# ISSA Proceedings 2006 – Women In Combat: Arguments Against Military Women In Combat Through Media Depictions Of Jessica Lynch And Lynndie England


One in seven U.S. military personnel currently serving in Iraq is female. As of June 2003, women represented roughly 15% of active duty armed forces (Cook, 2003; Iskander, 2004).**[i]** Women's presence in the military is a logistical necessity, although one that continues to be defined by military dictates in part shaped by public sentiment. In early 2005, Army Secretary Francis Harvey elected to maintain current military regulations denying women access to what were considered "combat" positions, a decision that met with debate regarding the "non-linear" reality of modern warfare (Bender, 2005a; Bender, 2005b). Long-range missiles, insurgent attacks, and roadside bombs do not target the "front lines" alone, making the notion of a front line as obsolete as the belief that because they do not occupy what are designated "direct ground combat positions," women are distanced from fighting. The reality of modern warfare has bearing beyond the battlefield however, including an impact on the stories of women in the military and the way in which those stories are told.

The stories of Private First Class *Jessica Lynch* and Private First Class *Lynndie England*, two soldiers whose names and faces became famous during the U.S. war with Iraq, are examples of how the current context involving the shifting reality of modern warfare presents unique opportunity to study public arguments that include an element we describe as the *free radical*.**[ii]** As women who traversed traditional gender boundaries and faced situations considered far outside stereotypical feminine experiences, we argue Lynch and England are instantiations of the free radical "gender" in the context of the military. When it

comes to the military, and specifically military roles such as positions in combat and POW prisons, or those stereotypically understood as far-removed from traditional feminine spheres, gender is a free radical, an element not entirely familiar or traditionally associated with the male-dominated institution. It is unstable because it does not draw from established scripts and in fact contradicts many long-held arguments against women's participation in the military, combat, and war. The presence of atypical gender (that of woman) in combat and in the military, consequently, produces various possibilities for understanding a story and argument, as the free radical element of gender bonds to frames.

To account for the free radical, or explain this unusual and unfamiliar aspect of both women's stories, the narratives of Lynch and England were framed in a variety of ways through the media's telling of their incidents. The experiences of Lynch and England differ drastically, as does the media coverage of both women's stories. We bring the concepts of framing and free radical together and explore their mutual impact through an analysis of their respective mediated stories. Such an analysis reveals that in the context of women in the military, the free radical *gender* often is controlled through traditional and familiar scripts, as an analysis of the Lynch story reveals. However, as an analysis of England's narrative illustrates, those stories for which there are no traditional scripts on which to rely send us scrambling for a means to frame the story, tame the free radical, and allow for easier consumption and understanding. We explore the concepts of framing and free radical, as well as apply an understanding of their interactions to the stories of Lynch and England, and conclude with a discussion of the impact of such an analysis on the study of argument.

## 1. *Framing and Free Radicals*

*Framing* is a familiar concept to argumentation scholars, although its continuum ranges from discourse analysis to media analysis. In this paper, frames refer to "principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6). Entman (1993, p. 52) tells us, "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation."

Frames are essential for public arguments since they select and give salience to certain aspects of perceived reality that cue a particular response. They define the problem and establish its terms for resolution (Gusfield, 1981). However, not

all frames are equal. Their chance of catching on depends on how they comport with what we know about the world or how they resonate with other frames we are used to and employ regularly to make sense of our experiences.

Two criteria particularly relevant for our analysis are *narrative fidelity* and *empirical credibility* ("Frame Analysis," n.d.). Narrative fidelity refers to the congruence of a frame with one's life experiences (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Oberschall, 1996). Sometimes the frame may require little or no explanation. Employees whose firm has filed for bankruptcy will easily catch onto the idea that this jeopardizes their pension fund. An invisible threat, such as the firm's loss of market shares, may require more elaborate mediation of the pension frame for employees to regard the firm's performance as threatening their retirement plans.

Although narrative fidelity provides the strongest possibility for catching on, a frame that does not relate to personal experiences still can have force if it fits with real world events as we know them, or has empirical credibility ("Frame Analysis," n.d.). When a country is directly attacked, media presentations will help citizens not directly struck to comprehend the event through comparable personal experiences of self-defense. For example, the 9/11 terrorist attack on the U.S. rendered the self-defense frame more credible than, say, the frame of legal redress, even though most U.S. citizens were not directly hit.

The concept of *free radical* is borrowed from chemistry. Atoms seek stability, which is achieved when an outer shell's capacity for electrons is full. Often atoms complete their outer shell by sharing an electron with another atom to form a molecule. As long as bonds don't split in a way that leaves an electron unpaired, the molecule is stable. When an electron is unpaired, however, it becomes a free radical. Free radicals are extremely volatile; they react swiftly to bond with other compounds in order to regain stability. Free radicals, then, are highly reactive molecules that actively seek stability ("Understanding Free Radicals and Antioxidants," 2006).

As we apply the notion of free radical to argument in this paper, it denotes a highly unusual and therefore unstable element within a story or argument that seeks a stabilizing bond. How an argument is framed may exacerbate the free radical's instability. That is, as with free radicals, when the dominant element of a story violates its frame, it may accelerate the search for a stabilizing bond. This element's volatility and bonding strength will depend on the frames it interacts with, each of which is socially constructed to consume the unfamiliar. In the sections that follow, we apply our conception of free radical to the notion of

framing and explain how these concepts interact, and with what result, within the mediated stories of Lynch and England.

2. *Jessica Lynch*

Pfc. Lynch was a supply clerk in the Army's 507th Maintenance Company, which became lost and was ambushed in Nasiriyah, Iraq in late March of 2003. The humvee in which Lynch was riding crashed and she was taken prisoner. She awoke a number of hours later in an Iraqi hospital and with extensive injuries. After spending nine days in the hospital, Lynch was rescued by U.S. Special Operations Forces and flown to Germany, where she underwent further treatment for her injuries and began her recovery. In the months that followed, Lynch's story was a media staple. She signed a book deal with Knopf Publishing and, in the wake of her book's release, appeared on ABC's *Primetime* with Diane Sawyer, *NBC's Today* show, and granted interviews to *Vanity Fair* and *TIME* magazine. Newspapers around the world continued to run coverage of Lynch's story for months after her return.

In the weeks following her capture and rescue, Lynch became the poster girl for the war, as well as women in the military. Her story, as originally told in the media, was one of a warrior, a woman breaking the mold who assumed her role in combat as a consequence of the unavoidable reality of modern non-linear warfare and an answer to critics who opposed the presence of women in support roles for fear of combat engagement. Lynch's story of heroics was useful for the military – it demonstrated that women could hold their own in combat and provided further argument for the protection of the military's resource of female soldiers. Lynch's story also was appealing to the media for its headline value; since the public seldom hears stories of gun-blazing woman in the throes of battle, Lynch's original tale received extensive media play.

The frame of "woman in combat zone" is not altogether familiar to Americans, yet within this frame particular stereotypes have operated; two long-standing and popular stereotypical frames are the *weaker sex* – women are not physically capable of competing with men on the battlefield, and *distraction* – male soldiers will become sidetracked from their duties by an overwhelming desire to protect their female counterparts.**[iii]** Both frames carry a degree of narrative fidelity and empirical credibility, and have long been employed in arguments against women's participation in combat. However, with the reality of non-linear warfare comes a third, supportive frame regarding woman in combat – that of *woman*

*warrior*. The erosion of "front-lines" and the irrelevance of the designation "combat position" increase the likelihood that this frame will become more familiar in the future. However, the woman warrior frame does not yet carry significant narrative fidelity because it is not a part of our military history.**[iv]** To compensate for this deficiency and to acquire stability, the gender radical of *woman* requires a bond with *warrior* in a way that provides empirical credibility.

The story of Jessica Lynch instantiated this bonding. Her capture and rescue did not provide the fodder necessary for fleshing out the more traditional frames mentioned above. Instead audiences were regaled with the story of Lynch's heroic firefight with Iraqi forces. From the outset, however, the weakness of the bond was evident. In Lynch's case, the woman warrior frame ultimately failed to provide a convincing argument because it lacked empirical credibility. The frame's failure to provide a stabilizing bond created the need for a second frame with a stronger bond. Audiences were left with the tale of a wounded woman now in search of a different frame with greater familiarity and cultural traction.

3. *Woman Warrior*

In early April of 2003, *The Washington Post* broke the story of Lynch's capture with the headline, "'She was Fighting to the Death.'" According to *The Post*, Lynch "fought fiercely and shot several enemy soldiers . . . firing her weapon until it ran out of ammunition" (Schmidt & Loeb, 2003a). The account of Lynch's heroics detailed how "Lynch, a 19-year-old supply clerk, continued firing at the Iraqis even after she sustained multiple gunshot wounds and watched several other soldiers in her unit die around her in fighting." The article continues, "Lynch was also stabbed when Iraqi forces closed in on her position." Newspapers around the world ran similar stories quoting *The Washington Post's* account of her exploits in battle during the ambush, relaying information about her multiple gunshot and stab wounds (Hermann, 2003; Anidjar, 2003; Seamark, 2003).

Although *The Post*, and the plethora of papers that ran similar stories provided an extraordinary account of Lynch's experiences, the information itself was relatively suspect. In its rendition of Lynch's actions, *The Post* quoted unnamed "officials" and included their warnings about the story's accuracy: "Several officials cautioned that the precise sequence of events is still being determined, and that further information will emerge as Lynch is debriefed"; and the possible origin of the story: "Pentagon officials said they had heard 'rumors' of Lynch's heroics, but had no confirmation" (Schmidt & Loeb, 2003b). The lack of definite and

identifiable sources as well as failure to commit to the events of a story and the reference to "rumors" suggests that the account provided by *The Post* and run by other papers was unreliable, or at least lacked empirical credibility. As *The Post's* account of Lynch's heroics was disseminated worldwide, so was the caveat of uncertainty. Newspapers carried conflicting reports, further contributing to the deterioration of the frame's empirical credibility. Moreover not all reporters and outlets jumped on the warrior woman bandwagon. Publications including *Newsweek,* the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* did not run stories detailing Lynch's battle heroics. Craig Gordon of *Newsday* claimed the Lynch story as it was told by *The Post* "'didn't pass the smell test. She's a 19-year-old supply clerk, and they made her sound like Rambo. I had no way to check it, and it didn't ring true'" (Eviatar, 2003).

The reality of wars no longer fought from a combat zone with a recognizable front line to one in which all military personnel, men and women, are at risk, requires unfamiliar and non-traditional frames and scripts, such as that of woman warrior. The frame of a male soldier, guns blazing, fighting to the death is familiar, but what of female Rambo? Not only does this tale require we adjust traditional notions of "femininity" and "woman's capability" to include the actions of soldier, we also must allow for modifications in traditional understandings of what it means to be a soldier.

The unfamiliarity of such a story in American culture and the conceptual demands it makes of us formed a weak bond by connecting the free radical "woman in a combat zone" that Lynch instantiated with the frame of "heroic warrior," further eroding an already unstable frame. A lack of empirical credibility only placed additional strain on the frame and intensified its instability.

The lack of empirical credibility within the woman warrior frame eventually led to its deterioration. Weeks after *The Post* ran the headline "'She was Fighting to the Death,'" the BBC called the Lynch story "one of the most stunning pieces of news management ever conceived" (Kampfner, 2003). One month later *The Post* ran an extensive front-page story to correct erroneous initial reports concerning its Lynch coverage. The article stated, "Lynch's story is far more complex and different than those initial reports," and continued to amend the record: "Lynch tried to fire her weapon, but it jammed, according to military officials familiar with the Army investigation. She did not kill any Iraqis. She was neither shot nor stabbed, they said" (Priest, Booth & Schmidt 2003). Months later Lynch herself countered the original narrative of the ambush with a series of media interviews

and the release of her book, *I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story* (2003), co-authored with Rick Bragg, a Pulitzer-prize winning journalist. Through her book and media appearances, Lynch finally had a hand in crafting her story – although what the audience received remained a product of question prompts, camera-angles, and editing. The story Lynch told through and with the media was not the story the public heard initially. The second frame with which the free radical gender sought bonding was a traditional one that provided greater stability and therefore an enduring story. Whereas the first bond did not hold for lack of empirical credibility, the following analysis demonstrates a turn to and enthusiasm for the stronger bond and frame – one that carries narrative familiarity as well as empirical credibility – of *damsel in distress*.

4. *Damsel in Distress*

Contrary to the initial frame, the second frame narrates Lynch as a more traditionally feminine character. Instead of reports that Lynch emptied her gun into Iraqi forces until it ran out of ammo, audiences learn more about Lynch's personality and experiences that contribute to the frame of damsel in distress. She is depicted as hyperfeminine, as someone who must be cared for, and in general, as a woman who, when faced with a combat situation, performs along more traditional scripts of femininity than was relayed in the initial telling of her story. Upon release of her book, Lynch talked publicly about her experiences; the frame in which her story was first told shifted dramatically from a competent soldier and woman who could hold her own in any circumstance, to that of a woman who got herself into a situation she could not handle.**[v]**

The focus on Lynch's feminine appearance and qualities reinforced the damsel in distress frame.. Lynch was portrayed with traditional notions of femininity as a quiet, tiny, "doll-like" girl. Stories often stressed her size and appearance, with special emphasis on her diminutive stature and blond hair: "she's a cute blonde with a big smile, but she's also frail. At five feet two, Wirt County's 2000 Miss Congeniality weighs only 99 pounds" (Smith, 2003, p. 302). In the Primetime interview, Sawyer (2003), refers to Lynch as the "little girl with blonde hair" ([1]21:33:21)**[vi]** who, as a child, insisted on matching her socks to her hair bows (Gibbs & Stengel, 2003).

Far from accenting her role as a soldier, Bragg (2003) refers to Lynch's position of supply clerk as the housekeeper of the unit, a job more easily associated with traditional feminine tasks and far from the action. "If war was an elementary school play," Bragg writes, "[Lynch] would play a tree" (p. 45). As a female

soldier, Lynch moved outside of a woman's traditional gender boundary, yet an emphasis on her appearance and the discussion of her role within the military as housekeeper and inanimate object demonstrated that Lynch corresponded with stereotypical notions of what it means to be a woman: cute, little, one who tends the house, and inactive.

The press also framed Lynch as someone who must be taken care of by others, which further supported bonding of her narrative with the frame of damsel in distress. In her book, Lynch recalls stories of her older brother looking out for her when they were little, and Bragg (2003) documents similar concern for Lynch on the part of her boyfriend, and her roommate Lori Piestewa. Lynch's parents hoped others were looking out for her daughter while she was in Iraq; Lynch's mother remarked, "'I always thought someone would care for her," (Bragg, p. 89). Finally, Lynch relied on others – the American soldiers who retrieved her from the hospital – to come to her rescue. Lynch recounted the event on *Primetime*: "He said. . . . We're here to take you home. . . . I clenched to his hand because I was not going to let him leave me here. He was going to take me out" (Sawyer, 2003, 22:34:53). In the abstract that begins the *TIME* interview, Lynch is quoted as saying "I was not going to be left behind" (Gibbs & Stengel, 2003). The story of Lynch's rescue reinforced her reliance on others and her own inaction.

The news media's selection of these portions of Lynch's experiences placed her in a frame that gave her a hyperfeminine persona. This frame, largely more recognizable and comfortable to audiences, accommodates narratives that rely on traditional and stereotypical understandings of what a woman should be that help audiences understand a woman's physical danger, especially when she steps outside the familiar.

The damsel in distress frame crystallized the image of a tiny, feminine, young blonde woman who must be looked after and protected by others and is finally rescued and brought to safety. This frame was highly successful since it did not require audience effort to stretch or scramble. The ease and comfort with which it was adopted is, in fact, demonstrated by the dismissal of factors that would have disrupted the frame. Lynch was criticized in the media for receiving accolades and becoming a public figure while others, such as Pfc. Shoshanna Johnson, and Pfc. Lori Piestewa, as well as the men who were killed in the ambush in Nasiriyah, did not received the same attention ("Clearing up the Record," 2003; Cock, 2003; Maxwell, 2003; Mitchell, 2003; Melone, 2003) and similar criticism for her book deal.**[vii]** The sweet, demure, girl-next-door image went untarnished by criticism

regarding the handling of her story; in fact it was strengthened. One opinion column read, “Now, out of the fog of war and storm of publicity, steps a slight, painfully honest and self-effacing young woman,” (“Exploiting Private Lynch,” 2003). Far from hindering the damsel in distress frame, Lynch’s innocence in the twisting of her story and her desire to right it coincided with notions of a woman who, at the mercy of others, only sought to do the right thing when it was within her power. The damsel in distress frame, which has familiarity and cultural resonance, formed a strong bond with the free radical of gender in the context of combat. The stereotypical force of this frame, which Lynch embodied throughout her story, gave it empirical credibility and a stability that could withstand interference.

5. *Lynndie England*

Sense making for the pictures from Abu Ghraib was more complicated, given the empirical reality of the pictures. Seeing MPs inflict pain and humiliation of this magnitude on detainees was outside the human rights restrictions most Americans impose within the *POW* frame. Jailers of POWs within this frame have constraints: guards and prisoners are to be same sex, prisoners are to be accorded humane treatment, and the Geneva Conventions prescribe boundaries for how far you can go to gain information (torture crosses the line). The Abu Ghraib photos transgressed both the same sex norm and boundaries for acceptable treatment. They not only showed a woman participating in inhumane treatment of Iraqi detainees, but depicted her as a hypersexualized woman engaging in the deviant behavior of a dominatrix imposing non-consensual S&M humiliation on naked Iraqi men. There were multiple possible frames for what we were seeing: scapegoat, chain-of-command, promiscuity, human frailty, cultural bias, political culture, personality traits, and guard mentality among them. However, as we shall see, none stood still sufficiently to satisfactorily make sense of the violence depicted or for punishing England in a way that both dealt with her transgression of military code and disciplined the free radical of gender in the military that was forming culturally aberrant bonds. She had to be disciplined not only as a soldier but as a woman.

The May 10th issue of *New Yorker* magazine published an article by Seymour Hersh (2004) that brought to public light American MP abuses of Iraqi detainees held in Tier 1 of Abu Ghraib prison. His article was followed on April 27th by a segment on the CBS news journal *60 Minutes II* that showed images of naked

Iraqis appearing in humiliating poses. They offered a spectacle of, to quote the Taguba Report, "sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuse" (2004, p. 15).

Hersh's response to the images was, "The photographs tell it all." This assessment was challenged when the storyline destabilized soon after the images, apparently taken as private souvenirs, became public. The meaning of these photos relied less on an official report than how they circulated publicly, and their circulation gave public meaning to U.S. military complicity through the images of Pfc. Lynndie England. The outrage expressed in many quarters over the sexualized humiliation of the Iraqi prisoners initially focused on the chain of command. The soldiers said they were acting under orders and news outlets asked who had issued orders to treat prisoners in violation of the Geneva Conventions.

That thread of inquiry as the main story line ended quickly. Before Hersh's article broke the story and selected photos became public, the report of Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba, which had investigated abuse of prisoners held at Abu Ghraib, exonerated the chain-of-command upward from Abu Ghraib. The lone exception was Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski, the officer in charge of the prison, who was relieved of her command and given a written reprimand. With the military chain of command hermeneutically sealed from the atrocities, the story line returned to the MPs of Tier 1 with Lynndie England, the unlikely administrator of torture, as its public face. Given the photographic record of her actions, England was perfect for the role. As Richard Goldstein (2004) observed in *The Village Voice*, "When a dude acts out, it's dog bites man. When a babe misbehaves, it's bitch bites man – and unfortunately that's a story."

6. *Free Radical and Volatile Frames*

The public photos of England were unsettling to American stereotypes of military honor and female nurturance. Pictures of her dragging an Iraqi detainee on a leash and of her grinning with the thumbs up sign at a detainee forced to masturbate quickly became iconic images of the scandal. England's dominatrix pose cast her as Lynch's evil doppelganger, thereby rupturing her gender bonds with the frames of *military honor* and *honorable woman*. With neither narrative fidelity nor empirical credibility to traditional American beliefs, England, as embodiment of the gender radical, became a volatile element that sent the press scrambling to account for her actions.

Initial articles bonded her with the frame of *promiscuity*. The narrative of sexual deviance seemed to have empirical credibility with the dominatrix posed in the

picture of “leash woman.” This image catapulted the viewer into male prison culture where the stronger make the weaker their “bitches,” and where England’s S&M pose performed the alternate “bitch” role of overpowering woman. For some, such as ICeman (2004) posting on om_blog, England was a sexual fantasy incarnate. “Man, that girl really turns me on! I hope she puts ME on a leash…” For others she became the source of inspiration to do the same, as “The Lynndie” – young people shooting pictures of themselves mimicking her finger-pointing pose – swept the internet (“Everybody’s doing the Lynndie,” 2004).

These popular culture appropriations were trumped by more sober accounts of her as promiscuous, as “an undisciplined, sexually overactive soldier” (Martz, 2004). Senators sat through a three-hour viewing of 1800 unpublicized images and videos that contained nude photos of England, England disrobed in front of the MPs, England bearing her breasts in front of the detainees, England having sex with numerous partners, and a video of her having sex with Spec. Charles Graner (Morris, 2004). To add to the confusion, her fallen status took an unexpected turn when her identity changed from Pvt. Lynndie England to pregnant Lynndie England. The father was Graner. Her body’s condition, a gendered condition, became a refutation that she could have been ordered to perform the humiliations, as she alleged, but proof that she was twisted.

However strong their seeming empirical credibility, the England photos created such enormous inner confusion that their bonding of *gender* to *promiscuity* was challenged from the outset. Her instantiation of gender created a free radical of such volatility that it bonded to multiple frames, none of which offered a stabilizing narrative that could support a compelling and decisive argument.

Alongside official and press denunciations of her moral character, her background came under intense press scrutiny. Most press accounts situated her in a frame of *backwoods localism* (Churcher, 2004; Dao, 2004; Rennie, 2004; Sage, 2004). She lived in a trailer park in dirt poor Fort Ashby, West Virginia. Despite facing court-marshal, locals regarded her as a hero (Churcher, 2004). One local woman said, “To the country boys here, if you’re a different nationality, a different race, you’re sub-human. That’s the way that girls like Lynndie are raised” (Churcher, 2004). Her family and others thought she was a scapegoat (Rather, 2004; Rennie, 2004). At best these depictions suggested local acculturation rendered her incapable of escaping local boundaries and, more likely, that she was stereotypically “white trash.” While this frame could compliment her bonding with promiscuity, it also raised the possibility that her actions, while deplorable, were more a reflection of

her environment than moral failure. Perhaps she was not twisted.

Her local environment, in turn, led to another possibility. Her account of her relationship with Graner and willingness to pose to please him fitted a frame of *human frailty*. She was weak (Valley, 2004), a follower (Cohen, 2004). She was only a high school graduate, a former chicken processor who lived with her family in a trailer, a blue baby born with a malformation of the tongue that gave her a speech impediment, had a learning disorder, was a tomboy seeking acceptance, married on a lark when she was 19 but quickly divorced. This profiled her as an inadequate and insecure woman who, on top of everything else, was homely, "which," Neva Chonin (2004) offered to explain England's behavior, "matters to women in America." (see also Cohen, 2004). She lacked the internal resources to refuse her bullying boyfriend. In sum, "She is the sort of woman who gets used by others, most often men. . . . Some women always say yes" (Cohen, 2004, A23). Perhaps her actions were inexcusable, but they were explicable.

Set loose from traditional frames of woman and woman soldier, the iconic photos of England continued their erratic swirl through the next two years as her case moved toward trial and sentencing. During this period she was pictured as a pawn, unrepentant, without recognition of the gravity of her deeds, and pregnant as a result of her promiscuous behavior. She was a reflection of western victimage of the cultural other (Smith, 2004; "Leashes, lynchings," 2005), the victim herself of a Manichean political culture (Burma, 2004), or perhaps a reflection of desensitized prison guard behavior to which anyone in her situation was susceptible (Nicol, 2004). Eventually she also was the mother of a newborn child, which offered a completely different possibility for disciplining her, for finding a stable bond for this gender radical so disturbing to American understanding of women in the military. As with Jessica Lynch, a final bonding with an empirically credible frame relocated England into a story familiar to Americans that, in her case, opened the doors for atonement.

### 7. *A Trip to the Principal's Office*

After the military trial at which England was convicted, she gave an exclusive interview on October 14, 2005 to Stone Phillips, anchor of NBC's news magazine *Dateline* (Phillips, 2005). The interview was the first time England had given her side of the Abu Ghraib story to a national media outlet. Phillips opened the interview by asking England how she thought America saw her, what kind of person did they think she was? She answered that some supported her and others would like to see her shot in the streets of Iraq. As Phillips's line of introspective

question continued, they opened the possibility to reframe her from the hypersexualized villain portrayed in the Abu Ghraib photos to a woman who had done something wrong but could be forgiven.

Having taken her through her explanation of the pictures, her role in them, and what she thought she was doing, they have this exchange:
SP: What are you guilty of?
LE: For doing the wrong thing, posing in pictures when I shouldn't have, degrading them (Iraqi prisoners) and humiliating – and not saying anything to anybody else to stop it. (Phillips, 2005)

Then, against the serial photographic backdrop of visual commonplaces of maternity – joyous young mom holding her newborn infant shortly after delivery, nurturing mom reclined while her sleeping infant nestles against her chest, and a video clip of responsible mom adjusting a pacifier in her toddler's mouth while repositioning him on her lap – Philips asks the now romanticized young mother:
SP: If your son sees your picture in his history book years from now, what are you going to tell him about what his mother was doing in a situation like this?
LE: Tell him the truth. Doing my job – what I thought was okay at the time and approved, and that his father played a major part in it.
SP: What do you want to say to those detainees that you were photographed with?
LE: I had no right to do that to them and I'm really sorry. I just hope they forgive me someday. (Phillips, 2005)

By the end of the interview, she has been bonded with a version of the *restorative justice* frame – an alternative justice frame to that of the legal code – *the trip to the principal's office*. In this script, the principal talks to the student about her misdeed before administering discipline. The conversation will assure the student that although she committed a serious offense, she is not a bad person. For this ritual of contrition to be valid, the student must be allowed to tell her side of the story, must acknowledge her part in what took place, recognize for what and to whom she must apologize, and then offer a sincere apology in order to restore her place in the school's community.

Phillips's questions and England's answers redeem her person, as is that of any student whose immaturity led her to follow someone older whose approval she sought and who bullied her into committing a grave misdeed, for which she is now contrite and apologizes. He reframes her from institutional justice, as

administered by a military court, to a culturally familiar frame that could form a stable bond with community justice that can restore her to our midst. It allowed us to hear her account as the empirically credible narrative of a young mother of 22, loving and nurturing to her baby, used by an older man, and, unlike the person who denied she had done anything wrong when the story first broke, now recognized that what she did was wrong, for which she wants to apologize. We can sympathize with this young woman, we can even forgive her.

8. *Conclusions*

Analysis of Lynch and England's instantiations of the military free radical *gender* offers a means to understand how we construct and consume the unfamiliar and provides insight into studying stories of public controversy, specifically those that contain a dominant element that acts as a free radical. As mentioned earlier, frames provide subtle cues that direct responses to a particular story or argument, but can also instruct us in how to address a free radical component of the story. In the case of the Lynch narrative, the enduring frame of damsel in distress molds how audiences consume and understand women in the military. Such a traditional and stereotypical frame can create difficulties when the public is presented with a story that does not fit, as is the case with England. Her story's remove from a familiar script makes it all the more sensational. Traditional and familiar frames pose the danger of relying on what is comfortable to explain and understand the extraordinary or unusual. Continual reliance on them as a means of stabilizing the free radical can stymie our potential to adapt and accept new conditions.

The notion of a free radical element within mediated arguments in the Lynch and England cases also is illumining of how unfamiliar or disturbing stories require frames that will support arguments capable of stabilizing their volatility. Our analysis raises the question of whether other elements have comparable volatility when their bonds to conventional frames are disturbed, such as race, cultural identity, and even national identity. It also raises the question of whether the idea of free radical typically would find instantiation in representative persons, such as Rosa Parks for desegregation, Teri Schiavo for right to die, and Elián Gonzalez for boundaries of political asylum.

Finally, our analysis of Lynch and England suggests that the efficacy of claims requires pairings that have narrative fidelity and/or empirical credibility within their frame. Without narratival bonds, contested elements destabilize conventional frames and create a search for new bonds capable of providing

stabilizing arguments, such as is happening in the U.S. since the 9/11 attack. Free radicals function as inventional irruptions that may alter existing frame, create new meanings, and quite possibly create new frames. However, as the Lynch and England cases illustrate, these frames, as all frames, support a selective set of arguments. And, as both cases illustrate, the varying degree of stability to the permutations created by free radicals sometimes are resolved by culturally inscribed frames that may provide greater comfort but, regrettably, have less relevance.

NOTES

**[i]** Although there is no official count of the number of women currently serving in Iraq and surrounding areas, the Department of Defense pay records indicate a total of 59,742 women have served or are currently serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries involved in operation 'Enduring Freedom.'

**[ii]** We acknowledge Rosa Eberly, whose conversations with one of the authors concerning rhetors functioning as free radicals sparked our speculation about its applicability to the Lynch and England stories.

**[iii]** For more information on long-held arguments against women's participation in the military and combat, see Meyers (1992); Enloe, C. (1988).

**[iv]** While stories of Molly Pitcher and Deborah Sampson remain entertaining side notes in history textbooks, U.S. history is relatively barren of stories regarding capable and heroic military women. Deborah Sampson disguised herself as a man and soldier, and was a respected member of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. For more on Sampson, see Freeman & Bond's biography (1992). Mary Hays McCauly (better known as Molly Pitcher) is famous for bringing Continental soldiers pitchers in the midst of a battle during Revolutionary War. The stories of both women are telling in their disguise and in their support for male troops.

**[v]** In her analysis of the four Washington Post front page articles that introduced the story of Lynch's capture and rescue, Sanprie (2005) notes an identity split in the coverage of Lynch's story. While two of the articles revolve around Lynch's role as soldier, the other two articles distance Lynch from soldier and instead focus on topics such as her appearance, personality, family, and home. Sanprie argues that such a split makes it difficult for audiences to understand Lynch as both woman and soldier and reinforces the incongruity many perceive between those two roles.

**[vi]** The parenthetical reference here refers to the tracking number included on

both the Primetime transcript and the videotape of the broadcast. The bracketed number "1" is constant throughout both materials; therefore, subsequent parenthetical citations will exclude the bracketed "1" and will include the tracking numbers referring to the hour, minute, and second of the broadcast.

vii. Private Shoshanna Johnson was also held as a prisoner in Iraq and like Lynch, sustained injuries. Johnson however did not receive nearly the same amount of media coverage; neither did Lori Piestewa, Lynch's roommate who was killed during the ambush.

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