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Gendered frontlines: British press coverage of women soldiers killed in Iraq

Abstract

The press plays a crucial role in image formation and information provision about female soldiers who die on battlefields. This article demonstrates how the UK press coverage of the death of four British service women stripped them of their identity as soldiers and minimised their accomplishments and level of military participation. It analyses how media discourse of war and military practices converged to reinforce cultural assumptions of war. The article argues that the nuanced coverage of the four women who died in Iraq within one year was a result of gendered mediation, which accentuated the femininity and masculinity dichotomy associated with the military; and underscored the gendered nature of war. The study shows that the gendering of the death of the women reinforced the entrenched marginalisation of women in war narratives.

Keywords: Gendered mediation, news frames, women and war, military conflict, women soldiers

Introduction

This article is concerned with the way in which the British press covered three defining moments in the Iraq war: the death of four women soldiers in three fatal incidents on the battlefield within one year. It examines how gendered mediation underpinned the coverage of their death and accentuated a masculinist paradigm of war. The study is predicated on the conventional association of war with masculinity and how this understanding anchors the need to explicitly explain the presence of women in news reports of war. Generally, the media do not refer to 'male soldiers', but references to women soldiers always merit a gender signifier, with the absence of such signification usually implying 'maleness.' This article demonstrates how the coverage of the death of the women reinforced the femininity and masculinity binary in media discourse of women's military participation. It argues that the media still privilege masculinity in war narratives in the 21st Century through the use of gendered news frames, which focus on gender-based perceptions and presumptions irrespective of their relevance and context.

Issues related to women's place in the media and the military have for many decades engaged the attention of scholars from different academic disciplines, especially those who adopt a feminist perspective. (Carreiras, 2006; Enloe, 1993; Kumar, 2004; Segal, 1993). These scholars have examined women's experiences in the armed forces (Carreiras, 2006), the militarisation of women's lives (Enloe, 1983, 2000), and women's military roles and participation (Segal, 1995). The study reported here draws on that foundation but diverges from it in two key directions. First, its primary focus is the UK press coverage of the death of four servicewomen within a specific time frame. It is not about the wider media discourse of women and the military. Second, through a qualitative approach it delineates a disparity in the coverage of the servicewomen in comparison with their male counterparts and illustrates how the gendering of death in media accounts can reinforce the conventional understanding of war as a masculinist construct. Death may be a central feature in military life, and unavoidable due to the very nature of its functions, but it is gendered in media accounts to maintain a power imbalance that limits women's military opportunities and minimises their contributions. Therefore this examination of the gendering of death in the military in press coverage makes a critical contribution to an understanding of the entrenched marginalisation of women soldiers in war narratives. It demonstrates how despite significant expansion in

women's military participation, press coverage of the death of women soldiers can alienate and distance them from the battlefield.

The article is divided into four main sections. First, following this brief introduction, it reviews key debates on the relationship between women, war and the media. Second, it summaries the methodological framework, discusses gendered mediation, a journalistic practice that emphasises the gender of the subject of a story irrespective of its relevance, and considers news frames that journalists use in the coverage of women in the military. The third section examines the data and shows the extensive focus on the women soldiers who were killed in Iraq; and the final part spotlights the main conclusions of the study.

Women, war and media narratives

The gendering of war and the marginalisation of women in war narratives have been noted by many scholars (Conway and McInerney, 2012; Dowler, 1998; Ette, 2008; Ridd, 1987; Segal, 1993). In Western societies, men are traditionally seen as soldiers and heroes of war while women are perceived as being supportive of the male warrior (Dowler, 2002). Until recently, women, as Dowler (2002) argues, were ignored in records of war and when acknowledged were represented mainly in the domestic realm. Deepa Kumar (2004:297) asserts that women typically have been seen as 'camp followers,' service and maintenance workers, rather than those involved in active combat. The cultural imaging of war distances women from the frontline as combatants because as Carreiras (2006) has noted, war has usually been defined as a male activity and intricately associated with highly valued masculine characteristics. The perception of soldiers as 'masculine men' challenges the legitimacy of female soldiers (Privera and Howard,2006) because the image of women as soldiers disrupts the gender order based on the separation of male and female (Carreiras, 2006:5).

In emphasising the dominance of masculinity, society resists the notion of women being warriors and embraces a low-profile role for them that contradicts the reality of the level of their participation even from historical perspectives. As Lorry M. Fenner, (1998), a colonel and former US Air Force Intelligence officer, has noted, the military has always needed women, but their services have been framed as temporary and press accounts of their participation have 'camouflaged' their achievements and

contributions. Lorraine Dowler (2002) contends that the media frame women into roles that are compatible with the domestic realm. Consequently, women's military roles are still conceptualised as being on the periphery and margins of the frontline. When women are the focal points in war narratives, as was the case in 1991 when they were deployed in large numbers to a combat zone, such reports, Cynthia Enloe (1993) argues, are often underpinned by 'militarized femininity.' Enloe (1993:202-3) notes that the media focus on women's gender and consequently, they are not soldiers but women soldiers. Their gender becomes an identifier. In an earlier study, Enloe (1983) had argued that while women may serve the military, they cannot be the military. This is still true in the 21st Century despite an increase in the level of women's military participation; their integration into the armed forces has not negated the military's masculinist image and their influence is still peripheral. As Laura Sjoberg (2007:84) has noted, the integration of women into the US military has paid 'little attention to the discursive and performative elements of gender dichotomies. The result has been the preservation of the discursive structures of gender subordination even in a gender-integrated military.' Ending the combat-exclusion policy for women in the US armed forces, which was announced in January 2013, may not eliminate the gendered structure of the institution because of the deeply entrenched perception of the military as a masculinist institution that creates the environment for the making of warriors. Women will remain disadvantaged because military training is seen to be a process that turns male recruits into 'real men' and while women may acquire necessary skills to function as warriors, their primary descriptor will remain their gender and not their professionalism. As Carreiras (2006:41) writes:

Traditionally, the military in general, and combat units in particular, have been seen as a proving ground for masculinity. Through specific forms of socialisation, disciplinary models, and authority patterns, the military has functioned as a central agency for the construction of the masculine gender identity card, thus, has been equally central to the definition of hegemonic masculinity. The imprimatur of masculinity conferred by the institution then becomes a core element in a soldiers' self-definition and simultaneously an operative form for the performance and interaction in military groups.

Thus, even though women have become more visible on the frontline since the first Persian Gulf War of the early 1990s, which marked a substantial increase in the

deployment of female soldiers (Forde, 1995), the conventional image of the military has not been refigured. Rather the notion of masculinity which is anchored in the very conception of wars and revolutions remains almost uncontested and 'femininity sits uncomfortably with wars and conflicts' (Afshar 2003:180).

The use of technology in modern warfare has resulted in the blurring of combat and non-combat zones (Forde, 1995), and has enabled British servicewomen to take on more 'frontline' roles, but their presence in close-combat zones is not usually acknowledged because in principle, they are not legally allowed to be in a position to 'engage and potentially kill' the enemy (theweek.co.uk). Consequently, women are still excluded from close combat in the British military. As soldiering is intricately linked to killing, men can become soldiers because they can kill but women can never be soldiers because they are not supposed to kill (DeGroot, 2001). Women's place in the military is further complicated by the view in most Western societies that 'those who give birth should not take life' and as a result, training women to kill is "abhorrent" (DeGroot, 2001:28). However, in Iraq, the increased demand for personnel who are able to function within religious boundaries has not only expanded women's roles but has challenged the orthodoxy of women as mere supporters of male warriors (Dowler, 2002; Maynard and Purvis, 1995) and has exposed them to dangers associated with close combat roles.

The level of media attention on women is now insignificant, compared to what obtained in 1991 when women were first deployed in large numbers to combat zones (Benedict, 2009; Forde, 1995). But when four UK servicewomen were killed in Iraq within one year, coverage of their death evoked memories of the media frenzy of 1991. And as was the case then, the dynamics of the coverage highlighted their identity as women and conversely detracted attention from their accomplishments as soldiers. They received more press coverage compared to their male counterparts who also died but primarily as women and not as soldiers.

Methodology and conceptual framework

The data for this study consisted of news stories about the killing of four British servicewomen in Iraq in one year. All the stories published within a month of the women's death were extracted from Proquest International NewsStand, a comprehensive electronic database of UK newspapers.

Proquest provided access to all the national, regional and major local newspapers and consequently to full texts of all the articles about the death of the service personnel. This extensive access facilitated a consideration of all the news stories about the victims. The time frame of the study coincided with the death, repatriation of bodies and funeral of the soldiers. Iraq was chosen as a case study because of the number of British service women who were killed on its battlefield in one year.

Two key questions underpinned the data analysis. First, are the service members framed in the news reports primarily as soldiers or simply as men and women? The question was expected to highlight which identity the newspapers prioritized in their coverage and the extent to which the sex of the victims influenced the level of coverage they received. Second, which areas of the life of the victims dominate the coverage? This question relates to the way the media tend to represent men and women in disparate ways, with coverage of women emphasising their private and personal life and that of men focusing on their public life. As Åsa Kroon Lundell and Mats Ekström (2008:892) have noted, women are 'more easily associated with domestic issues and the emphasis on physical traits, appearance and relationships is central' in media coverage. This emphasis on gender is central to the concept of gendered mediation, a strategic perspective for the framing of stories about women in androcentric environments (Devere and Graham, 2006; Ette, 2008; Gidengil and Everitt, 1999; Trimble, et al, 2007). This journalistic practice projects a perspective that presents the male as the normative in certain areas of public life (Gidengil and Everitt, 2003; Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross 1996). Gendered mediation is evident in the language journalists use to reflect gender-relevance of an issue or the sex of the individual in a story. This could be attributed to the 'masculinist norms of the news industry' (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross 1996: 114).

Gendered mediation is driven by a subtle, taken-for-granted bias that underpins news frames, which are traditionally defined in male terms (Allan 2010; Gidengil and Everitt, 2003). It is dependent on more than simple use of stereotypes but is also prefigured in approaches that treat certain public arenas as being gender-sensitive. Consequently, 'roles in areas such as

politics, national security, the armed forces, and the home are associated with specific genders and are usually represented in media narratives by gendered symbolic systems' (Ette, 2008:196). Gendered mediation challenges the notion of 'value-neutral' language of news and highlights how normative journalistic practices in news production, which are deemed to be neutral, are skewed to magnify easily identifiable gender differences in the representation of women. Gidengil and Everitt (1999) have noted how this framing tool shifts the focus from obvious stereotypes to subtle frames that emphasise popular conceptions of differences determined by gender. Gendered mediation entails highlighting a person's gender irrespective of its relevance to the context of the story (Devere and Graham, 2006). It encapsulates how news frames place undue emphasis on feminine and masculine roles as defined by social and cultural values.

Framing as an organising device entails the selection of certain aspects of a perceived reality to convey a particular message. As Entman (2007:164) has observed, framing is the 'process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation.' Entman explains that frames evoke shared cognitive knowledge that is stored in the past and such existing frameworks of understanding connect new perceptions to existing knowledge. 'People's prior knowledge, stored as schemas, allows them to make sense of new information by deciding (consciously or not) how the new materials fit into their understandings and feelings about the world' (Entman 2010: 391). News frames are gendered when they magnify real and perceived gender differences, and reinforce dominant norms that privilege men over women. Consequently, gendered news frames depict men and women in starkly different ways (Conway and McInerney, 2012) and as studies have shown, media frames provide central story lines and enable journalists to attribute 'meaning to issues, events and actors involved' (Melkote, 2009:549). Through the use of news frames journalists can select, organise and emphasis 'certain aspects of reality, to the exclusion of others' (De Vreese et al, 2005:103).

Gendered death on the frontline

On 6 May 2006, a British army helicopter crashed in the Iraqi city of Basra after being hit by an insurgent missile. Five service personnel were killed. One of them was Flight Lieutenant Sarah-Jayne Mulvihill, 32, the first British servicewoman to die in action in Iraq. The others were: Wing Commander John Coxen, 46, Lieutenant Commander Darren Chapman, 40, Captain David Dobson, 27, and Marine Paul Collins, 21. On Remembrance Sunday of the same year, Warrant Officer Lee Hopkins, 35, Sergeant Sharron Elliott, 34, Marine Jason Hylton, 33, and Corporal Ben Nowak, 27, were killed when their naval boat was attacked with an improvised explosive device on the Shatt al-Arab waterway in Basra. On April 5, 2007, almost a year after the death of Flight Lieutenant Mulvihill, a roadside bomb hit an armoured vehicle in Basra and killed Joanna Dyer, Eleanor Dlugosz, Kris O'Neill and Adam Smith. In total, four women and nine men were killed in the three incidents.

A Proquest search generated 311 stories, which were clustered around two distinct news frames – conventional and gendered frames. The former was evident in initial reports of the incidents. These were simple, factual reconstructions of reality – the death of the service personnel. The reports focused on how they were killed: 'Four UK airmen die in Iraqi attack on helicopter; (*Sunday Times*, 07 May 2006), 'Four troops killed in attack on patrol boat (*Belfast Telegraph* 13 November 2006:1), 'Four British soldiers killed in Iraq blast' (*Birmingham Post*, 6 April, 2007:5). The victims were not named in the stories until the Ministry of Defence (MoD) made their names public and disclosed that some of them were women. Once the identity of the victims was in the public domain, the initial conventional news frames gave way to gendered frames that highlighted the gender of the casualties and shifted the focus from the incidents to the victims. There was clear evidence of spotlighting of the women and peripheral positioning of the men in most of the stories. The women were identified by their names or as women in 115 out of 311 headlines but only fifteen headlines carried the names of some of the men. Three of the men were not identified by name in any of the headlines. It is worth noting that Wing Commander John Coxen was the most senior British officer to die in Iraq at that time, but he was not identified by name in any of the headlines. However, Sarah-Jayne Mulvihill, who died beside him, was named in thirteen headlines. Coxen was identified as a 'City airman', 'most top ranking officer to die', and 'quiet commander who inspired the RAF's flying aces.' In most of the stories the professional

attributes of the women, for example, job titles and ranks, were excluded or not prioritised but all the men were identified by their soldier identity and two of them were recognised as 'Marines' in fifteen headlines. The attention on the women was disproportionate in comparison to their male counterparts. For example, *The Independent* on November 15, 2006, dedicated 924 words to Sergeant Elliott in a 1156-word report and 232 words to the three male victims.

While a professional discourse was prevalent in reports about the men, as suggested by the use of their job titles or ranks, the women's gender identity, relationships, personality and temperament or their social roles superseded their military identity. For example, the women were referred to as 'girl/s' in eighteen headlines but none of the men was called a 'boy'. 'Daughter' appeared in six headlines but only three headlines carried 'son'. Although Sarah-Jayne Mulvihill was acknowledged in some of the stories as a first class flight operations officer, her enduring image in the newspapers was in relation to others as a daughter, wife, sister and friend. She was described as 'best friend, most beloved wife, an adored daughter and sister, highly loved and respected by all who had the pleasure of knowing her.' (*Daily Record*, May 9, 2006, p.4). These attributes signify femininity and are not usually equated with military values.

For Joanna Dyer and Eleanor Dlugosz, two of the four service personnel who were killed by a roadside bomb, the emphasis was on their personality, relationships and temperament and not on their accomplishments as soldiers. Dyer's connection to Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge, with whom she trained at Sandhurst Military Academy, was acknowledged in fifteen headlines. Several of the papers described her as 'fun-loving Jo' (*The People*, 8 April, 2007:11). In contrast, when a male soldier who had served alongside Prince William and his brother, Prince Harry, was killed in Afghanistan a year after Dyer's death, the royal connection was framed differently. The soldier was identified as the Princes' 'exceptional comrade' and 'army comrade, a 'rising star and 'a soldier'. Dyer was called 'Will's pal', which suggested a personal relationship rather than a professional connection. Dyer was a University of Oxford graduate who within a year of being commissioned had been 'promoted to a position normally reserved for more experienced personnel' (*The Scotsman*, 7 April, 2007:4) but she was framed in some of the reports as a fun-loving and carefree 'girl'. Her commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Mark Kenyon, while paying tributes to her, said: 'her enthusiasm was boundless and her contributions to our operations, even within a few short weeks, was

invaluable. We very quickly came to think of her as like one of us' (*The Herald*, Glasgow, 7 April, 2007:1). There is a suggestion here that, even in the acknowledgment of Dyer's membership of the unit, she remained 'like one of us', and not 'one of us'. Eleanor Dlugosz, 19, the medical technician who died alongside Dyer, was consistently identified as 'a little girl' in most of the stories, a description that was anomalous within the masculinist narrative of war as little girls are not expected to go to war. Her vulnerability as 'a girl' was highlighted and her identity as 'a devoted daughter and granddaughter' was emphasised whereas her soldier identity was not prioritised in any of the headlines in which she was named.

War narratives have been noted for restricting 'the lives of women to a rather limited set of roles tied to the private domain – caring mothers, loving wives, dutiful daughters and sisters....' (Pankov et al. 2011:1057). The emphasis on their feminine qualities as conveyed through words such as 'beautiful,' 'bubbly,' 'caring', 'wife' and 'sister,' stripped them of the tough soldier identity. They did not present the figure of the warrior, which in 'war discourse, is typically associated with strength, aggressiveness and virility – all characteristics that are at odds with the archetypal 'feminine' qualities emphasized in the patriarchal gendered order' (Pankov et al. 2011:1044). Given that the military's main activity is defined in terms of masculinity and in contrast to femininity, the emphasis on their feminine qualities reinforced the suggestions that they were not 'real' soldiers but 'women' or 'girl' soldiers. The dominance of stories from their civilian life distanced them from their military life. For example, the poignancy in Elliott's story was conveyed through her mother's emotional description of her life:

Sharron was the most beautiful caring person in the world. She was very strong-minded but very compassionate.

She had lots of friends and used to look after one of them who had cancer so that her husband could have a break - that is the sort of person she was.

She loved cooking and used to take over the kitchen when she came home, whipping up all kinds of exotic dishes for us all to try. (*Birmingham Mail*, 14 November 2006:4)

The stress on Elliott's domestic role emphasised her emotional behaviour. Highlighting her love of cooking, compassion for her friends and closeness to her family located her 'within the world of emotions, where rational thought is lacking and behaviour

uncultivated' (Lemish, 2002:111). This emotional rhetoric was emphasised in the coverage of the women but muted in the representation of the men as reflected in the tributes by their superiors. For example, Group Captain Duncan Welham, Sarah-Jayne Mulvihill's station commander, while acknowledging her as a dedicated officer who would be missed by all, asserted that: 'Whilst at Benson, her lively character and commitment to colleagues and friends made her extremely popular both in the workplace and across the wider station community.' (Note the reference to 'lively character and friendliness'). In contrast, John Coxen, was described as a professional whose 'reputation across the Support Helicopter Force and Royal Air Force was second to none. A true professional at work in all that he touched.' (*Daily Record*, 09 May 2006:4) Major Phil Carter, Kris O'Neil's squadron commander, said he 'was a committed soldier and an 'experienced and confident medic, with an unflappable nature' while 'Kingsman Smith was a popular and highly respected colleague, who was talented and had a 'bright future' in the Armed Forces' (*Daily Record*, 09 May 2006).

The tributes to the victims of the Basra boat attack were also gendered. Lt Col Park, Lee Hopkins' commanding officer, described the Warrant Officer as the 'ultimate-professional' who worked tirelessly for his soldiers. Major Nathan Hale, Marine Jason Hylton's squadron second-in-command, said he epitomised the true commando spirit throughout his time with the squadron and the early deployment to Iraq. (*Evening Standard*, 14 November 2006:1). Lt Col Haydn White, Nowak's commanding officer, said: the Corporal 'brought the highest levels of professionalism. He had an immediate and lasting impact on all those he served with' (*The Sun*, 15 November 2006: 6). Elliot was described by her commanding officer, Lt Colonel Andrew Park, as 'a dedicated, fun-loving and talented officer' (*Evening Standard*, 14 November 2006:1).

It is interesting to note how the phrasing of the tributes reinforced the masculinity and femininity binary in military discourse. While the men were acknowledged for their professionalism, Elliott was noted for being 'fun-loving', compassionate and 'smiley'. While the men were recognised as 'ultimate professionals,' 'vastly experienced,' 'extraordinary soldiers' 'true professionals' who 'loved the marine life,' and 'led from the front,' the women were 'loving daughter,' 'caring friend,' 'girl who went to war,' 'girl soldier,' 'cheeky,' 'really lovely, a smashing girl and so bubbly' 'army girl' and 'brave action girl,' 'a pretty, pint-sized tomboy who wanted to be a fighting soldier.'

This is not to suggest that there were no references to the private lives of the male victims, there were some acknowledgements of their identity as family men but such references were muted and less emotive. For example, John Coxen, was described by his neighbour as 'a good bloke' who 'grew up around here as a young lad and was often playing in the street. He died serving his country and he can be proud of that.' (*Liverpool Echo*, 09 May 2006:3). Gill Keary, Nowak's mother, said her son 'was a Marine and that is what he was there for.' Michael McEvatt, Nowak's uncle, described him as 'an extraordinary soldier.' (*Daily Mirror*, 15 November 2006:13). Even tributes by the men's family members were in the context of their professional life.

This gendered narrative can be understood as closely corresponding to military practice. Although women have served in a number of roles in the armed forces since the beginning of the 20th Century, and have seen the proportions of roles opened to them increase from 47 per cent to 70 per cent in the 1990s (Woodward and Winter, 2006), they are still 'excluded from ground combat units where the primary role is to close with and kill the enemy. This means posts in the Royal Marines general service, the Household Cavalry and the Royal Armoured Corps, the Infantry and the Royal Air Force Regiment' remain closed to women (Report on the review of the exclusion of women from ground close-combat role, November 2010). These posts are for soldiers who are trained and equipped to fight and kill and while service women are always prepared for combat, their primary role is to provide essential services and support but not to engage in close combat with the enemy. There is a clear suggestion here that women's exclusion is driven by the 'combat taboo', which DeGroot asserts has been 'a convenient method of restraining women' and 'has often been seen as a measure of civilization' (2001:28). As Kelly Oliver (2010:14) has noted, 'women are serving and dying, but conservatives think that women should be mothers, not killers.' This view echoes Segal's (1995:770) assertion that:

Women's social roles are affected by anything having to do with the family. Women's historical primary societal function has been associated with reproduction and child rearing. The extent to which a culture continues to assign women this primary role affects women's military roles. Cultures often see the mothering role as antithetical to the warrior role; giving life in childbirth is seen as the opposite of taking life in war.

The coverage of the death of the four women reflected this conservative viewpoint of women as 'carers' and not 'killers' and accounts for the use of gendered frames that accentuated gender identity over their identity as soldiers.

Against this backdrop, it is understandable why press coverage of the women did not emphasise their professional achievements as that would have challenged the notions of masculinity associated with combat. To acknowledge the women as soldiers would also have raised questions about their presence on battlefields where they are exposed to danger but are not entitled to the rewards of the battlefield experiences such as rapid promotion and pay that male soldiers ordinarily expect (DeGroot, 2001). The coverage inadvertently 'camouflaged' the extent of women's participation and contained them within conventional notions of femininity.

Despite this close correspondence between media discourse and military practice in the British forces, there is a clear distance between the military and the media in their attitude towards death. Nigel Farndale (2006), a journalist, argues that the military deals with death objectively while the media take a subjective angle. The differential approach was evident in the MoD statements issued to the press that included short biographies, of equal length, of all the soldiers killed (Farndale, 2006). According to Woodward and Winter (2006:54) the military's established appropriate standards of behaviour 'limit contact with the media', which suggests that reporters did not have unlimited access to information about the victims. Moreover, the newspapers gendered their stories because journalists know 'the most effective way to sell a story is to personalise it and, for the tabloids, to sentimentalise it' (Farndale, 2006:25). Information from the MoD did not highlight gender differences but media reports did because as a mediating force in society, the media tend to uphold traditional understanding of gender identities and in their representation of the servicewomen; they adopted the asymmetrical conceptions of gender differences.

While women's death in Iraq may not get as much attention now as it did during the period covered by this study, media representation of women's experiences of war are still determined by their identity as women because the military remains the bastion of masculinity. While the demands of modern warfare have made the British military more accessible to women, the combat exclusion policy raises obstacles against their full integration into the institution. As Kelly Oliver (2010) explains in her book on '*Women as*

weapons of war', women soldiers have played critical roles in the war but these seem to have gone unnoticed in media reports. The disparity in attention and coverage of the four British service women discussed in this article reflect media perception of women's place in the military, a view that contradicts women's self-identification as soldiers. Chantelle Taylor (2012) has observed that women do not want to be treated differently when they die in a combat area because it is not 'more acceptable for a guy to be killed than for a woman to be killed on the battlefield'. Taylor, the first British woman known to have killed an enemy in combat, told a journalist that 'as a woman in the military, if I lost my life I much prefer to be treated as a soldier because I have earned the right. There is a certain honour in dying as a soldier. (Taylor, BBC Radio 4) When the media frame women soldiers who die on the battlefield as just women instead of heroizing them as soldiers, they deny them that honour.

Conclusion

British press coverage of four servicewomen who were killed in Iraq within one year reflected gendered mediation in war and conflict narratives. The coverage stripped off the women's professional identity by emphasising their identity as women. The invocation of gender roles and feminine attributes in the coverage framed the women soldiers essentially as women and not as soldiers. Tributes to the women prioritized their gender identity over their professional roles while the concentration on their private and domestic life and their relationships served a cultural purpose by underscoring the conceptualisation of the military as a masculine domain. The news frames that shaped the coverage reflected the centrality of masculinity in popular understanding of the nature of the military.

This article has offered valuable insights about the impact of gender dynamics on the extent and tone of newspaper coverage of women soldiers who die on the battlefields. Consistent with the 'macho and misogynistic nature of journalism as a practice,' (Ross, 2005:289), the coverage 'camouflaged' the women's accomplishment to maintain traditional understanding of their place in the military. This grounding of the portrayal of women in stereotypes has social consequences (Carter et al, 1998) because of the power of the press to influence and frame public attitudes. The existence of news frames that treat women in a disparate way in comparison to their male counterparts underscores public perception of the military as a male institution where women are

seen as 'outsiders' in some areas. This view echoes Enloe's (2000:36) argument that a great deal of contemporary reporting presents women as invisible or as 'human interest story.' The coverage of the service personnel emits messages about women in male-dominated public sphere and reflects how gender serves as an organising principle in the news production process. By highlighting the private and domestic roles of the servicewomen, the media demonstrated their failure to accommodate women's multi-layered identity and place in society.

The domestication of the women and the emphasis on their personality, temperament and relationships is problematic because they trivialise women's contributions and achievement. Although the women received more coverage than the men, there was less information about their professional accomplishments and readers were primed to see them primarily as women and not as soldiers. Furthermore, the framing of the women's status and emphasis on their personal rather than public life reinforced their marginalisation.

Undoubtedly, the military has demonstrated a more progressive approach, despite what Rachel Woodward and Patricia Winter (2007) describe as a 'historically masculine' culture, by opening up more opportunities for women, probably as a response to the challenges of contemporary warfare, but as an institution, it is still 'marked by particularly entrenched gender images of women' (Nantais and Lee, 1999:182). While 70 per cent of posts in the army and the navy are now open to women (Ministry of Defence), the expansion of roles have not translated into full integration of women into the military. This marginalisation extends to press accounts of women's military participation as evident in the coverage of the four servicewomen whose death informed this study. It is not yet clear if the ban on the exclusion of women in the United States will pave way for full integration of women into the British military.

This article comes to the conclusion that despite the expansion in women's military participation and their integration into the armed forces, the image of a female soldier is still problematic because media accounts sustain traditional gendered discourses in war narratives, which serve to support the conventional image of the military as a bastion of masculinity. The gendered representation of the dead service personnel examined in this study illustrates the existence of entrenched gendered media frames that still marginalise women soldiers in the 21st Century despite their accomplishments as

professionals. When women die as soldiers, press coverage does not grant them the same recognition given to their male counterparts, thus distancing them from the battlefield where gender identity is not a shield against the dangers of soldiering.

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