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Double jeopardy: Women, the US military and the war in Iraq

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Synopsis

This article argues that women in the military are in double jeopardy. They face the danger of rape from their male colleagues as well as the ordinary dangers of being killed or wounded by the enemy. They are used to send messages from one masculine military to another in their very bodies. This is particularly clear in the case of Lynndie England and the Abu Ghraib tortures where her womanhood, and sexual use of her by her comrades, were used as weapons to humiliate Iraqi prisoners. This sexual violence from their own side is the result of the fact that militaries are founded upon an aggressive masculinity that is vital to enable warfare to continue. For this reason the argument that it is important from the point of view of equal opportunities for women to be in all areas of the military, including the frontline, falls down. If aggressive masculinity is the necessary foundation of the military rather than being an unfortunate hangover of patriarchy, then women cannot be equal in this institution. Women's organizations should not be using the language of women's rights in calling for the subjection of women to these forms of violence.



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