

## Shifted focus: newspaper coverage of female military personnel as casualties of war

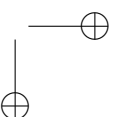
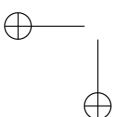
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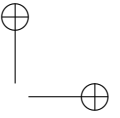
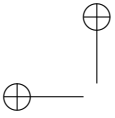
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ON March 23, 2007, a team of British sailors and marines were captured by Iranian Revolutionary guards in a disputed waterway that separates Iran and Iraq. The 15 service personnel were on a UN-authorized anti-smuggling patrol when they were seized and accused of incursion into Iranian territorial water. The incident quickly became front page news and sparked off a diplomatic conflict between the UK and Iran. Initial accounts of the incident in the media followed conventional journalistic news frames but these changed when one of those captured was identified as a woman. From then onward, Faye Turney, a 26 year old sailor, became the reference point and the human face of the story. However, subsequent reports, far from reflecting the reality of Iran's seizure of the personnel, were strategically framed in gendered terms with Turney's experience serving as the focus of an international conflict. The emerging rhetoric underscored not only the difference between Iran and the UK, but decontextualised the crisis, moving it away from a military stand-off to victimisation of women as notions of masculinity usually associated with war gave way to the feminisation of the captured. The focus on Turney emphasized her identity as a woman and not a sailor and reflected male-naming strategies as she was represented mainly as a mother, a wife, a daughter and not as Leading Seaman Faye Turney.

This article examines the coverage of the incident in British newspapers using media representation of Faye Turney as a case study. It argues that the newspaper discursive practice used was based on the notion of gendered mediation. The media, as Zotto (2002: 142) has noted, 'give meaning to events by selectively choosing the words and images that describe the events.' By concentrating on certain issues, and conversely ignoring others, the media can be quite influential in constructing prominent images in the audience's mind and understanding of an event (McCombs and Estrada, 1997). The media generate what Stuart Hall (1997) calls 'a circuit of culture' through artificially construc-





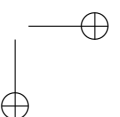
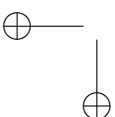
ted imagery that emerges as ‘truth’ over time. As a result, the narrative frames used to tell stories define and shape public understanding of issues on the media’s agenda. Crucially, the ‘media help to establish the parameters which structure public thinking about the social world’ (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996: 112).

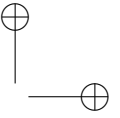
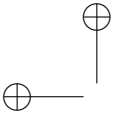
By focusing on media representation of Leading Seaman Faye Turney in British newspapers, this article attempts to illustrate how conventional news frames used to report military conflict, and which are stereotypical masculine, tend to shift when women are subjects and focus of stories. It will show how gendered mediation helps to conflate issues of gender and social roles in public discourse.

## Gendered mediation

The notion of gendered mediation is premised on the argument that conventional news frames treat the male as the normative and favour a masculine narrative of events and issues (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996). It concentrates on the form of bias that emerges when news frames, which traditionally reflect stereotypical masculine narratives, are applied to issues that concern women (Gidengil and Everitt, 1999). Gendered mediation, however, is not about the simple use of feminine stereotypes in the coverage of women’s affairs but about the nuanced representation of women in public arenas that are conceptualised as being gender-sensitive. 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.

Gendered mediation manifests in the imagery of language used to report issues where one gender is considered the norm and the other an exception. Sex-differentiated coverage of national security and politics, for example, illustrates this notion and underscores the emphasis often assigned to stereotypical gender differences. Gidengil and Everitt (2005) argue that gendered mediation shifts the focus from obvious stereotypes to subtle frames that emphasise popular conception of gender differences. And given that conventional news frames used to report certain issues are typically masculine, when applied to women these regularly bring into sharp focus gender differences



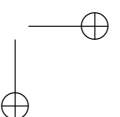
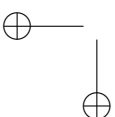


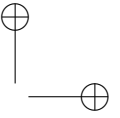
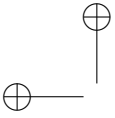
with women often at a disadvantage. The implication of this, as noted by Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, is that both the ‘manner in which issues relevant to women are framed and the way in which those active in public life are represented may play crucial roles in the formation of public opinion...’ (1996: 103).

Recent research, (Ross, 1995, Jamieson, 1995, Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996) especially of election campaigns, has pointed to a gendered perspective in the coverage of women in public life through frequent use of metaphors that are not only masculine but typically those associated with activities favoured by men. Coverage of election campaigns, for example, is often constructed in sporting and warfare terms with references to horse races and boxing tournaments dominating the discourse. Journalists routinely resort to metaphors of confrontation thus ensuring that election candidates clash over policies, exchange blows, scramble for the finishing line and battle for public support. As Kathleen Hall Jamieson argues, ‘by describing the political world in terms we comfortably associate with ...men, women are subtly defined as creatures alien to that habitat.’ (1995: 175). This supports the gendered nature of discursive practices of news organisations, an approach which is also applicable to public discourse of war and other forms of military conflict. The representation of women in the coverage of war is grounded in gendered mediation because such reporting is significantly embedded in news agendas that support war as a male-dominated territory. As this article argues, the framing of newspaper coverage of war often makes women invisible until they become victims and therefore, newsworthy. However, emerging narratives of their experiences, even when they are considered ‘newsworthy’, tend to trivialise, hype and sensationalise their roles and positions.

### **Gender and war**

If coverage of the political sphere rests on the conceptualisation of the field as being dominated by men, war reporting does not only encapsulate gender differences but also illustrates how conventional understanding of the place of women in society often shapes the representation of their roles in war. Traditionally, the armed forces have not been seen as contested arenas between men and women but a conclave of men and consequently closely intertwined with masculinity. In the western world, war is what Dowler calls ‘a conser-





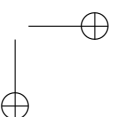
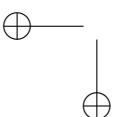
vative agent for the gendering of political identities,' which is implied in the 'tendency to perceive men as soldiers, warriors and heroes of war, while women are understood as the victims or icons of ... war' (2002: 161). As a quintessential male-dominated institution, the military relies

On the construction of a soldier in specifically masculinist terms. While women have always been a part of the military, their presence has been systematically marginalized. Their role has typically been as "camp followers," i.e., service and maintenance workers, rather than those involved in active combat (Kumar, 2004: 297).

Against this backdrop, aggression and competition, regarded as masculine attributes, are often elevated above cooperation and conciliation, which are seen as feminine traits. This understanding, feminist scholars (Segal, 1995, Dowler, 2002, Takacs, 2005) argue, influences public perception of war. The military, as Mady Wechsler Segal explains:

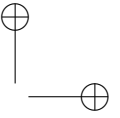
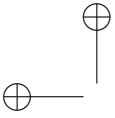
has been defined traditionally as a masculine institution; it may be the most prototypically masculine of all social institutions. For women to participate, either the military has to be perceived (by policymakers and the populace) as transformed to make it more compatible with how women are (or are perceived to be) or women have to be perceived as changing in ways that make them more seemingly suited to military service. Alternatively, the situation has to be perceived as so dire as to require an extreme and unusual response. These perceptions are socially constructed. The discourse on the issues, indeed the salience given to specific arguments about women's military roles, is not based on objective reality, but rather on cultural values (1995:758).

The military has, indeed, been transformed to accommodate more women especially in response to shifting frontlines in the war on terror, but the cultural values Segal referred to still permeate society beyond the confines of the barracks. Besides, military culture is still 'marked by particularly entrenched gender images of women' (Nantais and Lee, 1999: 182). At both institutional and cultural levels, the military's function of protection has always been conflated with its connection to masculinity and this conflation makes women's military roles problematic at the intersection of their gender and professional identities. Female military personnel challenge the conceptualisation of



women as the protected by assuming professional roles that assign to them the responsibility of being protectors. This role transformation, from the protected to the protector, therefore undermines the rhetoric of war as an act of protection of the vulnerable, for once women who traditionally are seen to be vulnerable become 'warriors', they cease to be victims (unless captured or hurt). In the event of them becoming victims, their perceived vulnerability becomes a recurring motif in news reports, thus raising questions about their suitability for roles that are culturally conceptualised as being masculine.

War narratives in media coverage paint gendered pictures of women and rarely present them as heroes and warriors, roles conventionally associated with male soldiers. Augusta Del Zotto's study of the coverage of women's experiences in the Kosovo conflict, for example, revealed patterns of gendered narratives. She concluded that 'media representation of women in Kosovo supports the theory that popular culture still upholds a masculinist paradigm of war. (2002: 149). A similar understanding was also reached in an analysis of the coverage of the United States' first female prisoner of war in the 1991 Gulf war. Nantais and Lee (1999) examined women's military roles using the story of Melissa Rathbun-Nealy who was captured and imprisoned in Iraq during the war, and came to the conclusion that although women's military roles have expanded over the years, their image as constructed by the media has not, especially when they become victims of war as a consequence of their professional role. The media, they noted, continue to reinforce the 'traditional imagery of protected femininity' (Nantais and Lee, 1999: 189). This was also illustrated by the staged rescue of Jessica Lynch, an American soldier wounded in Iraq, and supported by the coverage of Faye Turney in British newspapers. From the point Turney became the leitmotif of the story, scant attention was paid to her professionalism, and instead, the construction of her media image was mediated by several discourses that emphasised her gender and its associated connotations. It could, of course, be argued that the news frames were not constructed deliberately but were the outcome of particular understandings of the armed forces, women, and culturally defined gender roles. The point has been made that part of the reason why men go to war is to protect women. Given this, it follows that when women are not at home but on the front line, their presence becomes problematic for a variety of reasons. Firstly, they take on roles not culturally assigned to them and secondly, they raise questions about men's responsibility to protect them.



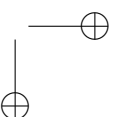
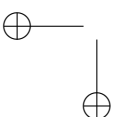
A key variable in the understanding of women's military role is the social construction of family and how this affects women's social roles. As Segal argues:

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. In addition, the long dependence of young children on adult caretakers (traditionally mothers) has precluded those caretakers from participating in activities that take them away or require their uninterrupted attention (such as hunting or war) (1995: 770)

As this article illustrates, this social construction of women's roles has impact on media coverage of women who combine their culturally assigned roles as mothers with professional roles that challenge the former. Take the example of the coverage of the British *Sunday Express* reporter Yvonne Ridley, who was arrested and held by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2002. The coverage amplified the 'misogynistic assumption that women with children are mothers foremost, while careers are of secondary importance' (Magor, 2002: 143). Interestingly, some of the most gendered views were expressed by women. Magor cites an example from the *Scotsman* in which a female writer condemned Ridley for recklessly sacrificing her daughter's future in pursuit of her career and questioned the value of her job as a journalist.

Is her copy so marvellous that she thought it worth making her daughter an orphan? ...This may be a strange war, but it is a proper war, not a gender war. We want information, not pictures of blondes in khaki (*The Scotsman*, October 2, 2001: 12)

This gendered representation is underscored by the lack of coverage of fathers who risk making their children orphans when they go to war. The dynamics relating to the portrayal of gender in the context of conflict are generally weighted in favour of men. They are often portrayed as being powerful and in control, to highlight their masculinity, while the image of women is often associated with the home, family and relationships, to conform to the stereotypical notion of femininity.



Gendered mediation in the coverage of women in the context of war, or any other military conflict, which routinely represents men as ‘protectors’ and women as the protected, frames women in ways that support ‘masculinist interpretations of conflict’ (Zotto, 2002: 142) and sends critical messages to the public about the place of women on the frontline. The coverage of the ‘rescue’ of Jessica Lynch is probably one of the best illustrations of this gendered logic. The highly creative reconstruction of her alleged rescue from a ‘fortified Iraqi hospital’ underscored the common understanding of men as protectors. Stacy Takacs in a robust and critical essay illustrates how this reconstructed rescue was used to ‘facilitate the conflation of militarism, masculinity, and security in a variety of ways’ (2005: 302). She argued that the staged rescue and the media coverage that resulted from it were to mobilise support for ‘militarised masculinity as the only logical antidote to national security’ (2005: 307). Lynch’s femininity and vulnerability provided the backdrop for that display of masculinity. The invocation of gender roles was also evident in the coverage of British sailors who captured by Iran in 2007 as outlined in the section that follows.

### **Newspaper coverage of captured British sailors and marines**

This study examines newspaper coverage of the capture of 15 British service personnel by Iran using the Faye Turney story as a case study. A Proquest search of articles published between March 23 2007, the day they were captured and April 6 2007, when they were released, covered all the national and regional newspapers featured on Proquest. As the data was obtained from an electronic web source that does not provide photographs, the analysis does not take graphic illustrations into consideration. A full text search (not just headlines) on the following terms was carried out: ‘Faye Turney’, ‘Leading Seaman Faye Turney’, ‘British sailors and marines’, ‘captive British sailors,’ ‘hostages’, and ‘navy crew’. These terms were chosen after a pilot study identified them as the key phrases used in stories. The search results showed two major news frames and clusters of stories. Between March 23 and 26, all the stories applied the conventional narrative frames of journalism of conflict and focused on the captured servicemen as a group with only a passing mention that a woman was among them. The bulk of the stories conformed to these news frames but from March 27, the focus shifted when Faye Turney was na-

med as the woman captured by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and from then on, the reports became gendered. The dominant media image that emerged from the reports was that of Turney. She overshadowed the 14 others who were also captured as she became the face of the story and a candidate for a rescue mission.

A full text search using 'Faye Turney' produced 570 hits while 'British sailors and marines' threw up 479 hits, 'Leading Seaman Turney' produced 305, 'captive British sailors' drew 138 references, 'hostages' produced 73, and 'navy crew' 30. A breakdown of hits in particular newspapers also produced similar clusters. 'Faye Turney' produced 77 hits in the *Daily Mirror*, 35 in *The Sun*, 24 hits in the *Daily Telegraph*, 22 in *The Guardian* and *The Times*, and 20 in *The Independent*. The term also generated nine references in *The Herald* (Glasgow) and the *Belfast Telegraph*. The focus was on the number of stories in which the search terms appeared. It should be noted that most of these stories were on the front pages of the newspapers. On April 6, the day the captured sailors and marines returned home, a search using 'Faye Turney' produced 53 stories in newspapers ranging from the *Birmingham Mail* to *Coventry Evening Telegraph* and *Glasgow Daily Record*, 'British sailors and marines' produced 107 and Turney was referred to in the bulk of those stories. The text search identified two dominant frames: implicit and explicit gendered mediation. The frequent use of certain contextual language in headlines and in the text of the stories by the media strongly supports the argument that the news coverage was gendered.

On the first day of coverage, most of the headlines conformed to conventional news frames with Iran as the recurring term as apparent from a selection of headlines: 'British navy personnel detained by Iranian military' 'Iranians seize UK Marines': Fifteen are snatched in Arabian Gulf.' 'BRITAIN last night demanded the immediate release of 15 sailors and marines captured by Iranian forces', 'MARINES TAKEN HOSTAGE BY IRAN.' Other key words were 'captives', 'hostages', 'sailors' and 'prisoners'. The adoption of a conventional news frame could have been informed by the lack of information on the incident at that point and as more details emerged, the story also unfolded. However, once the focus shifted from a diplomatic crisis to the plight of a young mother being held against her will by a repressive regime, the frames changed to reflect gendered mediation.



### **Faye Turney: Leading Seaman turned woman and mother**

As key actors in the art of constructing reality, the media help to formulate public opinion and this was apparent in the pattern of coverage of the capture of the British service personnel. It is important to note that journalists do not just report events, they reconstruct them and the narrative forms adopted are symbolic at several levels. News reports often create forums for public discussion of public concern and the coverage of women as frontline actors in military conflict is a good example of such occasions. Media reports perpetuate traditional conceptualisations of the military and war by separating the feminine identity of female soldiers from their military roles. By reproducing the masculine constructions of war, the media contribute to the dichotomy between women's role and their gender identity. As already noted, the military has traditionally been projected as men's domain with notions of masculinity dominating war narratives. Consequently men are always represented as protectors and fighters, roles closely linked to masculinity. The application of a masculinist narrative, therefore, undermines women's contributions, questions their roles and reinforces notions about their social place. Paradoxically, women and children are often victims of aggression brought about by masculinist tactics that lead to war in the first place.

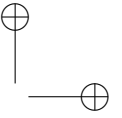
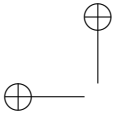
The idea of men as protectors is problematic in its consequences on the protected. Zotto makes the point that 'women have historically served the war process by providing the much-needed day to day maintenance of war such as feeding the troops and relinquishing male children to the 'cause' (2002: 142) but when they move from their perceived peripheral positions to become major actors as legitimate participants, their contributions challenge the organisational and social structure of military. Historically and culturally, men have always been seen as potential warriors and women as supporters of war efforts (Dowler, 2002). The presence of women fighting on the same side as men therefore challenges the balance of power by drawing attention to the process by which the image of women is shaped not by their professional roles but by traditional gender roles.

The coverage of Faye Turney by British newspapers reinforced this and showed how news coverage of female soldiers is frequently constructed in the context of social relationships and identity. Named first and interviewed first on television, Turney quickly became the reference point in the coverage

of what was a diplomatic standoff between the UK and Iran. The coverage was replete with references to womanhood and all its associated undertones. Her professional role, which was what put her on the scene in the first place, became secondary, giving way to her culturally constructed social roles as daughter, wife and mother. As Emily Harmer (2007) argues, she was represented as being vulnerable, subjugated and in need of protection. Her vulnerability and the notion that she needed rescuing was emphasised, above everything and this produced a narrative that failed to recognise her role as a member of the navy as being significant and important as her social roles. The reports showed how women often become pawns in the rhetoric of war as it quickly became apparent that she was a malleable pawn for both sides of the conflict. From an Iranian perspective, she was portrayed as a victim of Western materialism that separates mothers from their children to serve in the armed forces and from a British angle, as a vulnerable woman being exploited by a heartless regime for propaganda purposes. As a symbolic representative of the hostages, Turney's image was exploited by both sides and even the Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad played the gender card: 'How can you justify seeing a mother away from her home, her children? Why don't they respect the values of families in the West?' he thundered.... (*Daily Telegraph*, April 5, 2007, p.2).

From the first story in which she was named, on March 27, Turney dominated the news frames and was the primary focus of the story as a selection of headlines on that day shows: 'Mother held in Iran', 'Fears for Iran mum hostage,' 'Let mummy go,' 'Navy mother being held prisoner in Iran,' 'Family of woman sailor abducted by Iranians speak of their distress.' Going by the headlines only, the 14 others who were also being held were invisible once Turney was named. Subsequent narrative of the crisis highlighted her gender with the emphasis shifting from a professional, neutral perspective to superficial and physical. Her appearance and personality became news worthy. The *Daily Mail*, for example, constructed a story based on her body language during a television appearance.

Former Oxford don Dr Peter Collett said her body language clearly revealed her discomfort and unhappiness. He added that visual clues such as the corner of her mouth being turned down and the tension in her forehead made her distress plain.



Her eyes remained downcast throughout the recording, indicating that she wanted to blank her captors out, Dr Collett said.

When we look at her body language we can see several signs of distress suggested by her facial muscles,' he added.

'She can't bear to look at the camera crew as they remind her of the fact that she is obviously feeling coerced.

'Gaze aversion shows people feel unhappy. She is worried, genuinely unhappy and definitely stressed.' The former psychology professor said that Mrs Turney's flat, unemotional tone indicated she was concerned about saying the wrong thing and feared the consequences of making a mistake (*Daily Mail*, March 29, 2007 p. 3)

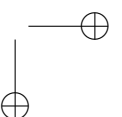
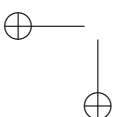
The coverage amplified Turney's position as a victim, not only of Iran but of her government for putting her at risk. Paul Routledge writing in the *Daily Mirror* wondered:

...what was she doing there, risking not just her own life but the motherhood of an infant child.

Amid the relief that we will feel when she eventually returns, it still has to be asked why we are sending young mothers to a war zone of our own creation. Britain cannot be so short of military personnel that such women should be permitted - nay, encouraged - to go gadding around the world's most dangerous and volatile waterway.

Call me old-fashioned but I think it is wholly wrong to separate a young mother from her child, put a gun in her hands and send her off to the Gulf (*Daily Mirror*, March 30, 2007).

Routledge's story reflected sentiments similarly expressed by a female journalist over the capture of the *Sunday Express* reporter Yvonne Ridley when she was arrested and detained in Afghanistan. Editorial comments and news stories used terms and phrases that questioned Turney's sense of responsibility as a mother. Jill Parkin, writing in the *Daily Mail*, asked: 'Isn't a mother's first duty to her children?' and stressed that she did not believe that 'a responsibility so fundamental as motherhood can, without anguish, be put



on hold for the duration of a military campaign' (*Daily Mail*, March 30, 2007, p.9). Ironically, her view was dismissed by another female commentator, who described it as 'blatant sexism about women in arms - and, worse - mothers in arms' (*Daily Telegraph*, March 31, 2007, p.24). Vicki Wood argued that as a ranking sailor deployed in a war zone, Turney was only doing her job. That is a fact most newspaper reports ignored.

Although 14 men were also captured, their fate and the effect of their captivity on their families did not make front page news. Their invisibility in the newspapers seemed to suggest that captivity was the norm in their choice of career. Nameless most of the time, their story when told was always as a subtext to Turney's. While Turney's victimhood was illustrated by references to her family, dressing – being forced to wear a headscarf - her isolation – being separated from her colleagues – her vulnerability – being forced to write letters to her parents and her government, and apologise on Iranian television – her male colleagues were assigned the role of supporting actors who for the most part were barely seen and hardly heard in the drama that was unfolding in the newspapers. The media constructions of Turney as a victim were further underscored by pleas from her parents, references to her three year old daughter, and personal narratives by colleagues who described her as 'a great girl with a warm sense of humour. Everyone knows her because there are not many Wrens who do what she does. It is quite an achievement. Topsy loves being a mum...' (*The Times*, March 27, 2007, p.4) Also to stoke up more sympathy for the captive,

...the priest who married Faye and Adam in 2002 -as well as baptising Molly -spoke of her shock. Mary Fearnside, from the village church of Oxon, in Shropshire, said: "Everybody is devastated at Faye's capture.

"They are a lovely couple. It's terrible to think this has happened. Faye is a charming woman and very professional -I hope she is able to cope (*The Sun*, March 27, 2007)

The coverage also evoked images of helplessness as expressed by recurring references of her headscarf. For example, 'her blond hair covered with a black headscarf', 'Forced to cover her head with an Islamic hijab' and 'dressed in a black headscarf.' These references suggested that she was doing it against her will and not out of respect for the country of her captivity. Harmer (2007) has suggested that this emphasis may possibly be an attempt to

reinforce the notion that the headscarf symbolises the oppression of women in Iran, one of the motivating factors of the war on terror. Harmer argues that being made to wear the scarf was seen by the press as an attempt by Islamic militants to impose their beliefs on a Western woman. The headscarf was such a key issue in reports that even when Turney was shown without it, reports made references to it as in when she ‘appeared without a headscarf’ (*Daily Telegraph*, April 4, 2007, p. 1) and was ‘for the first time not in an Islamic hijab.’ *Daily Mail*, April 4, 2007, p. 10

Before Turney was named, she was a professional doing her job with 14 other colleagues but once she acquired a name, her professionalism became irrelevant even though she is recognised as a ‘sailor’ and ‘sea survival specialist’ and one of only a dozen women who pilot navy boats. Although her gender was an issue, it was probably her social role as a mother that dominated the narratives. She was described and defined in the context of her responsibility to her three year old child and the impact of her captivity on her family. Highlighted phrases in the selection below amplify the emphasis paid to her gendered role.

The 15 Brits, including a **young married NCO mum in her twenties** (*News of the World*, March 25, 2007)

**A YOUNG mother** is among 15 British Armed Forces personnel who were last night being interrogated by the hardline Iranian regime.

*The Mail on Sunday* can reveal that the woman in her 20s is understood to have more than one child and is a Royal Navy NCO. (*The Mail on Sunday*, March 25, 2007)

Leading Seaman Turney, 26, who has a **three-year-old daughter**, is being kept separately from the other hostages, it was revealed today (*Evening Standard*, March 27, 2007)

THE brave Royal Navy woman sailor being held hostage by Iran has a **three-year old daughter** (*The Sun*, March 27, 2007).

FAYE Turney’s captors were last night branded cruel and callous after using the **terrified mum** in yet another sick propaganda stunt to bolster their lies... Faye, who has a **three-year-old daughter** Molly, was paraded on

Iranian TV on Wednesday in an outrageous attempt to shore up the lies of her captors (*Daily Mirror*, March 30, 2007)

On her return, the *Daily Mail* captured the scene:

Faye Turney the young mother who became the face of the hostage crisis was finally reunited with her three-year-old daughter.

The ecstatic 26-year-old wrapped her arms around little Molly, who had spent the last fortnight oblivious to the trauma that her mother was enduring thousands of miles from home (*Daily Mail*, April 6, 2007, p.8)

Overall, the media representation of the crisis created an impression that did not convey a complete story. The other 14 rarely named captives were also victims but by ignoring them in the coverage, the media conformed to the notion that men belong to the front line and being captured comes with that responsibility.

### **Women and war narratives**

An examination of the representation of Faye Turney in British newspapers has illustrated the impact of gendered mediation. It has also highlighted how the portrayal of women in war and conflict narratives tends to strip them of their professional identity and to confine them to culturally assigned roles. As Deepa Kumar has noted, the 'most prominent role that women play in war narratives is that of victim' (2004: 297) and this was also apparent in the coverage of Turney. There is no doubt that gender assumptions structure the representation of women as victims, passive, vulnerable, and weak even when they earned their place on the frontline. Consequently, media representation of women in war narratives emphasises their gender role above their professional capabilities. Conventional assumptions of their role as mothers dominate debates and relegate their professional role to a secondary position. Invariably when captured, as Lynch and Turney were, militarised masculinity becomes justified as in the staged rescue of Lynch and where that is not a viable option, as in the case of Turney, the opponent is demonised for attacking a woman. This rhetorical strategy seeks to illegitimise the action of the opponents and conversely to legitimise attempts to rescue the victim. Takacs, (2002), for

example argues that documentaries about the rescue of Lynch ‘fetishized her femininity and vulnerability in order to remasculinise a coed military and militarise the identities of civilian men and women in ways that would perpetuate the project of hegemony’ (2002: 301). In one of the documentaries, Lynch is reportedly referred to as ‘the blond 19 year old from Palestine, West Virginia’ (ibid). As Takacs noted, such references stripped off her military identity and underscored her gender identity. Ironically in ‘Saving Private Lynch’, (2003) when the US commandos who rescued her burst into her hospital room, they reportedly said, ‘Jessica Lynch, we are United States soldiers come to take you home,’ she declared, ‘I’m an American soldier, too,’ thus suggesting that even in that vulnerable state, she still defined herself as a professional and not as a teenager in danger.

This identity construction was not limited to the ‘brave commandoes’ who stormed a deserted Iraqi hospital to rescue a damsel in distress; it was also adopted by the media in their narratives of the incident. When reporting on women like Lynch and Turney who defy culturally defined notions of what it means to be a woman, media narratives of their experiences as casualties of conflict becomes one dimensional as their gender identity becomes the reference point. Consequently, war narratives of women experiences frequently employ what Virginie Sanprie (2005) calls ‘caricaturization of femininity’.

When reporting on women who participate in traditionally non-female arenas, like sports or the military, the media constructs gender and enforces gender roles by either inattention to female participants, or by caricaturizations of femininity including an emphasis on aspects of the women’s appearance, sexuality, and personality over her actions and achievements (Sanprie, 2005: 388)

This often results in the depiction of women ‘within an exaggerated feminine style, emphasising their physical appearance and feminine characteristics (ibid: 389). Note references to their hair as in ‘her blond hair covered with a black headscarf’ and ‘blond 19 year old.’

As already argued in this article, Turney was subjected to the above treatment in some of the newspaper narratives. Some articles referred to her as ‘girl’ even though she was 26 years old and a mother. Readers who did not watch her performance on the Iranian television when she was ‘paraded’ learnt from newspaper reports that when she was on the screen her mouth was

turned down and her eyes downcast. Readers were therefore prompted to think of her as a vulnerable victim and not as a professional in a difficult situation that was not alien to her line of work.

From this analysis, it is obvious that the narratives of professional women in male-dominated domains who become casualties while on duty are problematic to construct on two levels. Firstly, they call into question the notion of gender equality and secondly, they reveal the media's inability to move beyond the boundaries of conventional construction of identity. Examples from other incidents abound. Take for example the coverage of the murder of Sharon Beshenivsky, a police constable in Bradford, who was killed by armed robbers. A full text search of stories published in 2005 using her name produced 564 hits on Proquest. She was even named woman of the year by Anila Baig, a columnist for *The Sun* newspaper. Very few, if any, male police officers killed on duty have received similar media attention. The narrative of her death was made more poignant by references to the children she left behind, especially the daughter whose fourth birthday she was planning to celebrate after work.

## Conclusion

The Faye Turney story illustrates media representation of women in male-dominated public spheres. Her story takes into account culturally defined gender roles and how these clash with non-traditional roles at the intersection of professional responsibilities in arenas conceptualised as masculine. The focal position assigned to her by the media echoed multi-layered issues that surround women's role in war. Even as skilled participants, their career choice is often interpreted as reckless, selfish and irresponsible. Compare that with narratives that follow conventional news frames and the differences become more glaring, as was evident in the coverage of the heroes of 9/11, who predictably were men. Most of the initial narratives of the attack on the World Trade Center celebrated the brave men who valiantly responded to the tragedy. Sue Curry Jansen argues that 'what was most notable about the early phase in the coverage... was the virtual disappearance of women' (Jansen, 2002: 139). The narratives were woven around men acting and women, when they did appear on the scene, reacting. Jansen likens this news construction to mythical tales where heroes, by definition, were brave men who took charge while 'wo-



men watched, waited, and emoted' (ibid, 140). The majority of women who featured in the narratives were represented as victims – widows and mothers and sisters of the men who gave their lives to rescue others.

The point of this argument is not to suggest a conspiracy in the representation of women but to draw attention to the dominant news frames in journalism of conflict. That war narratives 'relegate women to the role of victims of war while men are understood as warriors and the heroes of war' is not in question (Dowler, 2002:159). What *is* in question is whether women's expanding participation in male-dominated domains is recognised by the media. From this analysis, that is not yet the case.

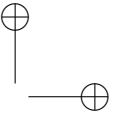
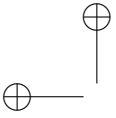
This article has examined the representation of Faye Turney in newspaper coverage of the 15 British service personnel who were captured and detained by Iran in 2007. The article argues that the dominant news frames in the reports were gendered to reflect the conventional conceptualisation of war as a masculine arena and that these distorted the image of Faye Turney, the only woman in the group. As Thompson et al have argued, media coverage does not often go beyond 'stereotyped images of women as passive victims...' (2007: 438). In the case of Turney, her passivity, vulnerability and helplessness were recurring motifs in the narrative. She was represented as a helpless victim of propaganda and of an oppressive regime. She was 'paraded on Iranian television', according to *The Guardian*, 'pressurised into making propaganda', according to *The Times*, she was a 'valuable trophy of war, a prize to be used as blackmail,' according to the *Daily Mail* and her appearance on Iranian television showed 'transparent coercion of a frightened young woman', according to *The Independent*.

It is apparent from this analysis that women's participation in war does not conform to the socially constructed roles assigned to them and that society is still uneasy with the notion of women being active soldiers and warriors (Dowler, 2002) in spite of their expanding roles in a male dominated arena. The media reflect this unease through their gendered perspectives in their war narratives.

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