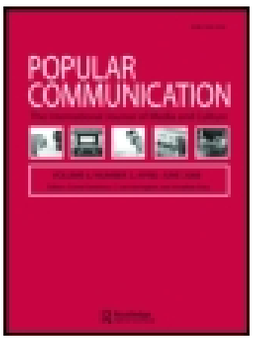

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Bombshells on Film: Women, Military Films, and Hegemonic Gender Ideologies

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This research explores the gendered representation of women in mainstream military films produced in the United States over a 70-year period when the official capacity of women in armed service underwent significant transformation. Utilizing contextualized visual semiotics, findings reveal that these films present women's standing as uncertain at best by reinforcing their exclusion from many nontraditional feminine roles or by setting them up for reintegration into proper gender roles. Such depictions reaffirm the two and only two gender category dichotomy, which discourages popular discourse from considering full integration of women into traditionally masculine roles in highly masculine gendered institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Public awareness of the operation of the U.S. military as a social institution is often derived from images and other representations in Hollywood films. The military has traditionally been a bastion of masculinity and maleness (Britton & Williams, 1995), and even casual observation of films about the military suggests that an essential if not fundamental aspect of what it depicts is the institution's gendered organizational culture. While Hollywood's portrayals of the military provide a general understanding of life in the armed services, far less is understood about the ways in which the influential medium of film presents the gendered institutional logics and practices upon which the military is based.

Our research explores how the military's institutional ambivalence toward women's participation in its ranks is sustained by Hollywood's representations of gender in films about armed service. As cultural products, films are social constructions composed of images, symbols, and other forms of consciousness that embody beliefs, values, idioms, and stereotypes that reflect cultural understandings brought to the production process. Symbolic forms of organizational culture that encompass such content are typically internal to institutions themselves, although external forms such as film may be considered part of that constellation. Because the military has a well established if lesser known relationship with Hollywood, wherein it provides access to military settings and information in return for preproduction script review (Talk of the Nation, 2008; Turley, 2003), cooperation between these two institutions suggests how the military's

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gendered organizational culture is able to influence the ways in which women's portrayals sustain the military's culture of masculinity.

To examine how military films present the socially constructed gendered binary that sustains the military as hegemonically masculine, we explore the gendered representation of women in mainstream military films produced in the United States over a 70-year period, from World War II to the present, when the official capacity of women in the military underwent significant transformation. Despite shifts over time in women's participation, we anticipate that filmic representations of the military's gendered binary remain firmly entrenched, even as these representations have become complex.

ANALYZING FILM AS A CULTURAL PRODUCT

Technical and social knowledge frames the decision-making process of film production, and that knowledge is mediated by bureaucratic, organizational, and other institutional arrangements that are themselves gendered (Bielby & Bielby, 2002). Producing representations of gender is, thus, deeply affected by prevailing historical, social, and cultural contexts and ideologies, which take form through the images, scenes, characters, dialog, and narrative, among countless other artistic and technical elements that comprise a film. Filmic representations can be powerfully influential, and ascertaining the way in which they accomplish their representational power is extremely complex (Tasker, 2002). Our analysis focuses neither on women's roles *per se* nor merely on their content, but instead on how gender is constructed symbolically within film narratives about the military. Specifically, we attend to *contextualized* visual semiotics, that is, on the ways in which the elements and composition of scenes, frames, and action contribute to the signification of gender suitability within the larger context of a narrative's structure and resolution of institutionally appropriate gender enactment, to reveal how symbolic portrayals of women, men, and gender are accomplished onscreen in ways that coincide with the military's preferred hegemonically masculine culture.

Central to our approach is Mulvey's (1975) scholarship, which brought attention to the relevance of the gendering and gendered framing of compositional elements of the medium of film itself, including its narrative structure, and invited a concerted focus on "the relationship between media content (and occasionally formal organization of the industry) on the one hand and a range of social issues on the other" that includes "external issues: race, gender, violence, and so on" (Kuhn, 2004, p. 1227). That is, understanding how films depict women calls not only for analysis of the *particulars* of symbolic representation but also for attention to the symbolic *contexts* of those representations. In the case of military films, this entails cognizance of how the gendered practices of the military establishment itself contextualize representations of its institutional culture.

Throughout history, the military has been a socially tenuous and sexually precarious place for women, making it difficult for them to participate freely and fully in its organizational culture (D'Amico & Weinstein, 1999; Mitchell, 1989; Sherrow, 1996). As a result, female members face circumscribed career options, a glass ceiling to the highest appointments, and corrosive sexual harassment (Manning, 2005). Attending to the historical particulars of women's "exclusionary inclusion" within this institution helps illuminate why Hollywood's representations of women in military films may be encoded in particular symbolic forms and why they shift as they do over

time. Because military images off-screen tend to be based on ideals of masculinity, a gender not usually associated with the female sex, we explored the ways in which the socially prescribed gender binary was associated with codes and conventions that signaled institutional preferences for women's containment. To ascertain this, we focused on how female soldiers were depicted relative to fundamental military institutional practices, beliefs, and goals, including team work, sacrifice, bravery, suspension of morality, and killing, and we asked how concepts of gender aligned with these institutional expectations. Do military films construct an unwavering binary of male/female? If not, how are violations of this fundamental social classification resolved? Were female soldiers who comported with hegemonic military masculinity delineated as no longer female, or feminine, or were they granted a transformed identity? Because prevailing societal beliefs about gender identity and gender relations are crucial to the narrative resolution of gender transgression, do such depictions, their magnitude, and their resolution vary by historical era, and if so, how?

METHODS

Women have been unofficially and informally involved with the military and war throughout U.S. history, but World War I marks their first sanctioned involvement. Table 1 reports the number of women who served in selected military and peacekeeping actions between 1918 and 2005. For our analysis, however, we sampled only films produced after WWI, which corresponds to the period in which women were formally allowed to serve. Thus, we excluded any films produced before WWI, and those made after WWI with narratives about the military that predated WWI, such as films about the Civil War.

Although the *war* film forms a distinct genre (Basinger, 1986; Belton, 1994), *military* films encompass a subject category that permits broader interrogation of the military as a gendered social institution. Consequently, we undertook the task of compiling eligible military films from which we sampled by identifying all films generated by repeated searches on The Internet Movie Database (IMDb). Using its system of cross-referencing to trace the filmographies of actors, directors, writers, and producers associated with military films, we searched keywords until we exhausted all possibilities. The universe of films included those with narratives about the U.S. military as a social institution that were distributed by Hollywood studios and production companies between 1918 and 2005. Locating copies of films about the military released during this period posed a challenge because many older films no longer existed, while others were not in the public domain. Our sample consisted of 42 films that had production or distribution dates and content that were consistent with the criteria described above and that were available for purchase or that aired on three of the major television networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) as well as on the networks TCM, USA, TNT, TBS, and AMC between September 2003 and 2005. Relying on these multiple venues gave us access to nonoverlapping film libraries that included some films not publicly available. The sample, while modest in number, was fully representative of the genre across time. Table 2 lists the films that comprised our sample.

The social significance of a film's narrative occurs through the way the story is told, inflected, or represented (Turner, 1988). Narratives are contextualized historically by the range of codes and conventions that signal whether it is consistent with or varies from dominant culture. Once films were viewed in their entirety, they were then re-viewed to record the number of

TABLE 1
Number of Women Who Served in Selected U.S. Military and Peacekeeping Actions, 1918–2005[a]

Conflict	*Number of Women*
World War I	33,000
World War II	400,000
Korean War	120,000
Vietnam	7,000
Grenada	170
Panama	770
Persian Gulf War	41,000
Somalia	1,000
Haiti	1,200
Bosnia/Kosovo	16,000[b]
Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan)	—[c]
Operation Iraqi Freedom	—[c]

Source: Manning, 2005, p. 3.

[a]The numbers for World Wars I and II and for the Korean War are the best estimates of the total number of women who served in the armed forces during these conflicts. Although the number of women on active duty on any single day is known, the total number of individual women on active duty who served can only be approximated. The number for the Vietnam War includes only those women who served in that theater, that is, those eligible to wear Vietnam Campaign service ribbons. The numbers for the military actions in Grenada, Panama, the Persian Gulf War, Somalia, and Haiti include women (both active duty and reserve) who deployed to these areas during the action.

[b]The Bosnia/Kosovo numbers include active duty, reserve, and Guard women who have served in these areas as of March 2001. More up-to-date data is not available at this time. Military women continue to serve in both countries.

[c]Best estimates are that women comprise approximately 10% of those who have served or are serving in these operations.

times events or actions occurred that pertained to gender displays, dynamics, roles, or interaction, followed by analysis of the substance of those occurrences. A file was created for each film that recorded the number of women in it, if any, their importance to the plot, the amount of time they appeared in the film, and what their roles were in relation to the narrative. To ascertain how women were depicted within the institution of the military itself, we then observed the institutional position they occupied, their social power, and the nature of their relationships with peers and authority. Given how few women were central to narratives of military films, women associated with the military who were in nonmilitary positions were included and their influence observed. We also recorded whether any female character experienced discrimination or harassment.

Scenes that entailed gendered action were closely examined, and frame composition and unfolding activity were analyzed using categories devised to record their outcome and significance. We observed whether the female characters engaged in traditionally feminine activities

TABLE 2
Sample of Films Analyzed

Title	*Year*	*Director*
36 Hours	1965	George Seaton
A Farewell to Arms	1932	Frank Borzage
A Few Good Men	1992	Rob Reiner
Above and Beyond	1952	Melvin Frank
Back to Bataan	1945	Edward Dmytryk
Bataan	1943	Tony Garrett
Beachhead	1954	Stuart Heisler
Black Hawk Down	2001	Ridley Scott
Command Decision	1948	Sam Wood
Courage Under Fire	1996	Edward Zwick
Dive Bomber	1941	Michael Curtiz
Flying Leathernecks	1951	Nicolas Ray
Force 10 From Navarone	1978	Guy Hamilton
Full Metal Jacket	1987	Stanley Kubrik
G.I. Jane	1997	Ridley Scott
Good Morning Vietnam	1987	Barry Levinson
Green Berets	1968	John Wayne
Keep Your Powder Dry	1943	Edward Buzzell
Kelly's Heroes	1970	Brian Hutton
Objective Burma	1945	Raoul Walsh
Paisan	1946	Roberto Rosselini
Patton	1970	Franklin Schaffner
Pearl Harbor	2001	Michael Bay
Run Silent, Run Deep	1958	Robert Wise
Saving Private Ryan	1998	Steven Spielberg
Sergeant York	1941	Howard Hawks
So Proudly We Hail	1943	Mark Sandrich
Stage Door Canteen	1943	Frank Borzage
Stalag 17	1953	Billy Wilder
Stripes	1981	Ivan Reitman
Task Force	1949	Delmer Daves
The Dirty Dozen	1967	Robert Aldrich
The Gallant Hours	1960	Robert Montgomery
The Great Escape	1963	John Sturges
The Hill	1965	Sidney Lumet
This Man's Navy	1945	William Wellman
Three Kings	1999	David Russell
To Hell and Back	1955	Jesse Hibbs
Top Gun	1986	Tony Scott
Torpedo Run	1958	Joseph Pevney
Verboten	1959	Samuel Fuller
We Were Soldiers	2002	Mel Gibson

and whether they engaged in traditionally masculine ones. To ascertain how gender was depicted in these scenes, we attended to a scene's codes, that is, the systems by which signs are organized and understood within a culture. These included gestures and conduct, accents, and clothing styles, among others, which "placed" characters into categorical representations of a

particular class, taste group, subculture, or other social category. A film's casting, for example, relies upon physical traits as culturally understood signifiers, so we observed for characteristics such as race, sexual orientation, and physical characteristics, such as body type and age. We also observed for indications of femininity and masculinity, or in the case of portrayals of military women, the number of times a woman was shown in nonmilitary attire and how often that attire was traditionally feminine in nature. We observed for other gender indicators such as length of hair, posture, amount of visible make up, and whether dirtiness, musculature, physique, and body stance were emphasized, as well as whether either men or women appeared physically injured and under what circumstances. We included feminine conduct such as flirting, self-deprecation, and coyness, and masculine conduct like toughness and degrading or objectifying others.

Often, the social significance of a film lies in the discourse of the characters, so we also observed how men in the film talked about, that is, expressed valuation of, women when female characters were not present in the film, or at least were not present in the scene. We observed for the number of times men talked of women as well as the ways they spoke of women, for instance, whether women were referenced as lovers, sex objects, family, co-workers, or friends. We also observed for whether feminine imagery was invoked in a negative manner when dealing with troops/soldiers, for example, if a drill sergeant referred to his/her troops as "pussies" or "little girls" when they did not perform to the military's set standards.

Last, we recorded each film's production information. This included the year the film was released and the year in which the narrative was set, whether it took place in wartime, peacetime, or both, the percentage of the film that involved combat, which war, if any, the narrative encompassed, and the geographical region or regions in which the narrative was located. These variables allowed us to ascertain the historical and cultural context in which a film's production and narrative were located, and whether there were differences in gender depictions representing one time period but produced in another.

We used both intra- and inter-rater measures to evaluate coding reliability. Two outside researchers were given the coding scheme and were asked to evaluate 10% of a randomly selected subsample of the films. We then compared coding and conferred to eliminate any ambiguities. We assessed intra-rater reliability by re-coding the first 10% of our sample a second time in order to ensure that our initial coding was consistent and unvarying. There were no statistically significant differences in coding in either the inter- or intra-rater tests. Reliability of inter- and intra-rater coding was evaluated using Krippendorff's alpha (Krippendorff, 2004). Tests yielded an outcome of 1.0, indicating complete reliability.

FINDINGS

The film industry overlaps with six eras of U.S. military history: pre-WWII (1918–1940), WWII (1941–1945), post-WWII to the early Cold War (1946–1959), the Vietnam era (1960–1979), the late Cold War era (1980–1989), and the post Cold War/"War on Terror" era (1990–present). For each era, military and social history and gender ideology served as a backdrop for analysis of the depictions of women in general and of women in the military in particular. Three of the 42 films in the sample (7%) did not include women, and of the 39 (93%) that did, eight (19%) contained women in parts with no dialog. Thus, approximately a quarter of the films had female characters

of limited significance. More than one-third (39%, n = 16) of the films had women in a major role in which the character was on screen for a significant part of the film with multiple speaking lines, and 15 of these 16 films depicted women in military roles, mostly as nurses.

Taking these findings into account, our overall analysis of film narratives for their social meaning and significance revealed that military films incorporated women in three basic ways: they are not present at all within the narrative, they are present as civilians who embody ideals of femininity, or they are present as members of the military. This third category can be divided into three subcategories: the woman who is a failure as a soldier but successfully performs her femininity; the woman who is a successful soldier but fails at some or all aspects of heteronormative femininity; and the rarest, the woman who succeeds both as a soldier and as a feminine woman, although this usually includes some form of limitation either in femininity or successful soldiering. We were particularly interested in how these representations were accomplished onscreen, that is, with the ways in which female characterizations, whether they were of military or nonmilitary women, were gendered, and the ways in which these depictions metaphorically and symbolically resonated with the military's preferences for women in its ranks.

A deeper probe into the film narratives of each era revealed that in all but the WWII (1941–1945) and the post Cold War/War on Terror (1990–present) eras, *if* women were present onscreen they were depicted either in traditionally accepted feminine roles as civilians or when portrayed as soldiers they were depicted in nontransgressive or conventionally feminine ways. For all eras but these two, the particular form of women's traditional depictions varied, not surprisingly, by historical period but, more importantly for our analysis, *despite* women's actual level of involvement in the military or regardless of the government's need for women's aid within the military.

During the post-WWII/early Cold War era (1946–1959), for example, when the nation sought culturally to return to an idealized version of prewar gender relations and many employed women were pressured out of the workforce, a ceiling was imposed that limited women's enlistment to 2% of the armed services' nonmedical capacity. Although many military women did in fact end their service upon completion of WWII, as Table 1 reveals, their enlistment numbers were the second highest of all eras we examined *and* the Korean War was under way. Nevertheless, in this particular era, women's depictions in military films differ substantially from what was going on societally or militarily, and a line of dialog from *Above and Beyond* (1952) epitomizes then-prevailing military ideology regarding women's proper place within its establishment. The film, which chronicles the WWII heroism of Paul Tibbets, the Lieutenant Colonel who piloted the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, contains a scene in which his character is speaking with his wife at his new duty station. The Tibbets' character says, "We both have a big job here – mine's out there, yours is right here in the house." Screen depictions during the Vietnam era (1960–1979) were also uncoupled from social and military reality but in yet other ways. Although this era predates the integration in 1980 of female and male troops into a unified military, in 1967 the ceiling on women's participation was lifted, and in 1973 the draft for men ended that instigated a steep decline in enlistment rates while the Vietnam War was raging and volunteers were being sought. Coinciding with this era, however, were the social movements of feminism, peace, and civil rights that vigorously challenged hegemonic constructions of gender, race, sexuality, and war with ideals that the military opposed. Challenged by these alternative ideologies, film depictions of women (and men) within the military's context of hegemonic masculinity became problematic, and narratives placed women, if present at all, in socially denigrated categories such as prostitutes or sexual objects

for men's visual or sexual pleasure (*The Dirty Dozen,* 1967) or as spies or double agents *(Force 10 From Navarone,* 1978, and *Green Berets,* 1968).

As Table 3 reveals, our overall analysis found that many of the visual semiotic elements of women's onscreen depictions reinforced dominant narrative forms as normative. Our sample yielded a total of 99 major and minor female characters for evaluation. The vast majority (73%) was young, white, heterosexual women with traditionally feminine features; the remainder (27%) were females with at least one nonnormative characteristic, such as racial or age difference or masculine features and appearance. Throughout the films, women were shown in explicitly feminine gendered activities, and by comparing percentages for each era, it is apparent that only in the WWII and the post-Cold War/War on Terror eras did women appear about equally in masculine and feminine activity (note that because the number of female characters varied in each era, the relevant basis for comparison across time is the era-specific percentages, not the frequencies). Depictions of military women with authority also show up in these two eras, with those of the later era presaged by evidence that began to appear in films of the late Cold War era of the 1980s. As the next two sets of variables reveal, during the WWII era women with authority were more likely to be challenged by *their* authorities than by their peers, a finding that narratively contextualizes women's then newly certified occupational involvement in the military. Interestingly, these women's peers were less likely to challenge them than were women's peers in more contemporary eras. This is likely because women's peers in the WWII era were almost exclusively female, whereas contemporary women's peers are predominantly male, which suggests that the majority of the challenges come from men. Because the films of the WWII (1941–1945) and the post-Cold War/War on Terror (1990–present) eras portrayed women militarily, institutionally, and socially in complex ways, we focus the remainder of our analysis on these two important periods. While the number of women and the types of roles they occupy are similar in the films from these two eras, their depiction differs greatly.

WWII Era (1941–1945)

Of the nine films in our sample that were released between 1941 and 1945, eight were set with the country at war, with six of those including combat scenes for at least part of the film. Films of this period had a particular emphasis on patriotism, and for women this meant supporting the war effort at home and joining the war effort through military enlistment or commission. Only one film had no representation of women in it, but the men in this film spoke of women 19 separate times, more than any other film in any era we analyzed. Five of the eight films from this period had at least some representation of women in the military. This high proportion was not seen again until the post-Cold War/War on Terror era nearly 50 years later, and it indicates not only the acceptability of the military as an appropriate occupation for women during WWII but also the outright encouragement of it.

The WWII era was one of the few periods in American military film history that represented women's involvement in the armed services without questioning their capabilities, while granting them a feminine identity alongside their military identity. One way in which this was accomplished was through narratives presented in combination with visual imagery that foretold or anticipated women's reintegration into "proper" gender roles at the end of the war. For example, while women were shown in leadership roles or nontraditional occupations, many of the portrayals of military women in WWII were as nurses, a clearly female-dominated occupation often

TABLE 3
Descriptive Statistics of Sample and of Films' Gendered Visual Elements

Variable	*Frequency*	*Percent*
Number of films in sample	42	100%
Number of films analyzed in each era		
Pre-WWII	1	<1%
WWII	9	21%
Early Cold War	11	26%
Vietnam	8	19%
Late Cold War	5	12%
Post Cold War	8	19%
Setting of film[a]		
Peacetime	5	12%
War	35	83%
Combat	35	83%
War and peacetime	2	5%
Number of films with featured female characters	39	93%
Subset of films with extras only or no dialogue	8	19%
Number of films with no female characters	3	7%
Major female characters featured (number of films)	16[b]	39%
Minor female characters featured (number of films)	30[b]	73%
Major female characters in military roles (number of films)	15	36%
Characteristics of major and minor female characters (excludes extras or those with no dialogue)		
Number of female characters coded	99	
Age over 40		16%
Race (non-white)		9%
Non-traditional female physical characteristics		2%
Sexual difference		0%
Other (young, white, feminine features, heterosexual)		73%

Number of times female characters shown in explicitly	feminine gendered activity (n = 180)		masculine gendered activity (n = 130)	
Era[c]				
Pre-WWII	4	2%	0	0%
WWII	70	39%	50	38%
Early Cold War	34	19%	13	7%
Vietnam	11	6%	6	3%
Late Cold War	21	12%	16	9%
Post Cold War	40	22%	45	25%

Number of military women with authority	7	28%
Era		
Pre-WWII	0	0%
WWII	2	22%
Early Cold War	0	0%
Vietnam	0	0%
Late Cold War	2	67%
Post Cold War	3	30%

(*Continued*)

TABLE 3
(*Continued*)

Variable	*Frequency*	*Percent*
Number of military women whose military position is challenged by peers	11	42%
Era		
Pre-WWII	1	100%
WWII	2	22%
Early Cold War	–[d]	–
Vietnam	–[d]	–
Late Cold War	3	100%
Post Cold War	5	50%
Number of military women whose military position is challenged by authorities	15	58%
Era		
Pre-WWII	1	100%
WWII	6	67%
Early Cold War	–[d]	–
Vietnam	–[d]	–
Late Cold War	3	100%
Post Cold War	5	50%
Total number of military women in sample who experience overt discrimination/harassment	4	21%
Men's discourse about women	39	95%
When women are absent from film	3	100%
When women are not in scene, but are in film	36	97%
Category		
Lovers	29	71%
Sex objects	24	59%
Family/loved ones	22	54%
Co-workers	4	10%
Friends	1	3%
Female imagery used derogatorily	10	25%

[a]Categories are not mutually exclusive.

[b]Combined total number of films for these two variables is greater than the sample because some films featured both major and minor characters.

[c]Because the number of female characters was not the same across eras, some eras have fewer women to be shown in either feminine or masculine gendered activity.

[d]There were no depictions of military women with authority in this era, which is different from zero; that would mean that there were depictions of authority that went unchallenged.

presumed to be consistent with women's "nature" and readily integrated with the family sphere. Another way this was accomplished was through female characters who demonstrated knowledge and skill equal to that of their male counterparts, successfully mastering previously masculine roles and accomplishing tasks traditionally conceived of as needing masculine attributes, while at the same time maintaining their femininity through appearance and either reference to or engagement in feminine roles, such as wife, lover, daughter, or mother. This combination of achievement in both traditionally feminine and masculine actions and roles was unique in military

film history, due in part to the government's encouragement of women to enter the public sphere to support the war effort without fear of social sanctions. However, it was also circumscribed. Such arrangements were portrayed as a temporary state of existence; once the U.S. successfully completed the task of fighting the war, women were expected to return to their feminine gendered roles.

A closer inspection of just how gender was constructed in films of the WWII era reveals the nuanced complexity and balancing act of depictions so that two genders could be represented and preserved and a masculine organizational culture for the military could be maintained. Two of the most interesting films from this period, *Keep Your Powder Dry* (1943) and *So Proudly We Hail* (1943), were made at the height of the war, when the outcome for the Allies was still uncertain. *Keep Your Powder Dry* (a dual reference to gunpowder and face powder) deals with the training and eventual commissioning of women in nonmedical, military positions, while *So Proudly We Hail* deals with the deployment of a group of American military nurses to the Philippines in the South Pacific front. Both films highlight the importance of women to the military economy of the time and even refer to the women as heroines in some contexts. These were the only two films in our sample whose main characters were women but which still received authorized assistance from the military. In fact, there were few films from any other era that had positive depictions of women in the military and also received support.

The female characters in *Keep Your Powder Dry* are women of different ages, ability levels, and class backgrounds who joined the Army during the war for sundry reasons. The conflict in the film is whether women from such wide-ranging backgrounds can coalesce as a coherent unit — a practice essential to the military's culture of hierarchical structure and discipline — in order to perform their patriotic duty of serving their country. Relying on stereotypical images of women as sexual competitors to highlight their differences and conflicts, the film ultimately portrays the women as competent at their chosen occupational specialties and in their performance of assigned tasks within and acquiescence to the structure of military authority, which comes with some surprise to the women and their superiors. Memorable scenes include one in which the women demonstrate mechanical proficiency while the male base commander, a General, comments on their physical attractiveness by declaring, "and they're such pretty girls, too!"

An aspect of films of this era designed to suggest female enlistees can remain feminine women is women's willingness, even eagerness, to break military guidelines on social behavior, especially in their interactions with men. One of the lead characters in *Keep Your Powder Dry* risks reprimand in order to a date a male soldier she meets during her time of service. The same is also true for two of the main characters in the largely female cast of *So Proudly We Hail*. Even the hard-nosed, task-oriented female lieutenant of this film falls for a soldier who was in her care on a convoy to the South Pacific. Another female officer goes so far as to break the guidelines of not fraternizing with enlisted men (a rule even male officers were subject to). While *So Proudly We Hail* centers on the heroism of nurses serving in the midst of combat zones in the South Pacific front, most of the narrative and dialog deal with their romantic relationships and the effect of those relationships on their military service.

While indiscretions were used as a means of highlighting then-prevailing expectations of women's inclination toward romance, marriage, and maternity, regardless of their military involvement in the war effort, films of this era also suggested something more. That is, although women can succeed in military positions for a time, women's ultimate place is within a loving and committed relationship with a man. Thus, while the films' narratives imply the temporary

nature of women's position outside the home, they also set the stage for the return of women to the domestic sphere in the postwar era and the restoration of the military as a male institution (an outcome that is consistent with our overall findings, reported above). To reinforce this, the female leads in both these films are often shown in nonmilitary, feminine attire (which is reveled in) despite that in *So Proudly We Hail* the women serve in an active, desperate combat zone that includes the retreat from Bataan and Corrigador. All the women in both films are costumed in full make up and well-groomed hair despite the frantic wartime situations into which they fall. In addition, these films often depict the women as catty with other women or coy and flirtatious with men, as well as succumbing to fits of tears in times of trouble or joy. All these characteristics were represented as consistent with traditional gender enactment and thus as appropriate, thereby aiding the construction of the women as still feminine in spite of the military's work and masculinized institutional culture.

There were also a number of films during this period that lacked women as main characters but included them in minor roles or as extras to serve as foils to the masculinity of the male soldiers to whom they played opposite. These films highlighted women's femininity — often in extreme form, such as wearing very feminine or sexualized attire, adorned with considerable make up, submitting to emotions, and engaging in frivolous grooming and superficial interactions. In *Bataan* (1943) and *This Man's Navy* (1945), women were not presented as heroines but rather as ideals to underscore what men were fighting for: the ability to live free and return home from combat to an attractive, doting wife. Such films emphasized domesticity, marriage, and companionship as the ideals of the two distinctly separate genders and of gender relations.

While such representations might now be viewed as negative or at least somewhat degrading, at the time they served as inspiration, a battle call to men's masculinity and self-worth. Women's femininity, which was highlighted in exaggerated, perhaps unrealistic ways, especially in contrast to men's masculinity, was also revered. There were no images of highly objectified women (such as prostitutes, cover girls, or pin-ups), and the male soldiers of this era spoke of women the least of any other era as sex objects or objectified bodies, suggesting the positive light in which society viewed women and femininity as cultural ideals for which masculine men served in the military. Finally, all representations of American women are of white, able-bodied, middle-class, heterosexual women, most of whom meet conventional beauty standards of the time. There were no women who were overweight or proportioned much differently than the ideal standard. The hegemony of these representations even extended into images of "the enemy." The only nonwhite woman in any sampled film from this era was of a Filipino woman working as a double agent (*Back to Bataan,* 1945). While European women were represented in many of the films of this era, there were no representations of Japanese women. Perhaps because women were thought of as civilizing agents, portraying Asian women might have been counter to the filmic convention of many of these films, which was to "other" the enemy through extreme racialization.

Overall, whether portrayed as civilian or military, women in military films of the WWII era were utilized as foils to the masculinity of the military and the men comprising it. There was some evidence of women crossing gendered occupational boundaries and in those roles they were granted military authority, but far less variation occurred in the discursive or visual gendered characteristics they encompassed as female characters. Women who managed to transcend role boundaries were also, through filmic convention, set up for reintegration into proper feminine, heterosexual roles as wives, love interests, and mothers.

Post-Cold War/War on Terror Era (1990–Present)

The post-Cold War/War on Terror era, which spans the period from 1990 to the present, includes presidencies, wars, and federal politics and policies that have elicited support as well as condemnation of military ideology and involvement. During this period, women's participation increased in all branches of the military, which was crucial in the context of an all-volunteer military, and they were involved in a number of military actions, including both Iraqi wars. Compared to the other eras studied, there was a greater variety of films about the military and more complex representations of women in armed service.

All eight films in the current period had female characters. Half featured a woman or women as main characters, and five of the eight represented women as soldiers, a proportion greater than any era since WWII. Only one film, *Black Hawk Down* (2001), had a woman but only as an extra. In addition to women's greater visibility in onscreen roles, in all the films men spoke of women when they were not present, but there was a shift away from speaking of them as alien to the military or as sex objects, as was the case in the eras between WWII and the present, and a return to mention of women as family members, wives, and love interests, as was the case during WWII. However, this commentary was not always positive; two of the eight films of this era used feminine imagery as a means of degrading both male and female soldiers.

The narratives of this era were by far the most complicated of any other in the way they problematized the association between gender and the military. Although for the first time since WWII there were films with female soldiers as lead characters, they were now in much more tenuous positions. Whereas films from the WWII era highlighted women soldiers' ability to successfully navigate between their masculine positions in the military and their feminine identities as wives, mothers, and other traditional feminine roles, the films of the current era highlighted the precarious position military women hold institutionally and the liability this creates for them personally as individuals and as women attempting to bridge feminine and masculine categories. This was conveyed through narratives that placed emphasis on the social and occupational problems female soldiers faced as members of the military rather than on their integration into the institution. Although women could be successful in masculine and feminine roles, the stakes were high, and they faced serious consequences for failure at either — with social sanctions for failing at femininity, and social, legal, and physical consequences for failing at masculine roles as soldiers. In the midst of this heightened role complexity, narratives were complicated further by an ongoing reliance on the gender binary, which was upheld, and the sex/gender connection, which was maintained. In short, if women succeeded in their role as soldier they were made to pay the price for betraying their femininity either through social sanction or at times even death, outcomes that prevented their gender transgression from becoming established. Thus, it would appear that the contemporary military film has yet to find a way to fully assimilate a new and more complicated multiple gender identity, allowing women to succeed both in their feminine and masculine roles.

A Few Good Men (1992) offers a useful illustration of the more complicated traditional categorization of gender as binary in films of this era. In this instance, the lead female officer served as a foil to a male lead — for each character trait the lead male exhibited, the female lead exhibited the opposite trait, symbolizing innate maleness and femaleness. However, when demonstrating strength, resolve, tenacity, and fortitude positively in her capacity as a military officer, the female lead also endlessly struggled for success in her duties. Moreover, when the film

acknowledged the barriers women face within the military in spite of their competence, nothing in the narrative problematized the denigrating treatment the female lead received when she took charge, thus continuing the normalization of the "othering" of military women. This theme of female as "the institutional other" is furthered in films of this era through explicit associations made between women and racial categories, race being a longstanding filmic convention for depicting outsiders.

Interestingly, while the two films discussed earlier from the WWII era received authorized assistance, the two from the present period that focused on women — *Courage Under Fire* (1996) and *G.I. Jane* (1997) — did not receive support, even though these films to a considerable extent better elucidated the actual experience of women in the military. Despite their greater realism, both films had idealized endings that portrayed acceptance and honor of the lead female characters. However, this acceptance was not unconditional; the women had to work hard to earn it, sometimes through death, and, tellingly, their fellow soldiers accepted them only as exceptions to their sex. Acceptance that is conditional allows contemporary military women to succeed but only as individuals, not categorically as a gender, and only at one point in time. Every woman has to prove herself anew in each new situation, regardless of those who have gone before her or her own previous acceptance elsewhere. Provisional acceptance is more similar to the experiences of many real life military women.

The present era was also the first in which we saw the assimilation of military women into proper gender for combat, rather than a focus upon an anticipated subsequent reintegration into established gender roles. In addition, female characters were allowed for the first time to modify their gender identity to fit their occupational responsibilities in the military rather than having to change their occupational roles to maintain conformity with society's heteronormative gender role expectations. *G.I. Jane*, for example, shed all signs of physical and emotional femininity in order to gain acceptance but not without a price, as she was perceived as becoming sexually deviant. As McCracken observes, "the crossing of strictly defined gender boundaries is, of course, what causes the anxiety about women in war" (2003, p. 631). However, depictions of gender modification that entailed crossing conventional gender boundaries coincided with an increase in the type and variation of narrative devices for maintaining the two-and-only-two gender binary. While hints were given, as they were in *G.I. Jane*, that the sex-gender-sexuality continuum might be broken in order to allow for more variation in gender construction, performance, and portrayal, women still faced extreme difficulty and an excess of discrimination.

The increase in the number of female characters in varying roles (e.g., women as wives, professionals, soldiers, sex objects, lovers) and the use of multiple narrative mechanisms (as civilian foil with femininity, as military foil with ability, as re-gendered soldier, as sexual object) suggested a shift toward more complex representations that allowed women to occupy multiple, less circumscribed, social positions. However, gender stereotypes persisted, albeit in somewhat more complex forms, as did the exclusion of images of gender difference among the women themselves. Lesbians were not depicted, and women either had to express mainly feminine or mainly masculine gender qualities; rarely were they allowed to mix qualities at all, and when they did they had to eliminate some from one category or the other in order to fit into the either/or ideology of gender construction (e.g., *Three Kings*, 1999). Finally, while there was an increase in the range of portrayals of nonwhite women and in the intersection between sex, gender, and race; these representations, too, have yet to fully capture the intricacy of multiple intersections.

DISCUSSION

Film is not merely a direct reflection of the current status quo or the actual experiences of people at the time of production. Film also is an embodiment in form of culturally shared significance, sometimes greatly idealized, and as a popular medium that carries matters of cultural relevance it draws upon symbols that are reliably and widely apprehended by the public. In the case of gender depictions, cultural idioms and stereotypes about the socially prescribed gender binary are deployed for symbolic representation through translation into filmic codes and conventions. To the extent that these elements incorporate ongoing insecurities about gender transcendence and gender transgressions, these find their way into film as well. The gendered organization of the military, with its highly masculinized institutional culture, makes it a particularly interesting site for analysis of how social institutions symbolically effect such a culture, and in the instance of the military, how beneficial Hollywood can be for naturalizing public understanding and legitimating the hegemonic masculinity of gendered organizational culture. Moreover, film's reliance on the socially prescribed binary of gender as a narrative convention makes studying military films a unique opportunity for analysis, since military identities tend to be founded on ideals of masculinity, a gender not usually associated with the female sex. Thus, analyzing how films depict military women offers an intriguing approach to observing how leading American social institutions envision the boundaries of gender categories, which are sharpened all the more when framed by the era of production.

By taking an historical approach to women's representations onscreen in military films, and to a lesser extent men's, we revealed how shifts in these representations correspond to the persistence of an unwavering gender binary on the one hand and to the fluidity of notions of appropriate gender roles, relations, and enactments for women on the other. We found that filmic conventions deployed to construct this varied based on historical and cultural context, and that filmic codes were not constant over time but took on different elements or properties depending on the extent to which female difference was read as transgressive. Our analysis found, in particular, how different eras were associated with often vastly different representations that were consistent with the social ideology of the period, that is, when women were included at all. Women's striking absence — a discursive silencing — in military films produced between WWII and the present era contradicts women's actual participation in the military and the military's lagging, if ongoing, institutional adaptations to accommodate them. The particular absence of representations of military women during the 1950s when women were serving in great numbers, especially during the Korean War, suggests a level of rejection of women in a masculine role or of any other in the public sphere despite historical evidence to the contrary. Yet even as military films bypass at times the actual social realities of women's participation in the military, or within the larger economy, they also appear at others to embrace a more inclusive institutional culture when women's enlistment is necessary for national survival, as it was in WWII and is now the case in the context of an all-volunteer military. Alternatively, during periods of social transition that could conceivably challenge the military's hegemonic masculine culture either through women's increased participation in armed service or through outright public questioning of the military's institutional culture, women's depictions were restricted to more traditional notions of femininity, again, if women are present at all. In short, we found appreciable evidence of an ever-shifting level and complexity of women's "inclusive exclusion" in the military film that coincided with the military's enduring hegemonic masculine culture and various public social agendas.

There was considerable transparency in the film codes and conventions employed to convey shifts in the military's institutional stance toward women. The most apparent was use of women in military films as a foil to male characters. Feminine women are deployed to convey stereotypes of sexuality and incompetence, and the more feminine the woman, the clearer the contrast, thus aiding development and definition of (the ultimate) military masculinity. "Since masculinity is commonly reserved as a term to describe men and their relationships to each other, female characters are often, by default, left with a femininity constructed in opposition, pieced together out of remnants and discarded values" (Tasker, 2002, p. 214). The particular contrast of the hyper-feminine woman, who often takes the form of a civilian or weaker military counterpart who is vulnerable and in need of protection, further expands overall public understanding of the value of the in-control male, thus reinforcing hegemonic ideals of gender construction and relations. Relatedly, onscreen femininity was often synonymous with hyper-heterosexuality, which further exaggerated and clarified men's masculinity — their virility and maleness — as the essence of a gendered military. Such female hyper-sexuality, in turn, effectively disenfranchised women's potential as autonomous soldiers by rendering them as institutional others or as sexual mascots to male organizations (Luckett, 1989).

Our use of visual semiotics has implications for furthering analysis of cultural forms, products, and production and for understanding the ways in which social reality can be more effectively deployed to inform those analyses. We began by considering filmic conventions for constructing a film's narrative, thus anchoring for examination the overall meaning associated with female (and male) characters. Because films are more than just actors who depict the characters they are meant to portray, analysis of other film elements was necessary in order to gain a more holistic understanding of the overall tone of scenes and meaning of characterizations. Examining the construction of strategic absence, visual juxtaposition, and syntactic signification, and the ways in which they are systematically associated with males and females, granted a more in-depth exploration of the meaning behind the actual images of female representation. Accordingly, we sought an analysis that went beyond "the seen" or even "the scene" and extended to the fictional social construction of the characters and their symbolic significance. It is from this stance one can begin to systematically read from and into the state of gender relations in place at the time of production.

Finally, as a particular cultural product, the military film, in contrast to the war film, reveals the extent to which cultural ambivalence persists in popular discourse about women in male-dominated institutions and occupational arenas. "Film mirrors a culture that has yet to figure out how a woman can be a soldier without being similarly obliterated" (Linville, 2000, p. 109). Since American society usually does not allow for an individual to occupy multiple gender spaces, the portrayal of women in the military, especially as created by the media, must highlight one gender or another. Media's limited ability to convey complicated gender identities means that depictions of military women are either excluded altogether, thus avoiding the issue, or that portrayals reflect only part of a military woman's identity. Regarding the latter, one version highlights the military woman's feminine identity, thus undermining her successful involvement in the military, while the other highlights the military woman's masculine identity, thus undermining her femininity and consequently her status and claim on womanhood. Scholars of war films, in contrast to military films, have noted how the transgression of proper gender roles makes the woman warrior an inappropriate anomaly (McCracken, 2003) and that there is no ready category in our culture for the woman as a professional combat soldier because

"women making war shatters quintessential categories of gender and family" (Hanson, 2002, p. 47). Historical examination of the military film as cultural product of a gendered society can more fully inform our understanding of that discussion and its place in revealing the hegemony of gender relations within social institutions that organize and reflect our lives.

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