

**WEAPON OF WAR: REPRESENTATIONS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN
CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN WAR CINEMA**

by

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Abstract

Sexual violence in war can no longer be ignored by contemporary American war cinema. This thesis looks at how the lack of representation of sexual violence in American war cinema rewrites history, and erases rape and sexual assault from public memory of military history. Due to the limited representation of wartime sexual violence, not only within American cinema, but also academically and historically, I focus on the lack of resources and cinematic depictions in order to posit how inadequate representations of sexual violence renders victims invisible.

In order to provide a comprehensive overview of sexual violence in American war cinema I draw upon historical as well as academic sources. By looking at examples of sexual assault in military history I am able to detail the ways in which American war films ignore the reality of wartime sexual violence in order to rewrite history. This rewriting of history, I argue, not only erases the truth of rape and sexual assault in America's military history, it also glorifies the white, American, male soldier.

I have chosen to look at this issue from three perspectives. First, I explore what literature exists on wartime sexual violence, and where the lack of representation is in historical and academic sources. Second, I look at the Vietnam War where I discuss the films *Casualties of War* (dir. Brian de Palma, 1989) and *Platoon* (dir. Oliver Stone, 1986) in relation to their problematic depictions of rape. Third, I investigate sexual violence in the American military and its representation in the films *The General's Daughter* (dir. Simon West, 1999) and *G.I. Jane* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1997), while drawing upon the statistics given in the documentary *The Invisible War* (dir. Kirby Dick, 2012). With the combined information discussed throughout this thesis I shine a spotlight on a difficult, yet important topic, in hope of helping to remove the invisibility of victims of wartime sexual violence.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Kelly St-Laurent

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Preface.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Dedication.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Literature Review.....	11
Chapter Two: The Erasure of Rape in the Vietnam War.....	33
“Unquestionably there shall be some raping”.....	33
“We’re supposed to be here to help these people”.....	37
“This is my rifle, this is my gun...”.....	42
“We did not fight the enemy, we fought ourselves”.....	49
“ I am sorry...”.....	56
Chapter Three: The Invisible War: Sexual Violence in American Military Films.....	58
“We can do it”.....	58
“Rape is an occupational hazard”.....	63
“It never happened...none of this ever happened.”.....	67
“Just treat me the same. No better. No worse”.....	73
“Perhaps more women will be raped”.....	77
Conclusion.....	80
Bibliography.....	90

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Introduction

“My purpose in this book has been to give rape its history. Now we must deny it a future.” Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, pg.404.

In war there is rape. History provides numerous examples where women, men and children have been victims of sexual violence in times of war. The statistics and information available are only a small sample of the true depth of the issue. In combat zones and eras of occupation lives are ended, cities destroyed and accurate statistics are at times impossible to accumulate due to a number of reasons. On top of the strategic difficulties in assembling statistics of sexual violence, there is one thing that makes it all the more challenging: the majority of victims remain silent. In America today 60% of sexual assaults are not reported to police.¹ In war zones the unreported attacks climb exponentially.

War films have been a popular genre since early cinema. They have been a means of providing historical information, spreading propaganda and celebrating military achievement. In Hollywood², films about World War II, the Vietnam, Gulf and Iraq wars are not only popular, many have also gained critical acclaim and awards. Steven Spielberg’s 1998 *Saving Private Ryan* earned him an Academy Award for Best Director, as well as awards for cinematography, editing, sound and visual effects. Francis Ford Coppola’s 1979 *Apocalypse Now* won Academy Awards for Best Cinematography and Best Sound. Kathryn Bigelow’s 2008 *The Hurt Locker* earned six Academy Awards for Best Achievement in Directing, Best Motion Picture of the Year, Best Writing, Best Achievement in Film Editing, Best Achievement in Sound Mixing, and Best Achievement in Sound Editing.

¹ Visit rainn.org for more information.

² Throughout this thesis I will use the term Hollywood. My definition of Hollywood in this context refers to narrative fiction American feature films, which are mainstream, with moderate to big budgets, shown typically at multiplexes.

Hollywood has not only been successful in creating high-grossing, entertaining war films, it has also played a part in rewriting history. For the majority the closest we will come to seeing war is through the screen. Wars like World War II and Vietnam are constantly retold through the cinema and these cinematic representations have come, at times, to stand for history. With Hollywood films dominating domestic and international box offices, they are influential in delivering specific ideologies to the audience. Hollywood war films are an example of this. By portraying wars from an American perspective history becomes entangled in fiction and sold in a package as truth. There are many things that are left out of these films: unbiased depictions of war, accurate representations of non-Americans, and realistic outcomes of battle. One of the main things that Hollywood war cinema neglects is women, and more specifically the sexual violence against women in war. Although there are statistics, trials and testimonials to the fact that rape and sexual assault took place during World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf and Iraq Wars, Hollywood fails to accurately depict these assaults, and in doing so erases them from cinematic memory.

In this thesis I will be looking at the limited representation of sexual violence in American war cinema, and explore how this lack of representation renders sexual assault victims invisible. Drawing upon historical and academic resources, I will use specific films as case studies in order to provide a detailed analysis of how sexual violence in the U.S. military is being excluded from filmic representation. As mentioned earlier there are some wars for which access to information regarding sexual violence is limited. In turn, filmic representations of these wars tend to omit depictions of sexual violence. While information regarding rape in war is difficult to access, it is more so in the case of World War I and II. As a result American war cinema rarely, if ever, includes depictions of rape in their films about the first and second world wars. For this reason I

will only look briefly at these wars for specific historical examination, and instead will focus on the Vietnam, Gulf and Iraq wars, where information on sexual violence is more readily available, and representations of sexual violence are depicted, albeit rarely, within the Hollywood war film genre.

Chapter One: Literature Review

In the first chapter I will provide a detailed literature review in order to examine the history of rape in war and on screen. I will look at literature on sexual violence in war, as well as war cinema, and discuss the limited historical and academic sources surrounding discourses of war rape in both history and American cinema. Throughout this chapter I will examine how the lack of historical and academic discourse surrounding war rape contributes to the lack of filmic representation. Even though this thesis is focused on rape in American war cinema, the subject of sexual violence in war is international and there are numerous significant events in history where rape has been used as a weapon of war. For this reason I will look at not only sources detailing the American involvement in cases of sexual violence during war, but also other international events. Although the scope of this thesis does not allow me the space to explore in detail these events, it is important nonetheless that they are discussed within the framework of the history of wartime rape.

Sexual violence has been recorded in the majority of wars of the 20th and 21st centuries: World War I and II, the Vietnam War, the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, the 1994 Rwanda Genocide, the Sri Lanka Civil War, the Iraq War, the Libyan Civil War, and more recently the war in Darfur, and the Syrian Civil War. Inger Skjelsbaek's statement in *The Political Psychology of War Rape: Studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina* that

“sexual violence in war is as old as war itself” (47) is not an exaggeration. Although the correct statistics of war rape are at times difficult to ascertain, the fact remains that rape has been a part of war for a very long time and continues to be a part of war today.

I will divide chapter one into two areas: rape in war, and rape in war cinema. In the first part I will look at the historical facts and statistics of various cases of wartime sexual assault throughout some of the wars of the last two centuries. Drawing upon data of sexual assault in World War II, the Bosnian War, the Vietnam War and the Gulf and Iraq wars, emphasis will be placed on the lack of accountability held by the military, and the impact this has had on the visibility of the victims. Ustinia Dolgopol’s chapter “Rape as a War Crime – Mythology and History,” details an historical overview of the Nuremberg, Tokyo and former Yugoslavia war tribunals, in which she asserts that more work is needed in order for there to be justice for victims of wartime sexual assault (137). Gina Marie Weaver’s *Ideologies of Forgetting: Rape in the Vietnam War* will provide evidence of what she calls an erasure of rape in the Vietnam War. Nomi Levenkron’s chapter “Death and the Maidens: ‘Prostitution,’ Rape, and Sexual Slavery during World War II,” and Yuki Tanaka’s chapter “Rape and War: The Japanese Experience,” bring to attention the issue of “comfort women” and forced prostitution during World War II. Finally Deepa Kumar’s article “War Propaganda and the (Ab)uses of Women,” as well as Lucinda Marshall’s chapter “The Misogynist Implications of Abu Ghraib,” will be examined in regards to the media’s portrayal of women in the military.

In the second part of Chapter One I will look at how the limited academic resources on rape in war cinema become part of the overall lack of representation of the female war experience in film, and how this affects the cinematic portrayal of wartime sexual assault. Sarah Projansky’s *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture* will be discussed in

terms of the various depictions of rape in cinema, while bringing attention to the fact that she does not take the opportunity to go into detail about rape in war cinema. Yvonne Tasker's discussion of the film *Courage Under Fire* (dir. Edward Zwick, 1996) in *Soldiers' Stories: Military Women in Cinema and Television Since World War II* will help set up the arguments of chapters two and three, in which the war film is viewed as valuing the male perspective over the female, and in turn participating in the erasure of rape from these texts. Susan Jeffords' assertion in "Telling the War Story" that memory surrounding the Vietnam War is constructed from films will be explored and brought over into the rest of the thesis.

My aim for Chapter One is to provide a brief overview of wartime rape in order to acknowledge that this issue is not limited to the American military, but is instead an international concern. By detailing various accounts of sexual violence in the wars of the past two centuries I hope to bring to light the extent of this problem, as well as the fact that there needs to be more historical and academic discussion of wartime rape. In regards to the representation of rape in American war cinema, my examination of the academic texts surrounding this topic will show that there is not only a lack of filmic representation, but also a lack of discourse on sexual violence in films depicting war.

Chapter Two: The Erasure of Rape in the Vietnam War Film

Moving forward onto a discussion of specific film texts, Chapter Two will be focused around Vietnam War films. Unlike filmic representations of World War II, Hollywood films about the Vietnam War do not shy away from negative depictions of the American soldier. However, as this chapter will detail, the films always end up with a male American hero who the film's perspective values. With specific reference to the films *Casualties of War* (dir. Brian de Palma,

1989) and *Platoon* (dir. Oliver Stone, 1986), and Gina Marie Weaver's concept of the erasure of rape, I will look at how the depiction of rape within these films renders the victims invisible, and instead provides a platform for the heroification of the male soldier.

The Mai Lai massacre and the Incident on Hill 192 forced the issue of war rape into a public prominence during the Vietnam War. Addressing these incidents, American films such as *Casualties of War* and *Platoon*, highlight the ways in which Hollywood rewrites historical events in order to place America in a more favorable light. By detailing the American involvement in the war I will examine the public perception of the war, as well as the effects of the Vietnam War Syndrome, and how these anxieties play out in film. I will also look at the evolution of the Vietnam War film during the 1970s and 1980s in regards to these social anxieties of the time. I also discuss Susan Jeffords' concept of the collective and explore this in relation to the investigation into why men rape in war. This question will be posited in both chapters two and three, but for Chapter Three the idea of the collective will be used with examination to the film texts.

Close analysis of *Casualties of War* as well as historical resources for the Incident on Hill 192, on which the film is based, will enable me to tie together both fiction and history in order to investigate how Hollywood rewrites historical events for its own gain. I will look at how the rape is depicted on screen, and how this depiction creates an erasure of rape. The character of Tran Thi Oanh (Thuy Thu Le) will be discussed in terms of her silence, and her lack of perspective, and how this makes her an invisible victim. Her rape will be discussed as a vehicle through which the male characters can play out their masculinity and the heroification of Eriksson (Michael J. Fox) can be explored. Finally I will discuss the outcome of the trial of the Incident on

Hill 192, and how the film's depiction of it, results in an example of Hollywood rewriting history and simultaneously erasing rape.

Platoon will be analysed in terms of how it erases rape not only through the cinematography used in the rape scene, but also in how the film is told through Taylor's (Charlie Sheen) perspective, particularly with the use of voiceover. One of the significant absences in war cinema is the depiction of women and the enemy. This will be discussed in terms of the characters Sgt. Barnes (Tom Berenger) and Sgt. Elias (Willem Dafoe), and how they come to represent the masculine and the feminine. Leonard Quart's idea of the superman character will be used to study the characters of Taylor and Eriksson, and how the rapes become events in which the superman character can take full form. Finally Robert Eberwein's connection between the image of the rifle, sex and violence will help to further the argument that the act of rape and the act of killing in the Vietnam War are interchangeable.

Throughout Chapter Two historical and theoretical resources, combined with the film texts, will provide the opportunity to discuss Hollywood's failure to accurately represent the sexual assaults that took place during the Vietnam War. Through close examination of specific scenes within the films coupled with historical facts I will argue that Hollywood has silenced the victims of these real-life events, and has rewritten history to valorize the American male soldier.

Chapter Three: The Invisible War: Sexual Violence in American Military Films

My final chapter will look at the invisibility of the rape victim on screen in American films about the military. Whereas Chapter Two focused on one war, Chapter Three will look at both the Gulf and Iraq wars. The reason for this is that women were present in the military during these wars. Building upon the arguments of Chapter Two, Chapter Three will discuss how the depictions of

rape in two fictional films *The General's Daughter* (dir. Simon West, 1999) and *G.I. Jane* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1997) become vehicles for exploring masculinity in the military, rather than depicting realistic scenarios that many women in the military face.

To begin with I will look at the history of women's involvement in the military. I will draw upon historical and governmental resources to explore the combat exclusion policy and what this meant for servicewomen. Statistics around sexual violence in the U.S. military will provide a detailed analysis into the epidemic of sexual assault in the military, as well as the lack of accountability by commanding officers. A look at the history of scandals involving sexual assault and harassment in the military will enable me to further the argument that there is a deep rooted misogyny within the American military and that women are held to a higher standard in regards to their sexual conduct than their fellow male soldiers.

The first film that I will discuss in this chapter is the documentary *The Invisible War* (dir. Kirby Dick, 2012). This film will provide a basis for my argument in that it will be used not only as a film text, but also as a statistical source. The interviews conducted throughout the film will offer firsthand accounts into some of the military scandals that will be discussed. The statistics, which are taken from U.S. Government studies, will be used in conjunction with sources such as Evelyn M. Monahan and Rosemary Neidel-Greenlee, former servicewomen who discuss sexual violence in the U.S. military during the Gulf and Iraq wars. Drawing upon these statistics I will posit the question, where is Hollywood during the years that these statistics were made aware to the public? I will then compile a list of some of the Hollywood films depicting the Gulf and Iraq wars, and discuss their lack of not only depictions of sexual violence, but also representation of military women, further highlighting the invisibility of the rape victim on screen.

The second film I will look at is *The General's Daughter*. What makes this film an interesting subject is that it is one of the rare films to depict military rape. However, this depiction, as will be discussed in detail, is made secondary to the plot. The murder of Elizabeth Campbell (Leslie Stefanson) is given primary focus in the film, rather than her rape, which leads to a missed opportunity to bring attention to rape in the military. Also, I will explore how the film takes part in victim blaming by painting Elizabeth as a sexual deviant and presenting her sexual behaviour to the audience to be judged. Finally I will argue that the film, like the films discussed in Chapter Two, value the male perspective, and that in the end it is a story about the American male soldier as hero, rather than about sexual assault in the military, making the rape all but invisible.

The final film this chapter will discuss is *G.I. Jane*. At first I will look at the masculinization of the female soldier, and how Lt. Jordan O'Neill (Demi Moore) must undergo a physical transformation in order to relinquish her femininity before being accepted into the military. This transformation, I will argue, frames the feminine as weakness and the masculine as strength. Secondly, I will investigate how the simulated rape O'Neill endures during training is depicted in such a way that the film partakes in the very misogyny it is trying to argue against. Lastly, I will discuss how sexual assault in the film is relegated to the sidelines and treated as something to further the plot, rather than as a serious assault worth further discussion.

Conclusion

In the conclusion of my thesis I will acknowledge the various film texts, along with the historical and academic sources discussed throughout chapters one to three, in order to once again bring forth my argument that both history and Hollywood's limited engagement with sexual violence

in war has made both the act and the victim invisible. By bringing together the combination of statistics, testimony and fictional representations of rape in war and in the military, I will express my hope that I have made clear the necessity of change in both the U.S. military's response to sexual violence, and Hollywood's depiction of it. Finally I will join in with Susan Brownmiller's declaration for the need to fight via multiple levels in order to change the culture of rape.

Chapter One: Literature Review

For an issue that has been around as long as war has there are surprisingly few resources on wartime rape, and even fewer on sexual violence in war cinema. Rape and sexual violence have long been depicted in film. From D.W Griffith's 1915 *The Birth of a Nation* to Steve McQueen's 2013 *12 Years a Slave*, the past century in cinema has explored sexual violence from many different perspectives. One such perspective has been the depiction of sexual violence in war. Like the literary representation of this violence, however, cinematic representation of sexual violence in war is also remarkably limited.

In this chapter I will focus on literature around sexual violence. In order to explore the topic thoroughly the research will be divided into two sections: rape in war, and rape in war cinema. Although this chapter will be concentrated on American war cinema, I will also draw upon other national examples in order to create a comprehensive overview of the literature surrounding sexual violence in war and war cinema, while simultaneously investigating the lack of discourse on sexual violence in American war cinema and American military history.

Rape in War

In *The Political Psychology of War Rape: Studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Inger Skjelsbaek provides a detailed history of wartime sexual violence. She makes the statement that "A look back on the history of rape shows that sexual violence in war is as old as war itself" (47). However Skjelsbaek also identifies an issue of representation. She notes that many victims have kept their stories from policy and research analysis due to the marginalization of war rape and sexual violence as either a women's problem, a private problem, or something that is too shameful to address (49).

Working through different wars and their corresponding documentation about sexual violence, Skjelsbaek identifies the limitations of representation. With WWII she claims that evidence of sexual violence is limited and therefore any documentation is hard to find (49). She gives the following reasons for this: “silence of the victims, unwillingness of military, political and legal authorities to prosecute offenders, and a general lack of understanding of the political impact of this form of violence” (49). These reasons offer insight into the difficulty in accessing accurate information regarding sexual violence in WWII³. In regards to other sexual assaults against women during WWII, Skjelsbaek notes that at least 100,000 women were raped in Berlin at the hands of Soviet Soldiers (50). She identifies the most documented case of rape during the war as the ‘rape of Nanking’ (51). This assault on Chinese villagers is also known as the Nanking Massacre, which took place over a six-week period by the Imperial Japanese Army beginning on December 13, 1937. Skjelsbaek draws upon Elizabeth Jean Wood’s estimates in the 2006 article “Variation in Sexual Violence during War, Politics and Society”, which places the number of rapes and executions between 8 and 32 per cent of the women or, 20,000 to 80,000 (51).

With numbers as high as these it could be assumed that wartime rape would be taken more seriously in the eyes of the law. According to Skjelsbaek it was not until the 1980s when things began to change (55), and only in the 1990s was sexual violence seen as a weapon of war (60). There are issues, however, with this term ‘weapon of war’. I am using it in my title for this thesis in order to highlight the ways in which sexual violence is not only a common occurrence during war, but also to examine how it is used as a means of domination and control during times of conflict, not only against the enemy, but also within one’s own military forces. Skjelsbaek

³ Robert J. Lilly in his book *Taken by Force: Rape and American GIs in Europe during World War II* estimates that American GIs committed over 17,000 rapes in Germany, France and the UK during the period 1942-1945 (Skjelsbaek, 50).

notes, however, that in order for sexual violence to be categorized as a weapon of war there would need to be specific characteristics to distinguish it from other kinds of violence and other weapons of war. However, the term ‘weapon of war’ has no agreed-upon definition (61).

Although the assaults were categorized under this term, there was not enough detail in defining the specifics of the weapon of rape to prosecute. Sexual assault is not always easily defined. The ‘comfort women’ issue is an example of this. The term ‘weapon of war’ does not account for such assaults, nor does it acknowledge rape within one’s own forces. In order for rape to be prosecuted as a weapon of war it first must have a clear, unambiguous definition.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in 2001 provided a necessary change to how wartime rape is prosecuted. The mass rapes and rape camps that were set up by Serbian soldiers against Muslim women during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995 were, as Skjelsbaek identifies, “an integral part of ethnic cleansing” (65). Unlike previous wars (the nine-month Bangladesh war in 1971⁴ or the 1956-1975 Vietnam War for example), the rapes of the Bosnian War were given significant media attention. Skjelsbaek suggests that the reason for this is because the victims were white Europeans and the (white) Western world identified with the victims more (65). However, it is worth noting that even with the Bosnian War it took months for the world to respond. In the 2011 PBS documentary *I Came to Testify* archival news reports are shown with one reporter claiming “stories like these have been filtering out for six months now as the world stood silently by.”

Skjelsbaek’s investigation into the history of wartime sexual violence shows that when it comes to wartime rape there is very little focus placed on such atrocities. Regardless of how many reports come out, how many estimations of victims are released, sexual violence in

⁴ It is estimated that between 200,000 and 400,000 Bangladeshi women were raped by the Pakistani Military during this time.

wartime appears to be seen as a casualty of war. We will never know the true extent of the number of rape victims in WWII, Vietnam, Bangladesh or Bosnia. Whether it is, as Skjelsbaek identifies, “ the silence of the victims, unwillingness of military, political and legal authorities to prosecute offenders, and a general lack of understanding of the political impact of this form of violence” (49), the majority of victims remain invisible and the perpetrators of these crimes continue to go on without punishment.

In Ustinia Dolgopol’s chapter “Rape as a War Crime – Mythology and History,” from the book *Common Grounds: Violence against Women in War and Armed Conflict Situations*, she also provides a historical overview of wartime sexual assault. In her discussion on the Nuremberg, Tokyo and former Yugoslavia war tribunals she highlights a need for more work to be done in order to bring justice (137). According to Dolgopol, the way in which evidence concerning rape and enforced prostitution was handled at the Tokyo and Nuremberg tribunals contributed to issues for women’s groups when first drafting the statute for the war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (127). One of the main issues she identifies is the lack of labeling sexual violence as such in the tribunals. She notes that such assaults were generally considered as atrocities rather than being given their more accurate terms of rape and enforced prostitution (133). It was not until 2001 during the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia that rape was considered an international war crime. Dolgopol notes that even though there have been significant steps taken during the trials of the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda “it is not clear that we understand enough of what happened in the past to put in place permanent mechanisms that will ensure equality of justice for women” (137).

In the book *Ideologies of Forgetting: Rape in the Vietnam War* Gina Marie Weaver explores the various accounts of sexual violence during the war, as well as Hollywood’s

depiction of it. She begins by discussing the lack of studies done on women's sexual trauma, stating that said trauma "has been little studied or even mentioned until recent work by feminist scholars has begun to gather primary accounts of women's abuse in war as well as to publicize and theorize its oversight" (2). Both Dolgopol and Weaver highlight the necessity for more research to be done in regards to sexual assaults against women in wartime.

One of the main issues that Weaver points out is that there are many war rapes committed by militaries in which the perpetrators are never brought to justice in international tribunals. She gives the example of the sexual assault of Vietnamese women by American GIs during the Vietnam War (5). She goes on to say that it is not only the international tribunals that failed the victims but also feminists, activists and historians who have continued to ignore such a well-documented crime (5). There appears to be a recurring theme across history in which war crimes against women are continuously ignored, particularly in regards to women that are not from the Western world. Weaver suggests that one of the reasons that women's trauma from the Vietnam War has been largely overlooked is because, unlike the wars of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda and Latin America, the United States was involved (19).

Weaver gives the example of the Mai Lai Massacre, which occurred in South Vietnam on March 16th, 1968. During this day between 300 and 500 unarmed Vietnamese civilians were murdered by American Soldiers. Victims included men, women and children, and many were raped and their bodies mutilated. Weaver notes that perpetrators were court-martialed but were never convicted for the rapes (76). She states, "though war rape was not internationally prosecuted until the 1990s, it was a litigable offense within the American Military justice system and, in fact, carries the highest penalty" (76). This only further emphasizes how victims of wartime sexual assault are made invisible while their perpetrators walk free.

Nomi Levenkron discusses another form of sexual violence in her chapter “Death and the Maidens: ‘Prostitution,’ Rape, and Sexual Slavery during World War II.” Prostitution generally signifies an exchange of sex for money; however, in the case of WWII, Levenkron labels this exchange as “prostitution.” She states that women who provided sexual favours were defined as being a prostitute rather than as a person who was struggling for survival (16). She goes on to detail how Jewish women were forced to work as sexual slaves for soldiers and guards usually until their death. They were labeled as prostitutes; however, they were not giving sex willingly (19). By replacing the word rape with prostitute it places agency in the hands of the women, making it appear as though they were choosing to enter into a sexual relationship rather than the forced sexual violence that it was.

Another type of forced prostitution during WWII can be seen with the Japanese Military forces’ use of “comfort women.” Yuki Tanaka discusses this in her chapter “Rape and War: The Japanese Experience.” Tanaka identifies the difference between prostitution and comfort women, stating that Japanese prostitutes worked in brothels serving high-ranking officers and were in far better conditions than comfort women (166). Comfort women were usually from Korea, Taiwan, China, or other places in Southeast Asia, and Tanaka suggests that the reason for this was due to a deep-rooted racial prejudice against people from these countries (166). Japanese women were not used as comfort women, according to Tanaka, because their role was to bear children to be “loyal subjects of the emperor” rather than provide sexual favours for men (166). Tanaka claims that records were either destroyed or hidden so it is impossible to know how many women suffered, though estimates put the number between 80,000 to 100,000 (169). Although specific numbers will never be known, there is a need for literature on the topic to ensure that victims of

forced prostitution are not labeled as prostitutes, and instead as what they were: wartime rape victims.

Victims of wartime rape are not only limited to civilians, however. There are many women and men in the military who are sexually assaulted. The topic of military sexual assault is something that the media has recently begun to explore more, particularly since the release of Kirby Dick's 2012 documentary on military sexual violence *The Invisible War*. However, in past years it has been a topic left out of most articles on war and the military. In the article "War Propaganda and the (Ab)uses of Women," Deepa Kumar examines the varying media constructions of Jessica Lynch, an American soldier who was captured and released during the Iraq War, and investigates the way women in the military are represented. Throughout the article Kumar looks at the way the media focused on either viewing Lynch as a victim or as a hero. Lynch served in Iraq during the 2003 invasion as a Unit Supply Specialist. Her convoy was ambushed on March 23rd where she was captured by Iraqi forces. She was held for ten days and rescued on April 1st. During and after her capture the media gave conflicting reports of her experiences. Kumar suggests that when it comes to war narratives the most prominent role that women play is that of victim (217). For some media outlets this was the portrayal of Lynch they chose to depict.

Kumar discusses an interview in which the topic of Lynch being raped during captivity is discussed. She mentions that Lynch had no recollection of any sexual abuse, and Iraqi doctors found no evidence of it. However, American doctors later claimed that Lynch had been the victim of anal sexual assault (303). What is interesting here is the way in which rape could be used as a tool for the media to sway their readers towards supporting the war. In 2003 there were large-scale protests against US involvement in Iraq, particularly after the March 19th invasion.

Lynch's supposed rape could therefore be seen as a way to garner support for the war. In the end it became less about Lynch's experience and more about how the military could use it to advance their campaign. Kumar states:

The military strategically constructed a particular narrative in which Lynch was an object about which stories were told. There is nothing empowering about this construction. Instead, it served war objectives in two ways. First, it became the basis for an emotional/non-rational pro-war argument. Second, the selection of a female hero served to demonstrate the superiority of the "West," justifying the argument that the US was in Iraq to "liberate" its people and promote modernity. (309-310).

This highlights the issue of media representation of wartime sexual violence. Although there needs to be further awareness made of this topic, it is imperative that the depictions are accurate and truthful. When used as political strategy the severity of the crimes become diminished and are replaced with hearsay, and the victims are made all the more invisible because of it.

The article also investigates other discrepancies in the story the media was posting. Kumar mentions John Kampfner, a reporter, who on May 15th, 2003 published articles in *The Guardian* and on BBC on-line after his own research into Lynch's captivity. One of the inconsistencies was in the way the media portrayed Lynch's rescue as a heroic show by the American military that barged into the hospital on a daring rescue mission. In Kampfner's report he found that the Iraqi Military had left the hospital a day earlier, and therefore there was no need for such a display of military power (305). What becomes apparent with the Jessica Lynch

story is that the media wanted to portray her as either a victim or a hero and used the alleged rape as a means of doing so. For a media that has long been resistant to telling the stories of wartime rape it is interesting that the supposed rape of one white female American soldier can suddenly have so much media support.

Another example of intense media coverage of female soldiers during the Iraq war can be seen with the Abu Ghraib Scandal. In 2004 photos were released to the public depicting American soldiers committing human rights violations against prisoners in Abu Ghraib. These violations included physical and sexual violence. The book *One of the Guys: Women as Aggressors and Torturers* explores the involvement of female soldiers in the Abu Ghraib scandal. Barbara Ehrenreich in her chapter “Foreword: Feminism’s Assumptions Upended” states that the scandal saw a change in feminism, which up until then had seen men as perpetual perpetrators and women as perpetual victims (2). She goes on to say that “Rape has repeatedly been used as an instrument of war, and, to some feminists, it was beginning to look as if war was an extension of rape” (2).

Francine D’Amico discusses in her chapter “The Women of Abu Ghraib” that the two most recognizable names to the public in the Iraq War were Private First Class Jessica Lynch and Private First Class Lynndie England (45-46). In the photos that emerged from Abu Ghraib it is England who stands out the most. In one photo she holds the leash attached to an Iraqi detainee who lies naked on the floor. In another she points jokingly at the genitals of naked detainees lined up, their heads covered with bags. In an equally horrifying photo she stands next to a male soldier, giving the thumbs up as a mass of naked detainees are piled before them. D’Amico notes that while Lynch was cast as a victim, England was cast in the role of victimizer (45-46). The

world was suddenly confronted with an image of a female aggressor that challenged gender expectations in the war.

Lucinda Marshall discusses this further in the chapter “The Misogynist Implications of Abu Ghraib.” She claims “...the sexualized torture that took place at the prison challenged our comfortable assumptions about how women are supposed to behave” (51). In the case of Lynch it was an easier job for the military and media to portray her as victim or hero. In the case of England, with the content of the photos being internationally reviled, there was no way in which the military could label her anything other than a disgraced soldier. Unlike many male soldiers before her who had committed acts of sexual violence during war, England was court-martialed and sent to prison for three years for her part in the abuse.

The questions that remain are why did the public respond so severely to England’s part in the Abu Ghraib scandal? And why did England become the poster child for the abuse? In her chapter “Shock and Awe: Abu Ghraib, Women Soldiers, and Racially Gendered Torture” Ilene Feinman tackles these questions. She sees the shock coming mainly from the fact that it was men being sexually devalued and assaulted by women, claiming that similar violations against female prisoners at the hands of male soldiers would not inspire the same response (74). According to Feinman the US Public sees white, female soldier torturers as visible. Tortured Arab males are also visible, as are white, US male soldiers and even one or two US male soldiers of colour. Arab women who were tortured and held as prisoners were, however, made invisible (74). Like the victims of Nanking and My Lai, the Arab women who were sexually assaulted during the Iraq War were never given a voice or a name in the media. Also invisible are the men who assaulted them. Whereas England was put in the public arena to be judged and was convicted of her crimes, the majority of male perpetrators have not been punished for theirs.

T.S Nelson tackles sexual violence and misogyny in the military in *For Love of Country: Confronting Rape and Sexual Harassment in the U.S Military*. She discusses the mixed messages about human dignity that many recruits receive. Growing up in a modern world with a mass media that promotes violence, Nelson suggests that the recruits have had violence (particularly violence against women) glorified in film, video games and music lyrics (8). This argument can be seen in full force in the film *Jarhead* (Sam Mendes, 2005) during the scene where the soldiers watch *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979). As they watch the infamous Flight of the Valkyries scene depicting American soldiers in the Vietnam War gunning down unarmed villagers, the men get riled up, yelling racial slurs at the screen and cheering anytime a villager is killed. In *Jarhead* a Hollywood film is used to get the men ready for their own war experience, depending on the violent images as a means of setting the psyche required for their deployment.

Nelson asserts that in the military the male persona is seen as strength, power and control, whereas females are stereotyped in terms of weakness, powerlessness and physical inferiority to their male counterparts (67). A film like *G.I Jane* (Ridley Scott, 1997) explores this with the depiction of Lt. Jordan O'Neil (Demi Moore), a female recruit who enters the training course for the U.S. Navy Combined Reconnaissance Team⁵. Throughout the film she is seen as weaker than her fellow male soldiers and must go through a transformation, both mental and physical, in order to gain access to the masculine military.

In terms of sexual violence in the military, Nelson notes that it is difficult to understand the true extent of sexual abuse because so few victims come forward (77). She suggests that the reason for this is because victims may fear reprisal from their command or from the perpetrator (33-34). She discusses the Tailhook Convention of 1991, noting that it was one of the first times a woman reported abuse in the military. During this convention in Las Vegas, at the 35th

⁵ *G.I Jane* will be used as a case study in Chapter Three.

Annual Tailhook Association Symposium, at least 83 women were sexually assaulted by officers in the US Navy and US Marines Corps. Paula Coughlin, a Lieutenant in the US Navy was the first to report the assaults. Nelson notes that although the Tailhook Scandal resulted in the end of many military careers, no one was ever court-martialled for sexual assault (59).

Lucinda Joy Peach's chapter "Gender Ideology in the Ethics of Women in Combat," in the book *It's Our Military Too!: Women and the U.S Military*, looks at the history of female involvement in the military. She places the number of women serving in Desert Storm at around forty-one thousand, or nearly seven per cent of the total forces (156). She identifies that women worked in flight operations within combat zones as well as support and rescue assignments (156), and that in 1991 the ban on women flying combat aircraft was lifted (159). According to Peach there is focus placed on the need for women to be protected from capture and imprisonment; however, this ignores the reality that both men and women are raped in war, and that women are at risk of sexual violence from their fellow troops rather than just in combat (170).

Although rape occurs frequently in times of war, there have been moments in history where the sexual behaviour of soldiers has been restricted. In the book *Women Soldiers: Images and Realities* Cynthia H. Enloe has a chapter called "The Politics of Constructing the American Woman Soldier" in which she discusses the fear of women in combat being raped. She states that while the Vietnam War had an abundance of stories of rape and prostitutes, the First Gulf War was under strict sexual control. This control was imposed by King Fahd of the Saudi regime who feared rumours of sexual promiscuity could threaten the regime's political legitimacy. As a result, the US government was required to prohibit both alcohol and prostitution (100). Although this limited sexual contact beyond the American military, it did not prevent sexual contact within

it, opening up the military as a source of finding sexual fulfilment. The argument of women being at risk of rape in combat overshadows the reality that women were at a higher risk of sexual assault from within their own military on their own bases.

This overview of the history of rape in war underlines the necessity for a change in how sexual violence is approached by both the media and academics. The victims of wartime rape are prolific, and yet their stories are silenced, and they are made all but invisible. This cycle continues throughout history, whereby women, men and children are assaulted, remain silent in fear of the consequences, and the world remains ignorant to their suffering. The only way to break this cycle is to make the topic of wartime sexual violence a central focus. The media discuss war daily and yet rape is constantly missing from reports. Historians detail wars over the past centuries, and sexual violence is addressed as an afterthought. Although there are academics, as discussed, who have made gains in opening the discourse of rape in war, more needs to be done.

Film is a powerful medium in which ideologies are perpetuated, and histories are re-written. However, without factual and historical sources the topic of wartime rape and military sexual violence will continue to be misrepresented, if represented at all. In order for Hollywood to make a change in the way in which it depicts war rape, there first needs to be a change in how wartime sexual violence is reported and researched. Not only will an increase in awareness of such assaults help give victims a voice, it could also potentially lead to more severe penalties for the perpetrators who have for too long gone unpunished.

Rape in War Cinema

Although there are many films that depict sexual violence, and many that depict war, there are few that portray sexual violence in war. When it comes to rape in war cinema it is not only the literature that is lacking, but also filmic representation. A quick Internet search of ‘American war films’ brings up a list of the most iconic films in this category. The posters associated with these films depict white, American male soldiers in uniform, perhaps posed with guns, or on the frontline. Women are rarely shown. American war cinema has long focused on the male war experience, whereas the female soldier has been relegated to subplots for the most part.

While there is a lack in literature on wartime rape, there is a significantly greater absence of literature on rape in war cinema. This is for the most part probably due to the fact that the majority of American war films do not depict rape. How do you write about what is not there? The discourse surrounding the topic is at present mainly limited to discussions of absence of representation, with some analysis of the few films that depict war and military sexual violence.

In *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture*, Sarah Projansky looks at the representation of rape on screen, focusing on the history of rape in film and the concept of postfeminism in popular culture since the early 1980s. She identifies rape as being an important aspect of cinema, claiming, “I would argue, in fact, that rape is a key force throughout the history of US cinema and that one cannot fully understand cinema itself without addressing rape and its representation” (26). In discussing the volume of rape narratives onscreen she states, “the sheer number of representations of rape that have appeared on screen since the 1970s offer a sustained definition of women as sexually victimized and a sustained assault on women” (95). Throughout the book Projansky does not limit her discussion of rape with any particular genres, but instead looks at its representation in regards to feminism. She states that her focus is on “how rape and

feminism *cross* popular and local cultural texts and how they can help us understand *symptoms* of media and representation” (17).

Within cinema there are different forms of rape narratives. Arguably the most common narrative is the rape-revenge film. In this subgenre, act one typically portrays the rape of a woman, who by act three will have gained control by hunting down her rapist. Films in this category were popular in the 1970s and include *The Last House on the Left* (Wes Craven, 1972) and *I Spit on Your Grave* (Mier Zarchi 1978). It is interesting to note that both films have recently been remade: *The Last House on the Left* in 2009 (Denis Ilidas) and *I Spit on Your Grave* in 2010 (Steve R. Monrow). Projansky sees rape narratives as a context where feminist issues can be explored (64). She looks to the rape films of the late 1960s and 1970s and sees in them a way of engaging feminist perspectives on rape, particularly between rape and pornography, or the validity of rape-revenge (64-65).

Projansky goes on to define different rape narratives in American war cinema. She first looks at texts that depict independent women who are interested in masculine careers. She states that rape portrayed in these films comes from the idea of gender difference; in which that difference must be overcome in order for them to have a place in the masculine world (102)⁶. Another depiction is that of the friend-turned-enemy rapist. Projansky says, “this new rapist, a figure of US military authority and citizenship is figured as white, as is the woman who gains access to equality with men through rape” (103). Examples of films with this narrative are *Opposing Force* (Eric Karson, 1986) and *The General’s Daughter* (Simon West, 1999)⁷.

⁶ Such representation will be discussed in depth in Chapter Three where rape in American military narratives is explored.

⁷ *The General’s Daughter* will be used as a case study in Chapter Three.

The relationship between the audience and filmic representations of rape is explored by Tanya Horeck in *Public Rape: Representing Violation in Fiction and Film*. Horeck suggests that there are a majority of films that depict rape for sensationalism and exploitation; however, there needs to be a further exploration into how these depictions invite wider questions about changing viewpoints on the relationship between audience and film (115). There is a precarious balance in place when a film depicts acts of sexual violence. Many films have been critiqued for scenes that are argued to lean towards exploitation rather than representation. An example of this is the 2002 film *Irreversible* (Gaspar Noé), which depicts the brutal rape of Alex (Monica Bellucci). The rape scene in the film takes place over minutes, rather than seconds, making it an extremely difficult viewing experience. In his review of the film Roger Ebert opens up by stating, “‘Irreversible’ is a movie so violent and cruel that most people will find it unwatchable.” When representing rape onscreen there is a risk of exploiting the assault. As Horeck suggests, there needs to be further analysis into the relationship between the audience and films depicting sexual violence. Representations of sexual violence onscreen should make the audience uncomfortable, but they should also lead to further discourse on such representations and how the audience receives them.

In “Public Property: Sexual Abuse of Women and Girls in Cinematic Memory” Yvonne Kozlovsky-Golan looks at sexual abuse against women in films depicting the Holocaust. She discusses the lack in representation of abuse against women in such films. Looking at early Holocaust films, she says that what stands out the most is the absence of any serious attempt of representing abuses, both physical and sexual, of women (235). She states that it was in postwar cinema that the tendency to conceal and repress sexual abuse of women began (239). In the early research stages of this thesis it became apparent that discussion of sexual abuse in films

depicting WWII was lacking. A cause for this could be due to the fact that there is not enough research done on sexual violence during WWII, particularly in regards to the abuses of Jewish women during the Holocaust. Kozlovsky-Golan notes that although there are photographic records of such abuses there is still a cloud of shame that hangs over rape and society responds to this by silencing it (248). She believes that this is why there are so few cinematic representations of the abuse. However, she asserts that it is necessary to depict them, stating; “Yet if we as viewers, witness no example of this act in a film which rape figures, we may consider the abuse exaggerated” (248). Therefore it becomes essential to show the act in order for audiences to understand the severity of the abuse. However, as discussed above, the depiction must be handled carefully so as to not exploit or sensationalize it.

In the case of American war films that do portray female soldiers there tends to be a focus on the necessary change women must go through either physically or mentally in order to access the masculine arena of the military. Yvonne Tasker’s *Soldiers’ Stories: Military Women in Cinema and Television Since World War II* discusses the assumed necessity for military women to prove themselves. She notes that women in military narratives still need explanation; they are required to prove themselves against a perceived inadequacy (236). Throughout the book Tasker looks at the role women have played in the military onscreen since WWII. Beginning as auxiliaries in the middle of the 20th century and moving to representations of female soldiers in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, women have always played a part in onscreen military narratives. Like Projansky, Tasker sees a connection between rape in war cinema and the role of the female soldier. She states, “Thus in military rape narratives women are raped (or threatened with rape) when they are too successful” (257, 2011). Therefore according to Projansky’s and Tasker’s observations a female soldier in war cinema is either

raped to gain access to the masculine world of the military, or is raped because she has proven herself too successful in it.

Tasker also looks at the way in which women are represented in military narratives in the article “Soldier’s Stories: Women and Military Masculinities in *Courage Under Fire*.” She discusses how the masculine is a term reserved for men, and states that “...female characters in the movies are often, by default, left with a femininity constructed in opposition, pieced together out of remnants and discarded values” (214-215, 2002). Often in military narratives that include female soldiers much is made of their femininity. An example of this is the film *Courage Under Fire* (Edward Zwick, 1996). The film follows Lt. Col. Nathaniel Serling (Denzel Washington) as he tries to uncover the truth of a rescue operation gone wrong during the First Gulf War in order to determine if Army Captain Karen Emma Walden (Meg Ryan) should receive, posthumously, the Medal of Honor, which would be the first given to a female soldier. Throughout the film the members of her crew, which is made up solely of male soldiers, tell Serling conflicting stories of the battle that eventually took Walden’s life. Some paint her as a hero, while others as a coward. The film’s narrative explores the different viewpoints of women in the military from male perspectives.

In *Soldier’s Stories* Tasker notes that by constructing its narrative around the investigation of whether or not a female soldier should be awarded the Medal of Honor, the film “repudiates the feminizing and superficial world of media and public relations and incorporated (albeit posthumously) a female soldier into the community of military honor” (250). Although Tasker is right in acknowledging the integration of Walden into the military community, it is worth noting that the entire film constructs Walden solely through the memories of men, and never allows her a voice to make this integration about her.

Susan E. Linville's article "The "Mother of all Battles": *Courage Under Fire* and the Gender-Integrated Military" also looks at the film as well as representations of women in American military narratives. She notes that it was during the First Gulf War that the first group of gender-integrated troops was deployed (100). Although the Tailhook scandal became synonymous with military sexual assault during the First Gulf War, Linville suggests that the months before the war were marked with sexual abuse on military bases (102). Of *Courage Under Fire* Linville states, "The film grants the problem of sexual harassment weight and consequence, depicting it not only as sexual misconduct but as a means of undermining a woman on the job" (105). She further asserts:

Missing in action from the film's depiction of the "truth," however, is Walden's subjectivity. For if Walden is an object of projection and manipulation for the public relations machine that the film critiques, she is certainly one for the film itself, despite its disavowal of such methods. As a result, she is only the ostensible center of the narrative. In contrast to the agonies of guilt her crewmen suffered, her ordeal is never visually represented or experienced from her point of view (107).

What is represented is the perspective of each of her male crewman. The film therefore inevitably privileges the male war experience over the female. We come to know Walden through the male perspective only and therefore miss the opportunity to have a war narrative that gives voice to the female war experience.

When dealing with a sensitive issue like rape and sexual violence onscreen, it is arguably impossible to detach fiction from reality. Representations of rape tend to provoke a visceral

reaction from the audience. In regards to military fictions depicting rape, Tasker sees this as revealing an innate hostility toward women from military men, and that any attempts to cover the assault up indicate the wider misogyny of these institutions (257, 2011). Considering that many war films do not depict sexual violence against women, or if they do, it is usually in order to provide a male protagonist the opportunity to be the hero, the underlying misogynistic practices alleged in both the military and Hollywood become apparent. Tasker continues by saying “In repeatedly linking military women’s experiences of abuse to a desire for advancement, military rape narratives draw on a postfeminist rhetoric that assumes equality is achieved but presents professional achievement as unfulfilling and inappropriate for women” (257, 2011). Therefore many American military narratives depicting sexual violence against women in the military do so in a contradictory fashion. On the one hand they attempt to portray the achievement of gender equality in the military by depicting the struggles of female soldiers. On the other hand, they conclude with the military remaining a masculine space, to which women can eventually access but never really belong.

Cinema has the ability to present and reconstruct history. Susan Jeffords article “Telling the War Story” explores the representation of the Vietnam War onscreen and its connection to history. She highlights the importance of filmic depictions of the war, suggesting that much of the public understanding of the Vietnam War is constructed not from history textbooks but from films (226). The article discusses how in American Military history wars have historically been fought exclusively by men, and therefore war films offer a space in which portrayals of masculinity can be explored (228-229). However, Jeffords also suggests that war film narratives have more to do with exploring social and cultural issues than particular wars (228). In this regard the lack of filmic representation and social awareness of wartime sexual

violence becomes apparent. As war films explore the predominantly masculine world of warfare they generally exclude portrayals of female soldiers and almost never mention sexual violence at the hands of soldiers. Therefore there is a social and cultural discourse surrounding war cinema that neglects female perspective. If a majority of the public come to understand a war like Vietnam through filmic representations, there is a need for a more balanced depiction of wartime experiences, particularly those from a female perspective.

Jeffords cites *The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978) as the film that changed the way in which war stories were told. She breaks her reasoning into two categories: first, that the Vietnam War was acknowledged as being a war that should not have been fought; second, that focus was placed on the individual soldier experience as opposed to civilian or military leaders (223-224). Considering the film was released only three years after the end of the war, it emphasized the cultural and social uncertainty of the time. According to Jeffords, the Vietnam War is the war that people see, more than any other, as being rooted not in historical accuracy, but instead in a collection of experiences, emotions and memories (220). A film like *The Deer Hunter* therefore draws upon these experiences and memories, while simultaneously contributing to them. Again, it becomes apparent that film has a significant influence on historical memory. What is problematic is that American war films privilege male war experience over female, contributing to the lack of accurate representation of female wartime stories.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have detailed the literature available on both rape in war and rape in war cinema. Although there is need for further discourse on this topic, there are, as discussed, academics that have made attempts to bring focus to this issue. Hollywood has the potential to

bring forth awareness to an international audience. The problem, however, is that Hollywood is an industry that is constructed around ideology. Without adequate historical and academic discourse on wartime rape the issue will remain invisible to the majority, and to Hollywood also.

Therefore the change begins with further research. Academics must look back before looking forward in order to understand the extent to which rape has been a part of war. By bringing this issue forward and by highlighting it as a real and existing wartime consequence the issue can become a part of the discourse surrounding war and the military. Perhaps then Hollywood will begin to integrate the stories of the many who have been victims of sexual violence in war.

In order to move forward with the discussion of representations of sexual violence in American military cinema it is necessary to go back. In the following chapter I will look at rape in the Vietnam War, with a focus on American film texts that incorporate the topic of wartime sexual violence. Drawing upon the history and sources from this chapter will allow me to create a comprehensive study in order to investigate the issues surrounding Hollywood's representation of rape in Vietnam War films.

Chapter Two: The Erasure of Rape in the Vietnam War Film

“Unquestionably there shall be some raping”

In Susan Brownmiller’s influential 1975 book “Against our Will” she dedicates a chapter to war rape. The chapter opens with her stating: “It’s funny about *man*’s attitude toward rape in war. *Unquestionably* there shall be some raping” (31). A trip through history can easily prove this point. In war, rape is not only a threat, it is an expectation. In the previous chapter I detailed just a few of the statistics covering a handful of wars. In this chapter I would like to look at one specifically: the Vietnam War. In *Ideologies of Forgetting: Rape in the Vietnam War* Gina Marie Weaver discusses the erasure of rape. This erasure is seen through Weaver’s research of the Vietnam War, along with victims’ testimonies, in which it becomes evident that rape has been erased from war memory. More than that, she asserts that rape has been erased from Hollywood war films also (160). I will be drawing upon Gina Marie Weaver’s idea of the erasure of rape in the Vietnam War, and how this extends to contemporary American military film narratives. By looking at two Hollywood Vietnam War films from the 1980s and engaging with a variety of historical and scholarly texts, I will argue that the contemporary American film about the Vietnam War fails to represent the sexual violence that occurred, and in doing so, rewrites history.

Before I begin to look at filmic representations it is necessary to provide a brief historical overview of the Vietnam War. Not only are history and fiction entwined in film, in the case for films portraying the Vietnam War, history, I will argue, is rewritten. The Vietnam War began in 1955 and lasted until 1975, making it the longest war in American history. The American military fought with South Vietnam against the communist allies of North Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and China. There are many reasons why the Vietnam War stands out from the previous

World Wars. When America withdrew from Vietnam in 1975 the majority of Americans were against the war. Veterans had been returning to the home front to find themselves the targets of a civilian backlash. Unlike their fathers who had returned from World War II as heroes, Vietnam veterans were seen as murderers and rapists. Brownmiller describes a 1971 public forum in which over one hundred veterans gathered together to share their testimonies (107). They became known as the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW)⁸. According to Brownmiller these men spoke about the abuses suffered and the abuses given, specifically what she calls “the special systematic abuse of women” (108). Today we still celebrate the soldiers of World War I and II, holding ceremonies in their honour, and celebrating anniversaries of their victory. The soldiers of Vietnam however have all but disappeared from present-day society.

The Vietnam Syndrome is the name given to the aftermath of the Vietnam War. In their chapter on the evolution of the Vietnam warrior in film, Jennifer Asensas, Sharon D. Downey and Karen Rasmussen discuss the Vietnam Syndrome as being a legacy of the war, in which American ideology and identity became infused with anxiety, and in which the notion of the war hero became compromised (134-135). One of the greatest changes in the American approach to war during Vietnam was the inclusion of the media for the first time. This meant that Americans were able to see firsthand footage and personal accounts coming from the front-line in the comfort of their living rooms. Not only did this allow greater investment into the war for civilians, it also allowed the darker sides of warfare to be shown, in particular the brutality and loss of life of not only soldiers but of Vietnamese villagers including women and children. The reports coming out through the media, combined with the stories from returned soldiers led to an increase in resentment towards America’s involvement in the war.

⁸ Visit <http://www.vvaw.org/> for more details.

The most infamous of these reports is the one detailing the Mai Lai Massacre. On the morning of March 16th, 1968 Charlie “C” Company entered the undefended village of Mai Lai. What followed was hours of brutal murder and rape at the hands of the Americans. Brownmiller notes that the majority of the men in C Company had been drafted and most were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two (103). They were what was called a “grunt” unit⁹. According to Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim these boys were the boys next door, and no one would have suspected they were capable of such things (5). This atrocity was mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, but I would like to investigate it in more detail. One of the main reasons that we know about the Mai Lai Massacre is because of investigator journalist Seymour Hersh who released the story in late 1969, and Sgt. Ron Haeberle, a combat photographer who photographed the massacre. On November 12, 1969 Hersh sent a cable stating: “The Army says he [Calley] deliberately murdered at least 109 Vietnamese civilians during a search-and-destroy mission in March 1968, in a Viet Cong stronghold known as ‘pinkville’” (Seymour Hersh Breaks My Lai Story). At the end of that day the number of unarmed Vietnamese civilians murdered was around five hundred. Lieutenant William Calley Jr. was the only man prosecuted for the murders. In 1971 he was found guilty of killing twenty-two innocent South Vietnamese civilians and sentenced to life imprisonment. This sentence got turned into house arrest due to President Nixon’s intervention and Calley became, what Bilton and Sim describe as “the most privileged prisoner in America” (2).

There were innumerable mishandlings in the aftermath of the massacre. The first is the lack of justice for the victims. It is beyond insulting to the men, women and children who lost their lives that day that only one man was convicted, and by 1974 he walked free. What adds insult is that the culprits of this tragedy have all but been forgotten in American memory. Bilton

⁹ Grunts were a slang term given to infantrymen fighting in the Vietnam War.

and Sim write, “Everyone else responsible for the most inexcusable act of American arms during this century has got clean away with it. No one remembers them” (3). What is even more alarming is that no one was ever convicted for the rapes that occurred. Brownmiller notes that three men were charged with rape, and yet, although the army confirmed that systematic rape had taken place, the charges against these men were dropped (105). Gina Marie Weaver expands upon this: “though war rape was not internationally prosecuted until the 1990s, it was a litigable offense within the American military justice system and, in fact, carries the highest penalties” (76). And yet the rapes were never prosecuted. The American military mentality does indeed seem to be of the mind that “unquestionably there shall be some raping.”

The question remains “why?” What is the motive of sexual violence in times of war? Claudia Card states that one of the reasons is to assert dominance (7). She also suggests that it can be used as a means of dividing families and binding rapists to one another¹⁰ (7). Susan Jeffords notes that in the case of gang rape it can function as a way of determining the status of the collective (69, 1989). In the Vietnam War, and particularly in the films that will be studied in this chapter, the idea of the collective was imperative in the functioning of the platoon. It perhaps begins to answer the question that Bilton and Sim posited as to how the boy next door could do such horrific things. In the case of the collective it is not the boy necessarily that does the action, but the collective mind of the platoon. That is not to say that the individual is excused from their actions, rather that in the moment, away from home, surrounded by the men they considered brothers, the lines between right and wrong became blurred, and the commands of their superior officers became law.

¹⁰ This is evident in the mass rapes that occurred in the Bosnian War where Muslim women were targeted by Serbian soldiers who wanted to impregnate and assert cultural dominance over the Muslim people.

As I move onto American filmic representations of the Vietnam War, and the erasure of rape in these texts, I will draw upon this idea of the collective, and on the history that has been briefly detailed above. From the albeit limited investigations into rape in the Vietnam War it is evident that rape did take place and that it became a part of the war psyche. Going forward I will begin to investigate why, if rape was so prevalent in the war, does Hollywood want to forget it, and what this means in regards to the rewriting of history through Hollywood's lens.

“We're supposed to be here to help these people”

Unlike films set in and around the Iraq War, the first cycle of Vietnam War films did not start until the war's end. According to Guy Westwell, Hollywood was unwilling to address the war up until 1975 (60). Weaver describes Hollywood's resistance to portray the war pre 1975 stating that “Hollywood's stilted attempts to deal with the conflict gave way to silence; as usual it found avoidance the best answer to controversial issues” (128). The withdrawal of American troops, however, allowed the major film studios to engage more directly in their approach to the war (62). In 1978 *The Boys of C Company* (Sidney J. Furie) and *Go Tell the Spartans* (Ted Post) were released, detailing a bitter approach to the war. That year Michael Cimino's critically acclaimed film *The Deer Hunter* depicted the effects the war had on the American home front and the challenges faced to the veteran psyche. In 1979 Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* took a dark approach to the war, showing the slow decay of madness experienced by soldiers.

At the time these films were made the Vietnam Syndrome was in full effect. This was characterized by what Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner describe as “national self-doubt, military vacillation, and a failure of will to intervene overseas...” (243-244). The films took on a harsh outlook of the war, using theatrical means to explore the unrest the aftermath of the war

had on American society. Although now film classics, *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* do not portray the realities of fighting in Vietnam; instead, they focus on anxieties created by the Vietnam Syndrome. By the late 1970s, however, the Vietnam Syndrome was starting to decline. Ryan and Kellner note that by the late 1970s the war was no longer the volatile subject it had once been (243), and that by the mid-eighties the Vietnam Syndrome was to some extent overcome (247).

The mid-eighties brought in a new range of films depicting the Vietnam War. While the films of the seventies had explored the darker sides of the war, they were approached via a fictional reimagining, opting for creative license over realistic portrayal. In *Apocalypse Now* Coppola recreates the 1899 Joseph Conrad novel “Heart of Darkness,” using the Vietnam War as a backdrop to Willard’s journey to find the Colonel turned self-made God. In *The Deer Hunter* focus is on a small Pennsylvania town rather than the jungles of Vietnam. In the 1980s, however, films began to emerge that attempted to portray the war truthfully, exploring the journey of soldiers in basic training, and in their tours of duty¹¹.

Many of these films used realistic cinematography and mise-en-scene in order to lend verisimilitude while simultaneously repurposing the war to rewrite history. Weaver notes that these ‘revisionist’ films rewrote the war so that America could win it, and encouraged the heroification of the veteran, portraying him as a victim of his government who had sent him to war and abandoned him there (133). Westwell expands upon this, noting that the films from the 1980s worked towards a kind of redemption for the soldiers, depicting them as the victims, drawing the attention away from the Vietnamese, as well as removing the reasons for fighting the war (82). An example of these films includes *Platoon* (Oliver Stone, 1986), *Full Metal Jacket*

¹¹ One of the changes made in the Vietnam War from previous wars was the implementation of a twelve-month tour of duty. Jon Robert Adams suggests, “Military officials hoped that by limiting the length of a tour they could exponentially increase soldierly productivity, commitment and morale, while fostering the same at home” (73).

(Stanley Kubrick, 1987), *Hamburger Hill* (John Irvin, 1987) *Born on the Fourth of July* (Oliver Stone, 1989), and *Casualties of War* (Brian de Palma, 1989).

It is not a new concept, the idea of Hollywood rewriting history. Film is subjective; the ideologies of the filmmaker are played out on screen to the masses, ready to be taken as fact if one so wishes. Films depicting historical events are at an even greater risk of being taken too literally. For most, the Vietnam War is understood and remembered through its representation on screen. Regardless of the countless problems this causes, Vietnam War films have come to stand in for the Vietnam War itself. Jeffords states, “by both viewing and participating in the movie that is Vietnam, by recognizing itself *as* representation, the subject of Vietnam come into existence” (16, 1989). Ryan and Kellner note that American filmic representations of military competency become inseparable from national self-esteem (239). It is one thing to realistically depict the aesthetics of the war on screen; it is another to depict the historical, social, and political truth from all sides. Hollywood Vietnam War films do the former well, and the latter not at all. The films show the struggles the men face, the harshness of the terrain, and the complexities of moral ambiguities of life on tour. By looking at what they leave out though we can begin to understand how limited these filmic portrayals are.

There are two main groups left out of representation in the majority of American Vietnam War films: the Vietnamese, and women. Films depicting World War II have long shown the Axis, even providing films from their perspectives (Clint Eastwood’s 2006 *Letters from Iwo Jima*, for example), whereas Vietnam War films all but erase the presence of the Vietnamese. They also erase the presence of women. The films tend to focus on the American male soldier experience rather than any of the estimated 11,000 American women that were stationed in

Vietnam during the war¹². Jeffords notes, “because war in the United States has historically been fought almost exclusively by men, war stories offer an ideal place to examine portrayals of masculinity” (223-229, 1996). This leads to what Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud call a minimization of spectator difference, where minority and female spectators “respond to their own erasures in representation from positions of self-denial” (8-9). By omitting accurate representation of women and Vietnamese in Vietnam War films, Hollywood re-writes history placing the (white) American male soldier as both hero and victim. The American military defeat, as well as the debatable reasons for their engagement in the war are removed from cinematic history and replaced with stories focused on the redemption of the male soldier.

By failing to depict accurate representations of women in Vietnam War films, rape is all but erased from these texts. We know that rape happened in the Vietnam War, and I have detailed some of the facts surrounding the Mai Lai massacre. We also know that rape during the Vietnam War was rarely prosecuted. Weaver points not only to the international juridical discourse for failing to prosecute crimes against Vietnamese women by American soldiers, she also claims that feminists, historians and other activists have ignored the well-documented crimes (5). Weaver believes the reason for this is because, unlike the wars in Bosnia Herzegovina and Rwanda, the United States was involved in the Vietnam War (19). So what we have then is not only an erasure of rape in American cinematic representations of the war, but also in history itself. The idiom “history is written by the victors” seems not to apply here. Perhaps instead history is written by whoever has the largest hold on the film industry. Take for example the Iraq War. Like the Vietnam War America’s involvement in Iraq was eventually seen by the majority as unnecessary, and its political intentions as deceptive. This led to many films depicting America’s involvement as ambiguous (Paul Greengrass’ 2010 *Green Zone*), militarily

¹² For more details visit <http://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/women-in-the-vietnam-war>.

unjust (Paul Haggis' 2007 *In the Valley of Elah*) and with great loss of American lives (the 2010 documentary *Restrepo*, dirs. Tim Hetherington and Sebastian Junger). The very anxieties played out through the Vietnam Syndrome in Vietnam War films become the "Iraq Syndrome" in Iraq War films. And just like Vietnam War films, these later films focus on the male perspective and erase any representations of sexual violence. What this shows is that Hollywood becomes the victor. It rewrites history in order to portray its versions of events, finds a male American hero in any situation, and all but erases sexual violence from American military history.

Of the many Vietnam War films very few include any depiction of women, let alone rape. When women are depicted they are often portrayed as prostitutes. Weaver, in her discussion of *Full Metal Jacket*, suggests that the film invents a different kind of woman; whereas Gustav Hasford's 1979 novel "The Short-Timers," on which the film is based, has no inclusion of prostitutes, the film does, one of which is represented as a "corrupter and an extremely unsympathetic character" (144). Jeffords claims that representation of gender in Vietnam is reshaped as sexuality and presented as spectacle (50, 1989). By representing a Vietnamese woman as a prostitute it suggests that she has agency over her body, making her the instigator and corrupter of the American soldier's morality. However, it also focuses her under the male gaze. In *Full Metal Jacket* the prostitutes add nothing significant to the story and are instead used to show the sexual relationship between the prostitutes and the soldiers as being consensual. (Weaver, 145). Rather than providing a perspective from these women, the film limits them to a sexual object. They become something to be looked at rather than heard. Through film's ability to rewrite history this objectification comes to stand for female representation in the Vietnam War.

Sexual violence in Vietnam War films, although limited, is not entirely erased. However, the ways in which these assaults are portrayed lend to heroizing the soldier, rather than addressing the perspective of the victim. Conolly-Smith notes, “While pre-Vietnam War films used rape as a narrative device to justify US foreign and military policy, Vietnam combat films later used it as metaphor for US imperialism” (233). He goes on to say that the rape of Asian women has become one of the central thematic tropes in Vietnam War films, but feminist scholarship has rarely engaged with representations of sexual violence in the war film genre (234). Although a thematic trope, its inclusion is there only as a means of redeeming the American soldier, not as a way of exploring the realities of sexual violence in the war. There are two Vietnam War films that show this: *Platoon* and *Casualties of War*. Through an in depth analysis of these two texts we can begin to see how Weaver

’s idea of the erasure of rape plays out on screen, and how Hollywood rewrites history, keeping hidden the realities of sexual violence in the war, and in turn silencing the victims.

“This is my rifle, this is my gun...”

Brian De Palma’s *Casualties of War* tells the story of a five-man squad led by Sgt. Tony Meserve (Sean Penn), who, while on patrol in Vietnam, decides to kidnap a young Vietnamese woman from a village solely for the purpose of rape. Eriksson (Michael J. Fox) is the only member of the squad who refuses to take part in the rape. The young woman is brutally gang raped by Meserve, Cpl. Thomas E. Clark (Don Harvey), Pfc. Herbert Hatcher (John C. Reilly), and Pfc. Antonio Diaz (John Leguizamo) and is eventually murdered, when her cries are deemed by Meserve to be a distraction with potential to alert the enemy. She is at first stabbed multiple times and then eventually shot, her body falling from the train tracks to the ground below.

Eriksson upon returning to base immediately informs his superior about the incident, but is told to forget it. He becomes a target for Meserve and is almost killed in an explosion in the barracks. Later, drunk at a bar, a concerned chaplain talks with him and Eriksson tells him everything that happened. Meserve, Clark, Hatcher and Diaz are interrogated and eventually sent to trial. It is at the trial that the men first hear the name of their victim: Tran Thi Oanh. The men are sentenced between eight years and life imprisonment, the flashback voice over of the Captain's earlier conversation with Eriksson, however, reminds the viewer that it is unlikely that they will do any real time and they will most likely be looking for payback. The film ends with Eriksson waking up on a bus; a young woman who reminds him of Oanh asks him if he had a bad dream. She tells him that she thinks it is over now.

The Incident on Hill 192 is the official name given by the United States Army to the events that inspired *Casualties of War*. The victim's name was Phan Thi Mao. She was a young Vietnamese woman who, while asleep in her village on November 18th 1966, was taken by Sgt. David E. Gervase, Pfc's Steven Cabbot Thomas, Cipriano S. Garcia, and Joseph C. Garcia. She endured gang rape and eventual death at the hands of these men. Pfc. Robert M. Storeby refused to take part, and eventually tried to tell his superiors, who refused to take action. In 1968 Storeby, using the alias of Sven Eriksson, was interviewed by Daniel Lang for *The New Yorker*. The article led to the eventual trial of the soldiers, and, as depicted in the film, it was only during this trial that the men learned the name of the victim (Brownmiller, 101-102). They were handed varying sentences similar to those given in the film. These sentences were eventually either overturned or shortened significantly. Lang turned his article into a book, and this book is the basis for *Casualties of War*.

The film begins and ends with Eriksson and it is through his perspective that the film is shown. He is portrayed as a hero, someone who stood up against his own squad members to try to protect a young innocent woman. Weaver, however, is quick to point out that in Lang's book Eriksson is quite clear that he never attempted to help Phan escape (149). In the film Eriksson gingerly approaches a beaten and frightened Tran, untying her and encouraging her to run, before being happened upon by Clark. This scene highlights Eriksson as a hero, because even though his attempt failed, he did try. The heroification of Eriksson becomes a balm for the audience to cover the atrocities of his fellow soldiers. It is almost as if to say yes Americans are capable of such things, but more importantly there will always be a hero among them. Sarah Hagelin suggests that De Palma's casting of Michael J. Fox, who at the time was a television star on a family show, provides an easier entrance into the hell of the film's Vietnam (64). With his youthful innocence Fox comes to be the narrator for the audience, keeping them at a distance from the true horror of the war. We go where he goes, and according to the film his is a hero's journey. Therefore the events of the plot are read as a device that aids in this heroification of Eriksson, and anything else becomes secondary, including the rape of Tran.

Throughout the film Tran is silenced. Her cries are sometimes heard, but her pleas are never translated. When Eriksson approaches her in the hut to help her escape he finds her burning with fever and her muffled Vietnamese words are overpowered by Eriksson's English dialogue. He does not speak her language, and she does not speak his, and so perhaps De Palma wanted to create the frustration of their situation by avoiding any use of subtitles. However, what this means is that Tran never gets to express herself. The audience experiences her fear through Eriksson, rather than through her. Desser notes that even decades after the war the Vietnamese as subject is rarely depicted or acknowledged in Vietnam War films (87). The film is not about

Tran, her story or her suffering. The film is about an everyday American soldier who became a hero. According to Hagelin at the time of the film's release the public image of the American soldier was no longer seen as heroic (49). The film, however, seems to be working hard to prove this wrong. Although there are plenty of non-heroic portrayals in the film, Eriksson remains virtuous throughout. We never get to know the other men in the squad but we do get to know Eriksson. We know that he has a wife and child and that he is protestant, but what about the others? Weaver suggests that the omission of their personal lives means that the men come to be understood solely through their actions during the war (148). We know even less about Tran than we do about the four other members of the squad. Without providing insight into her life the film fails to give her a voice, and in doing so limits the audience's connection to her and to the abuse she suffers.

Although the film is centered on the rape of Tran, there is still an erasure of rape. The way in which De Palma depicts the assaults and the perspective from which he provides it limits any chance of engaging with the true horror of the abuse. Weaver's concept of the erasure of rape is based upon the lack of representation of women's trauma in the Vietnam War. While *Casualties of War* depicts the rape, it does so from an outsider's perspective.

At the 45-minute mark the soldiers along with Tran come across a dilapidated hut. Meserve decides that it is the perfect location for their CP (command post). As he, Clark and Hatcher go to check the surrounding area, Eriksson and Diaz are left at the hut with Tran. They both watch as Tran uses a broken basket to clean the debris off a table inside. No one has asked her to do this, nor is it going to make a difference considering the hut is nothing more than a shell. However it brings attention to the table, which will be the location of her rape. Diaz takes this opportunity to tell Eriksson that he is not going to rape anybody. He asks Eriksson to back him

up and Eriksson tells him that he will. Diaz insists that Eriksson swears to it. Eriksson promises and asks Diaz to back him up also, which Diaz assures him he will do. As Tran sweeps the floor of the hut Eriksson offers her some water and looks at the injury on her back. He tells her that he is not going to hurt her; he is going to fix it. Like the sweeping of the hut, this attempt to clean her wound is futile. Eriksson knows why Meserve has taken the girl. With Meserve, Clark and Hatcher away for the moment it would have been the best chance she had to escape. Rather than offer her this, he instead takes his towel, covers it with water and, pulling her top down from her shoulder to expose the extent of the injury, begins to clean it, all the while telling her that it is going to be okay. This scene works therefore solely to show that Eriksson is, as he says it, “a friend.”

When Eriksson refuses Meserve’s command that he take part in the planned rape of Tran, Meserve responds with a violent outburst. Eriksson is immediately accused by the others as being “queer”, and when Meserve tells him that “everybody else is up for this” Eriksson looks to Diaz. Meserve asks Diaz if he has a problem with the plan and Diaz says no, clearly more afraid of Meserve than he is loyal to Eriksson, or his own morality. This is an example of how the notion of the collective can explain perhaps why some men turn to rape in war. Diaz’ fear of Meserve leads him to do something he is strongly against. Away from home, in an unpredictable and dangerous environment Diaz becomes something he might never have thought he would become. When Meserve threatens Eriksson with friendly fire still Eriksson refuses. Meserve then threatens him with rape, saying “maybe when I’m done with her I’m gonna come after you. Maybe when I’m done humping her, I’m gonna come hump you.” Meserve has gone from accusing Eriksson of being gay to threatening to sexually violate him. This does not seem to worry Thatcher or Clark, who stand by Meserve’s side the whole time in support. When Eriksson

takes an attack posture, holding up his gun, Meserve holds up his and says “the army calls this a weapon, but it ain’t.” he then grabs his crotch and says “this is a weapon.” And then reciting the drill made famous by *Full Metal Jacket*, but in a reverse order of action, Merserve still holding his crotch says “this is my rifle,” he holds up his gun, “this is my gun,” he brings attention to his crotch again, “this if for fighting,” then back to the gun, “this is for fun.” According to Robert Eberwien’s discussion of the film in *Armed Forces: Masculinity and Sexuality in the American War Film*, weapons become pervasive within the film’s mise-en-scene once Eriksson has declared his refusal to take part (129). The rifles are no longer the instruments of war, the penis is.

When Tran is first raped Meserve throws her onto the table and tears off her clothes. The scene is intercut with shots of Eriksson’s shocked expression. The camera follows Eriksson as he moves away from the hut, his eyes still on the assault. Peter Conolly-Smith suggests that by seeing the assault through Eriksson’s eyes the audience, like him, are not participants and are unburdened from “any sense of direct complicity” (235). As Eriksson continues to watch helplessly, moving away, Meserve asks if he is going to watch. Clark, pulling a knife to Eriksson’s throat, tells him that he gets security. Eriksson moves away from the hut, and we go with him. A dissolve transitions the scene from day to night where a long shot shows Meserve finally leaving the hut and grabbing a cigarette from Clark. They argue over who gets to go next and Meserve insists that Diaz goes. It is only when they move that we see the half naked body of Tran in the background on the floor of the hut. She is so far from the camera and there is enough between her and the foreground that she is almost lost in the frame. In regards to De Palma’s choice of depicting the rape through Eriksson’s eyes Conolly-Smith notes, “In doing so they

absolve themselves of any responsibility for the images they show, yet simultaneously re-enact to an excessive degree the very type of violence they ostensibly condemn” (235).

The issue, however, is not the excessiveness of the depiction, but rather the fact that Tran is all but omitted from it. We see her on the ground in the distance, but we never get to see her facial expressions or hear her voice. Scenes like these must always be handled with care and sensitivity to the audience, but a rape scene should also make us feel uncomfortable; it is a violent act that should engage the victim’s perspective, or it is at risk of becoming exploitative. By having the scene play out through Eriksson’s viewpoint the film, as Sarah Hagelin argues, “refuses to force its audience into identification or complicity with the violent male characters who represent U.S. exploitation of the Vietnamese” (64). The victim therefore becomes Eriksson, who has to endure watching the gang rape, as well as the ostracization of the other soldiers, not Tran who is the one being abused. This lends to the audience seeing Eriksson as a victim too, and it is his victimization that overshadows Tran’s. Her rape is simultaneously depicted and erased, as it becomes Eriksson’s life the audience fears for more than Tran’s. Sarah Projansky suggests that Tran’s rape is used as a vehicle for understanding men and the perspective is that of a white American man’s, who comes to stand for her experience (113). Further evidence of the film valuing the male perspective is the fact that Tran’s death comes just over half way through the film. At the point of her death it becomes Eriksson’s life that holds the most value, and the most threat. The position of Tran’s body on the ground is later mimicked by the death of a ‘cherry’¹³ soldier on base. As Eriksson looks over the body of the soldier he tells his friend that the war has got them turned around, and that everyone is acting like they can do anything. He says, “we might be dead in the next split second, maybe we gotta be extra careful about what we do, because maybe it matters more.” Just as Tran’s death has given Eriksson the

¹³ A cherry is a slang term for a young, inexperienced soldier.

opportunity to become a hero, so too has this young soldier's death. Tran and the soldier therefore become mere casualties of the war, a narrative device in which the heroification of Eriksson can be explored.

When adapting a film from real events there will always be things that get lost along the way. In the case of *Casualties of War* there is a glaring omission. The film ends with the sentencing of the men, making it appear as though Eriksson's journey to get the truth told has been successful. However, the sentences were reduced drastically or entirely overturned. There was no real justice for Phan Thi Mao. Weaver argues that by omitting to tell the truth about the sentencing De Palma has participated himself in the erasure of rape (150). In the credits of the film, once you have gone through the list of main actors, the director and cinematographer, a title card comes up explaining that Hatcher's rape conviction was reversed and on retrial acquitted. Why does De Palma place this in the credits, and a good minute into them no less? It is almost as though the truth got in the way of the story he wanted to tell. What becomes apparent is that the film was never about Tran, or her rape, it was about the heroification of Eriksson. Once again, Hollywood rewrites history in order to change the outcome in their favour. Phan Thi Mao never received the justice she deserved, but Tran supposedly did. Yet even with the changes made the true victim of the story, Tran, is relegated to a subplot, her abuses made invisible in the shade of American military prowess, and her voice silenced.

"We did not fight the enemy, we fought ourselves"

At the end of Oliver Stone's *Platoon* Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen) leaves Vietnam via helicopter, watching the firefight below, as his voice-over states: "I think now, looking back, we did not fight the enemy, we fought ourselves. And the enemy was in us." The lack of

representation of the enemy in Vietnam War films lends Taylor's words some kind of truth. *Platoon* is about a group of American soldiers turning on one another, not nation versus nation. Taylor, a 'cherry' soldier, who has volunteered for his tour of duty, finds himself caught between two superiors: the tough, aggressive Sgt. Barnes (Tom Berenger) and the more compassionate Sgt. Elias (Willem Dafoe). Like *Casualties of War*, the film follows a young white American soldier as he grapples with morality in the war. Unlike films that depict World War II, Vietnam War films seem to be hesitant to include any representation of the Vietnamese soldiers they fought against. David Desser notes that this absence of the enemy indicates how America still sees the war as a part of American culture, as a "product of a sickness within American society, or how the war led to a sickness within American society" (88). Desser is quick to point out that regardless of Taylor's final voice-over they did, in fact, fight an enemy and "the failure to acknowledge this is indicative of a larger failure to examine the Vietnam foray in the first place and a continued failure to come to terms with it" (88). It is not only the sexual violence that Hollywood wants to erase from the war; it is the war itself. In films like *Apocalypse Now*, *The Deer Hunter*, *Casualties of War* and *Platoon* the enemy is erased, allowing directors to focus on individual soldier experiences rather than the war and its outcome.

By placing the perspective of the war experience through white American soldiers, Hollywood is able to rewrite the Vietnam War. *Platoon* opens with a quote from Ecclesiastes, one of the books of the Hebrew bible: "Rejoice O young man in thy youth..." This title shows that from the very start this film was always going to be about the young men fighting the war. The opening scene is that of a group of men exiting a military plane onto a dust-filled tarmac. The first soldier that comes into view is Taylor looking slightly bewildered as body bags are laid on the ground before them and a superior says "Welcome to the Nam, follow me." In the next

scene it is nighttime in the Vietnam jungle and the platoon is making their way through the darkness, the hand-held camera placing the audience in the perspective of the soldiers, as though walking along with them. Ten minutes into the film we get the first of Taylor's voice-overs, where he describes the hell he is in, and the fact that he does not know what he is doing. Almost a minute into his speech it becomes clear that he is writing to his Grandmother. Not only do these voice-overs give the audience an insight into Taylor's experience, they also show him as a sensitive, moral man who has no idea why he is fighting the war.

Taylor's perspective becomes for the audience a gauge between good and evil. Jeffords argues that the film's ethics and moral vision are driven by the masculine (140, 1989). Since it is his journey that we follow from start to end, his actions become the point of reference in which all other actions are based around. In a scene where the platoon raids a village, Taylor, who is struggling with his own understanding of the war, takes his anger out on an unarmed Vietnamese villager, forcing him to hop from one foot to another in a pathetic dance by shooting at his feet as Taylor screams at him. A fellow soldier, Bunny (Kevin Dillon) encourages Taylor to kill the man. Taylor's anger eventually gives way to tears. Bunny calls him a "fucking pussy" and beats the man, presumably to death, with his rifle, all the while smirking as though the act brings him pleasure. Although Taylor has shown a rare aggressive side of himself in this scene, he does not go through with the violence, Bunny does. This positions Taylor as good and Bunny as bad. Due to Taylor's voice-overs throughout the film, the audience understands that Taylor is struggling, and therefore can perhaps find reason as to why he would be pushed to such an extreme. Without a voice-over for Bunny, and no idea of where he is emotionally, the film places him as the aggressor and Taylor as a victim of the circumstances of war.

Taylor's voice-overs add to the narrative of the film, allowing certain plot points to be addressed and the inner voice of Taylor to be heard, but what do they remove? Judy Lee Kinney suggests that the film relies on the structure of a bildungsroman (161). But what does this 'coming of age' story leave out? First, as mentioned earlier, it avoids any representation of the Vietnamese they are fighting, and in doing so removes one whole side of the war. Second, it denies any access to understanding the Vietnamese civilians and the struggles they faced. And third, it allows all other members of the platoon to be judged solely on their actions. Whereas Taylor may be forgiven for some of his aggression due to the access the audience has to his morality, other members of the platoon are not as lucky. This creates a black and white perspective of right and wrong in the war. Like *Casualties of War*, *Platoon* follows one man's journey only, rather than allowing different perspectives, therefore the film becomes biased in its approach. This denial of a different viewpoint means that Hollywood is able to keep focus on the heroification of the singular soldier, rather than the truth of the war.

If there is any doubt to Taylor's morality after his mental breakdown with the Vietnamese civilian, Stone ensures it with a following scene. In the two-hour film there is only one brief scene depicting rape. As Taylor walks through the burning village he hears the screams of young girls. Taylor finds a group of men from his platoon attacking a girl and he pulls one of them off her. He is immediately called a homosexual, just as Eriksson was in *Casualties of War*, as though rape is a heterosexual masculine right, and to not want to be a part of it would mean a loss of that heterosexuality. Jeffords suggests "Gang-rape combines collectivity and display as the masculine bond performs as a group, with itself as audience" (69, 1989). Taylor, by stopping the rape excludes himself from the collective, making him seem weaker to the men. As Taylor brings the girl to him for safety he yells "she's a fucking human being man." One soldier tells him that he

does not belong in the ‘Nam, and Taylor responds with “You just don’t fucking get it do you?” and leads the crying girl away. At no point do we see the girl who was attacked, not even as she is being led away by Taylor. The framing stays as a mid shot from Taylor’s chest upwards. This means that the girl must be very young, no taller than his lower rib cage. By keeping her out of frame the film positions this scene around Taylor only, making him the victim who has to suffer the verbal abuse of his fellow soldiers, and in turn making the girl invisible.

The depiction (or non-depiction) of the rape in the film helps to erase it entirely from the narrative. Weaver writes, “emotionally depleted and dazed, it is possible for viewers to miss the rape entirely, especially as the film’s mise-en-scene and camera work obscure it” (137). She continues by saying that it is not just the visual representation of rape that is absent from the film; it is also missing from the dialogue (137-138). Stone’s inclusion of this scene appears to be there solely to prove Taylor’s morality, that he in position to the other soldiers is good, and that his previous indiscretion is forgiven. Like *Casualties of War*, the film does not include the rape to further the audience’s understanding of sexual violence in times of war; rather, it is there to further the herofication of the singular male soldier that the film’s perspective values.

Leonard Quart’s idea of the superman character is useful in unpacking the characters of Taylor and Eriksson. According to Quart this figure first appeared in Hollywood Vietnam films in *Who’ll Stop the Rain?* (dir. Karel Reisz, 1978), and is an “American soldier or officer who lived beyond conventional values, projecting an aura of almost superhuman courage and power and personal invulnerability” (159). Quart suggests that the character of Michael Vronsky (Robert DeNiro) in *The Deer Hunter* is where the superman character began to really take shape (159); with his heroism having the effect of making Americans the innocent victims and the Vietnamese the aggressors of the Vietnam War (165). In *Casualties of War* Eriksson is portrayed

as courageous for his refusal to let the rape and murder of Tran go unpunished. In *Platoon* Taylor's purity and innocence make him a perfect superman character, swooping in to save the young girls from rape, and refusing to let the verbal abuse of the soldiers deter him. Quart's superman character becomes an appropriate title for the figures of Eriksson and Taylor. The rapes of the films are events in which the superman characters can be in full form. These figures come to represent America in the war. They stand up to what is morally and ethically wrong and fight for justice, all while struggling with their own positions in the war. The absence of the representation of an enemy ensures that the films can play these struggles out within their own military with Vietnam merely as a backdrop. The films could be set anywhere, in any war, and do not represent the truth of the Vietnam War. Instead they are a way in which Hollywood can play out anxieties about Vietnam while keeping America in a heroic and guilt-free position.

As seen in *Casualties of War*, the image of the gun also stands in for the phallus in *Platoon*. In a scene where Taylor visits 'the underground,' a recreational area where some of the soldiers drink and do drugs he tries marijuana for the first time. In a close up Sgt. Elias breaks the fourth wall asking Taylor (who the audience has now become) if it is his first time. He then takes his rifle and brings it up to Taylor saying "put your mouth on this". Elias then blows smoke through one end to Taylor who inhales it. Eberwein asserts that although the scene carries homosexual context, it is really about the connection of sex and violence, and how using the gun becomes symbolic of engaging in a sexual act (118). Eberwein suggests that the scene in which Bunny uses his rifle to kill the Vietnamese villager continues this connection of sex and violence since the scene depicts Bunny as killing with pleasure (120-121). In Vietnam War films masculinity becomes the dominant threat. The soldiers see the act of rape as an assertion of their dominance, and to deny taking part is to deny masculinity and heterosexuality. The penis, like

their rifles, becomes their weapon of war and the act of rape and the act of killing in the Vietnam War become interchangeable.

With the lack of female representation in Vietnam War films, *Platoon* works around this by playing out the masculine and the feminine through male characters. Jeffords proposes that the confrontation of good and evil in the film becomes rephrased through a struggle between masculinity and femininity, with Sgt. Barnes standing in for the masculine, and Sgt. Elias the feminine (138, 1989). After Taylor stops the rape and takes the girl under his protection he looks up and sees Elias in the distance who yells at the men to get out of there. When Barnes kills a woman as a threat to a villager, who he assumes is not telling him the truth about the origins of the guns found in the village, he also takes a child hostage. Elias happens upon this and attacks Barnes, placing himself as a protector of the villagers. As the two sergeants engage in their power struggle throughout the film Taylor finds himself in the middle. Westwell sees the oscillation of Taylor between Barnes and Elias as representative of America's sense of self (79). After the burning of the village, which Westwell reads as corresponding with the events of Mai Lai, Taylor, and the audience move further from Barnes and closer to Elias and his stance on the war (79). As Elias had earlier mentioned to Taylor, "We're gonna lose this war". After Elias is murdered by Barnes, Taylor decides that Barnes must be killed. For Taylor to do this he must adopt a more masculine, aggressive approach, similar to Barnes. Stone highlights this with the line "The only thing that can kill Barnes is Barnes." Jeffords suggests "by killing Barnes, Taylor ends the film, not in the position of the masculine *or* the feminine, but in both" (209, 2000). By playing out the feminine and masculine through the male soldiers, Stone removes any female representation while simultaneously being able to explore traits associated with the feminine.

This further highlights the male perspective of the film and shows the erasure of any chance of exploring rape in the war.

“ I am sorry...”

Throughout this chapter I have drawn upon both historical and theoretical texts in order to understand the ways in which Hollywood rewrites history to change the depiction of the Vietnam War. Gina Marie Weaver’s concept of the erasure of rape in the war has been an invaluable guide in my exploration of Vietnam War film texts. By looking at a brief history of the war, as well as the evolution of the Vietnam War film, I was able to identify the connection between Hollywood and history. Film has recreated historical events since its inception. The issue is that film is subjective, and therefore these events are depicted with bias, and in the case of the war film, with different outcomes. The Vietnam War was a great military defeat for the United States, but films about the war tend to avoid the topic of its ending. By focusing on the individual soldier experience the loss of the war is all but forgotten in Hollywood memory.

What became apparent in researching Vietnam War films is the lack of representation of sexual violence in them. There is a resistance from Hollywood in showing the realities of the war if it works against the American military. When sexual violence is depicted, as in *Casualties of War* and *Platoon*, it is done so only to heroify the singular, white, male soldier that the film’s perspective values. This creates an erasure of rape in the films, and in doing so rewrites the history of the Vietnam War. In real life Phan Thi Mao never got the justice she deserved for her brutal rape and murder. Neither did any of the victims of the Mai Lai massacre. In *Casualties of War*, however, Tran Thi Oanh’s rape and murder is brought to justice thanks to the superman character of Eriksson who refuses to let it go unpunished. De Palma’s choice of finishing the

film with the sentencing of the men, rather than telling the truth of the overturned or shortened sentences, highlights De Palma's desire to tell the story he wants to tell, rather than the truth. Similarly Taylor's heroic saving of the rape victim in *Platoon* places him as a superman character. Both Taylor and Eriksson become the victims of the films, having to stand up to their fellow soldiers while being verbally abused and threatened. The real victims are silenced, as in the case of Tran, or not shown at all like the girl from *Platoon*. The rapes therefore become erased from the narrative, used only as a device to further explore the struggles of the male protagonists.

Brownmiller ends her chapter on rape in war with the following:

“I am sorry that the peace movement did not consider the abuse of women in Vietnam an issue important and distinctive enough to stand on its own merits, and I am sorry that we in the women's movement, struggling to find our independent voices, could not call attention to this women's side of the war by ourselves. The time was not right” (113).

She wrote that in 1975. In the decade that followed it appeared that still the time was not right. Scholarship, historians and films continued to ignore the abuse of women in the Vietnam War. It has now been four decades since Brownmiller wrote this and Hollywood still seems hesitant to discuss the truth of rape in war. Looking ahead to films depicting rape in the American military I will continue to explore Hollywood's erasure of military rape. Perhaps in 1975 the time was not right, but now we have no excuse.

Chapter Three: The Invisible War: Sexual Violence in American Military

Films

“We can do it”

The 1943 poster of Rosie the Riveter by J. Howard Miller has long been associated with feminism and war. Produced in an era during which women were stepping into the roles previously held by men, the “we can do it” slogan aimed to inspire them. In the decades since its release the poster has become synonymous with the idea that women are capable of doing any job a man does. In the struggle for gender equality in the workforce there have been many for and many against this idea. One area where this struggle plays out on a daily basis is in the military. Women have always been a part of war. They have been nurses on battlefields, reporters on the front line, mothers, sisters, daughters and wives on the home front; they have been victims of invasions and spoils for the enemy. However, they have also been soldiers, fighting wars alongside their brothers in arms.

In this chapter I would like to turn the focus to women in the U.S military. Drawing upon historical resources and specific film texts I will explore the issue of rape in the military and Hollywood’s response to it. Although I will be looking at two fictional films: *The General’s Daughter* (dir. Simon West, 1999) and *G.I Jane* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1997), I will base most of this chapter around the 2012 documentary *The Invisible War* (dir. Kirby Dick). In the previous chapter I argued that Hollywood has failed to depict the truth of sexual violence in the Vietnam War, and in doing so has erased such violence from cinematic memory. In this chapter I will argue that Hollywood’s depiction of sexual violence has made the victims invisible, focusing

once again on the male perspective and neglecting to tell the truth about sexual violence in the military.

Since I will be drawing upon different historical military cases and scandals, it is necessary to take a brief journey through the history of women's involvement in the U.S. military. Although women have been in the U.S. military since the late 1940s, they had not been allowed to take part in combat due to a combat exclusion rule in place since 1948. On January 24th, 2013 the Department of Defense released a statement rescinding the combat exclusion policy, with Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta declaring:

Women have shown great courage and sacrifice on and off the battlefield, contributed in unprecedented ways to the military's mission and proven their ability to serve in an expanding number of roles...The Department's goal in rescinding the rule is to ensure that the mission is met with the best-qualified and most capable people, regardless of gender (<http://www.defense.gov>).

Statistics on the Department of Defense site state that women make up 15% of the military (202,400 out of 1.4 million), and yet, until 2013 they were excluded from combat.

Women were integrated into the Army after the end of the draft in 1973 (Solaro, 145). However, according to Erin Solaro, U.S. servicewomen until the end of the 1990s were "generally considered tolerable peculiarities" and that it was commonly believed that they had joined because they were "trying to get away from a man, looking to marry one, hoping to become one, or looking for love among each other" (197). This brings forth the idea held by some that the desire of women entering the military was hinged upon their love lives. They wanted husbands, or perhaps wives. They were either dependent upon men or unnaturally independent of them. What it really shows is that woman's inclusion into the military has always

been met with some sort of contention, and this contention has often hidden what women were really doing in the military: they were there to serve their country, just like the men who joined.

On August 2nd, 1990 the Gulf War began with the deployment of American troops to Saudi Arabia under the name Operation Desert Shield. In January 1991 this became Operation Desert Storm in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. During Desert Storm the active American Forces were made up of 7% women, almost 41,000 (Peach, 156). Their roles included rescue assignments and support (Peach, 156); but even though these positions could place them in danger within combat zones, they were still excluded from combat participation.

While statistics of rape in war are always difficult to ascertain, determining rape in the Gulf and Iraq Wars becomes increasingly complicated due to the fact that a lot of sexual violence happened within the military itself. Evelyn Monahan suggests that these two wars produced a different pattern of rape compared to previous wars, and that at least one of every three women in the military during this time was the victim of sexual assault (408). However, these statistics are difficult to prove. According to Cynthia Enloe, the Gulf and Iraq wars were different in that they were under "strict sexual control," which was forced by the Saudi regime under the leadership of King Fahd (100). During their time in Saudi Arabia the U.S. military was prohibited from both alcohol and prostitution (Enloe, 100). Whereas in previous wars where prostitution had been allowed, and at times even encouraged, the Gulf and Iraq wars implemented a stronger restriction upon such activities. This is not to say that alcohol and prostitution did not take place during the war, but that they were prohibited whereas in the Vietnam War they had not been.

During the 1990s there were a series of military scandals that shone a light on sexual assault and gender inequality in the military. In September 1991 the Tailhook Scandal took

place, in which around 90 women and men were sexually assaulted by U.S. Navy and Marine Corps aviation officers during a symposium in Tailhook, Las Vegas. Lt. Paula Coughlin, who was one of the first to report the incident, was interviewed by Kirby Dick in his documentary on sexual assault in the military, *The Invisible War*. According to Coughlin the corridor of the hotel became a gauntlet where “it was about maybe 30 or 40 feet of 200 guys trying to pull my clothes off.” In 1996 at the Aberdeen Proving Ground 30 women filed complaints of sexual harassment and assault against non-commissioned officers. In 1997 Kelly Flinn, a female pilot in the U.S. Air Force, was discharged for having an affair with a civilian. Rosemary Skaine notes that a Lt. Colonel at the same base Flinn was stationed at had sex with his secretary, which is both adultery and fraternization by military law, and yet he was only reprimanded and fined, whereas Flinn, whose affair had been off base, was facing a potential court martial and almost ten years in prison (189). Sara L. Zeigler and Gregory G. Gunderson see the Tailhook and Aberdeen scandals as suggestions of the Army turning a blind eye to sexual violence against women, and the Flinn case as proof that women are being held to a higher standard than men in terms of sexual behavior (1).

One of the more recent incidents involving sexual abuse in the military is also arguably one of the most unique. The torture and abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison at the hands of American soldiers in 2003 and 2004 was a disturbing display of military power. Photos emerged showing prisoners naked, piled on top of one another, being dragged around on leashes, and forced into sexually suggestive poses. What the media became attached to, however, was that female soldiers were in the photos assaulting the prisoners. Ilene Feinman suggests that there is an increase in shock due to the fact that the tormentors were women and that the photos of male soldiers taking part do not inspire as much distress (74).

The Abu Ghraib scandal had an impact on feminism. Barbara Ehrenreich believes that there was a part of feminism that died with the scandal, “it was a feminism that saw men as the perpetual perpetrators, women as the perpetual victims, and male sexual violence against women as the root of all injustice” (2). Lucinda Marshall discusses the backlash against feminism in the wake of Abu Ghraib suggesting, “women being portrayed as front-and-center participants in the sexualized torture that took place at the prison challenged our comfortable assumptions about how women are supposed to behave” (51). What becomes apparent is that the shock stemmed less from the violence portrayed in the photographs and more from the fact that women were responsible for a part of it. Sexual violence is usually seen as perpetrated by men against women; however, Abu Ghraib reminded everyone that women are capable of atrocities. It wasn’t what Rosie the Riveter had in mind when she declared proudly “We can do it.”

The last two decades have brought about many changes for women in the military. From the lifting in 1991 of the ban on women flying combat aircraft (Peach, 159) to the Abu Ghraib scandal, the public’s attention has been focused on women in the military. It is interesting then that Hollywood has not paid as close attention. Films about the Gulf and Iraq wars are predominantly told from the male perspective, and even if they are deemed anti-war films, still work to show the heroism of the male protagonist. This has created an imbalance in the portrayal of Gulf and Iraq war stories where rape has been all but eliminated. Fiction films, as will be discussed in this chapter, do not attempt to work through any of these concerns on screen. It seems that documentary is the only form that is interested in portraying the true stories of the U.S. military.

“Rape is an occupational hazard”

The Invisible War is a documentary that details the extent of rape in the U.S. military. Compiled of interviews with soldiers who were raped during their service, as well as archival footage and interviews with military personnel, the film paints a bleak picture of not only the high number of victims of sexual violence in the military, but also the lack of accountability and justice. The film explores how the biggest threat women face in the military is not war, but sexual violence. The opening title tells the audience, “All statistics are from US Government studies.” The film relies on these statistics to bring together a comprehensive report on military sexual violence while also making a case for the necessity of a policy change in how the military handles sexual assault.

Throughout the film we meet different women who were in various branches of the military. They all have two things in common: they joined the services proudly, and they were raped while in service. Kori Cioca joined the U.S Coast Guard because she did not want to wait another year on the waitlist for the Navy. She had been sexually harassed by one of the Officers in her unit, but regardless of her attempts to avoid him, he would go on to brutally rape her, leaving her with a dislocated jaw. Throughout the film the camera follows her as she struggles in pain, waiting to hear if she will receive financial help for her medical needs from the Veterans Association. Although Cioca reported her rape, nothing was ever done about it. She left the Coast Guard while her rapist went unpunished. Cioca’s is only one of the heartbreaking stories told in the film. As each woman details the events of her rape, the film continues to supply statistics: Over 20% of female veterans have been sexually assaulted while serving; 80% of sexual assault victims do not report, therefore that number is likely significantly higher, with one journalist, Amy Herdy, estimating that half a million women have most likely been sexually assaulted in the U.S. military; 33% of servicewomen did not report the rape because the person

to report to was a friend of the rapist; 25% of women did not report the rape because the person to report to was the rapist. As of 2010 there were 3223 perpetrators and only 175 did any jail time.

Tanya Horeck suggests that the filmic representation of rape is still a highly charged issue and that “what needs to be explored further is how these images open up wider questions about changing viewpoints on the relationship between audience and film” (115). *The Invisible War* confronts the issue of rape head on, putting testimony and statistics out there to the audience. The stories being told are not fiction or created to show the heroism of the male soldier, and the audience is not asked to be passive. Instead, the audience becomes a witness to the trauma, and they are asked at the end of the film to visit a website and sign a petition. There is something interesting in how documentary as a form can be used politically. Documentary allows filmmakers to add an extra level of verisimilitude to their films. By depicting real life and using testimony from non-actors they are able to promote ideals without being caught up in the restraints of mainstream American cinema.

One of the main arguments of *The Invisible War* is that there needs to be a change in policy. By having the commanding officers make the decision over prosecution, the victims of rape and sexual assault do not have a fair, unbiased ground on which to report. Throughout the film Rear Admiral Anthony Kurta, the director of military personnel plans and policy, is interviewed. Intercut with the numerous testimonies of rape, Kurta’s assurance that “any report of sexual assault is fully investigated in the United States Navy,” becomes a clear deflection of how the U.S military responds to sexual assault, or in most cases, does not respond. At one point in the film the Marine Barracks in Washington is discussed, where there appears to be an epidemic of sexual violence. Robin Khale says that after reporting her assault she was accused of

welcoming the harassment for wearing the regulation skirt and exercising in shorts. A title comes up stating, “The filmmakers contacted five female marines who were each assaulted by an officer while serving at Marine Barracks Washington. Four of the women were investigated or punished after they reported. No officer was punished for any assault.” The use of these titles, intercut with testimony of assault, and interviews with military personnel create an environment where director Kirby Dick is able to highlight the facts of his argument. By the end of the film it would be a difficult task to argue against the facts Kirby Dick has assembled, and in fact a title lets the audience know that “On April 14, 2012, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta watched this film. Two days later, he took the decision to prosecute away from unit commanders.”

In Chapter Two I posited the question of what creates this impulse for sexual violence in times of war? I now look further and ask why is the military a space where rape is so common? According to the statistics of the film a Navy study found that 15% of incoming recruits have raped before entering the military, twice the percentage of the equivalent civilian population. In the films discussed in Chapter Two both Eriksson and Taylor are accused of being lesser men for their lack of desire to rape. Vietnam War films all but erase rape from their texts, but they do still suggest that rape took place. In films about the Gulf and Iraq wars rape is eliminated entirely. Yet, according to the statistics given in *The Invisible War* rape has been a part of military life for a long time. Monahan suggests that women in the military during the Iraq War had to face the same hardships as their fellow male soldiers, but they also had an added threat: that they could be raped by their comrades-in-arms (405-406). She adds that the war was a “no rules zone” where, providing the soldier performed the tasks given to him, he could “take whatever he needed to keep himself fit for combat” (405-406). Monahan provides statistics for sexual assault in the military during the Iraq War: in 2005 2,374 people were assaulted; in 2006 the number was

reported as 2,947, a 24% increase from the previous year, and a 73% increase from 2004; in 2007 there were 2,688 reported assaults and 60% of them were rapes (408). These statistics have been coming in for the past decade and yet it was not until 2012 when Kirby Dick's film was released that the public started to understand the extent of rape in the military.

So where was Hollywood during all of this? Kathryn Bigelow's 2008 critically acclaimed film *The Hurt Locker* focuses on the addiction to war through the perspective of a male sergeant working in an army bomb squad in Iraq. In Paul Haggis' 2007 film *In The Valley of Elah*, the plot centers on a man trying to find out the truth behind his son's murder during the Iraq War. Paul Greengrass' 2010 *Green Zone* tackles the subject of the Weapons of Mass Destruction and one soldier's mission to uncover the truth of their existence. The 2010 documentary *Restrepo* highlights the suffering and heroics of a platoon during a year in a deadly combat zone in Afghanistan. In 2014 Peter Berg's *Lone Survivor* was well received by critics. The film is based on Marcus Luttrell's book of the same name, and tells the story of how Luttrell and his team came under fire on a mountainside in Afghanistan, during which all members of the team but Luttrell were killed. These are just a few of the films based in and around the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. What they show us is that Hollywood does not shy away from portraying the war, but it does limit its focus. The films, regardless of whether they are perceived as pro or anti-war, all depict the war from a male, American military perspective. American women are only depicted on the home front, and never associated with the war. So what about all the women in the military during this time that were sexually assaulted? Statistics show us that the assaults happened, but according to Hollywood women were not really a part of these wars. By focusing on male soldiers only, Hollywood is not just erasing the truth of rape in the military; it is erasing women from the military.

Due to the lack of films portraying women on duty during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars I will look back to the 1990s, to films that portray women in the military during and after the Gulf War. Drawing upon the statistics and testimonies from *The Invisible War* I will investigate how Hollywood presents sexual harassment and assault in the military.

“It never happened...none of this ever happened.”

The General's Daughter is a murder mystery film that centers on the death of Capt. Elizabeth Campbell (Leslie Stefanson), the daughter of Lieutenant General Joseph Campbell (James Cromwell). Warrant Officers Paul Brenner (John Travolta) and Sara Sunhill (Madeleine Stowe) are brought in to investigate the murder and supposed rape of Elizabeth. The film opens during a ceremonial dinner celebrating the career of the General. We first see Elizabeth at a table watching her father present a speech. She is dressed in her formal clothing, her blonde hair in a tidy bob, her make up feminine complete with red lipstick. Later she stops on the road to help Brenner replace a flat tire. She is depicted as strong, more competent than Brenner as she changes the tire, an act associated with masculinity. From the moment Brenner sees Elizabeth his sexual attraction to her is obvious. The following day he goes to her office with a thank you basket filled with bath products. She is not impressed with the gift, telling him that it looks like strange chocolate. The next evening Elizabeth is dead. She is found on a training base, strangled, naked, and tied spread-eagle to poles in the ground. At first it is believed that she was raped, but Sunhill, a rape investigator suggests that she was not due to an absence of numerous clues, including Elizabeth's lack of struggle.

When Brenner and Sunhill go to the General's house they are first met by Capt. Jake Elby (Boyd Kestner), a young, attractive soldier who Sunhill later tells Brenner she thinks is

cute. After their meeting with the General, in which Brenner has promised to find the culprit, they are asked by Col. George Fowler (Clarence Williams III) to notify him before any arrests are made. When asked by Brenner why, he responds “We don’t like our personnel being arrested by outside people without knowing about it. There are three ways of doing things: the right way, the wrong way, and the army way. See that you’re doing it your way Mr. Brenner, but don’t forget about the army way.” During the investigation Brenner and Sunhill go to Elizabeth’s house. In her basement they find a false wall. Behind it is a secret room with a bed, chains, handcuffs, numerous sex toys and a hidden camera. They watch one of the tapes and it shows Elizabeth engaging in S&M acts with numerous men. Further investigation sheds light on the truth behind Elizabeth’s murder. Years before during a night training exercise she was brutally raped by a group of fellow soldiers. They tied her in a spread-eagle pose with poles in the ground and left her there. She was eventually found the next morning by other soldiers and taken to hospital. As she lay in bed, her face swollen and bruised, her father says to her “Try not to think about it anymore. I only want what’s best for you, trust me... don’t ever think about any of this again...it never happened, none of this ever happened.” Angry at her father’s response to her rape, Elizabeth decides to do everything she can to punish him and force him to admit that it happened. The film shows that it was Elizabeth who put herself in the pose that she was found killed in. She asks her father to meet her at the training base and lays in the exact position she was found in after her rape. Still, he refuses to acknowledge it, and he leaves her lying there alone as she begs for him to come back. She is then found by Col. William Kent (Timothy Hutton), who had long been in love with her and would eventually tell Brenner, “she tormented me, she became my obsession.” Elizabeth tells him to go away, that it was between her and her

father, but he does not leave. She tells him “you repulse me, you’re not a soldier, you’re not even a man,” and in anger he strangles her to death.

One of the first things that comes to mind when watching the film is that Elizabeth is hardly in it. We see her at the start, and then half way through the film she is killed, much like Tran in *Casualties of War*. Also, like Tran, her rape all but disappears from the narrative. The film is more focused on who killed her, rather than who raped her. At one point Brenner tells the General that he has a list of the perpetrators but the General is not interested, and in fact appears annoyed at him for discovering the rapists. It is through Capt. Elby, that we first hear anyone aside from Elizabeth admitting to the rape happening. However, he is quick to blame Elizabeth. He tells Brenner and Sunhill, “You know what rape usually is? It’s a woman who changes her mind afterwards.” Elby continues by saying that Elizabeth was “banging his entire male staff.” Sarah Projansky sees this scene as evidence that it is Elizabeth’s presence that provoked the rape (103). She argues that the film suggests, “in the end, the problem is not the military, but the presence of women in the military” (103). Yvonne Tasker asserts that the film “seems to suggest that military women are a marginal presence in need of the sort of paternalistic protection the general has failed to provide for his own daughter” (264-265, 2011). By focusing on the murder rather than the rape the film all but erases it from the plot. Considering the statistics *The Invisible War* provides for military rape, it seems like a wasted opportunity to explore the epidemic of sexual assault in the military.

The way the film depicts Elizabeth lends to a sort of victim blaming. She is portrayed as a sexual deviant, someone who engages in hidden sadomasochistic acts with numerous partners. Tasker sees this portrayal as a “figure of scandalous, undisciplined sexuality” (266, 2011). The finding of her secret room in her house creates a space in which judgment can be placed upon

Elizabeth. It asserts that she has control over her sexuality and depicts that control as something illicit. When Brenner and Sunhill watch the tapes Brenner says, “well, how she died does appear to be linked to how she lived.” He then tells Sunhill that they must keep the tapes secret as long as possible because it could destroy the lives of the men on the tapes, as well as the General. It does not seem to matter that it could destroy Elizabeth’s image, or that the tapes could help with the investigation. The important thing in Brenner’s mind is to protect the men. Victim blaming is a huge concern for rape victims, and particularly for those in the military due to the consequences from the lack of an outside judicial system. In *The Invisible War* many of the women speak about how their careers were threatened if they pursued the charges further. Some victims were even charged with adultery because their rapists were married. *The General’s Daughter* is one of the rare films to actually depict rape in the military, and instead of exploring it from an unbiased perspective it places some of the blame on Elizabeth’s sexuality.

Even though rape is a horrible act to witness on screen, it is necessary to provide filmic representation in order to bring awareness to it. Yvonne Kozlovsky-Golan suggests that rape is still viewed in terms of shame, and that the common response is to silence it (248). She believes that filmmakers do not show the act due to either shame, or respect for survivors; however, by not showing it, the viewer could potentially see the abuse as exaggerated, rather than being a witness to it (248). The rape in *The General’s Daughter* is shown in flashback after Brenner and Sunhill speak with a psychologist who knew Elizabeth. Through the psychologist’s voice-over we are told that at the end of her sophomore year there was a large night exercise with thousands involved. Elizabeth got separated from her group and found herself with a half dozen men. The images coinciding with the voice-over depict Elizabeth being beaten and her clothes being torn. “They raped her almost to death, raped her all night long taking turns. Stripped her, spread-

eagled her and nailed her to the earth with tent pegs,” the psychologist’s voice-over tells us. We see close ups of her hands being bound, flashes of male figures in camouflage. The filming is stylistic, taking away the realism. In the daylight her hand is shown, still bound, as men find her and cut the binds. Sound effects are used in correlation with changing frame rates to stylize the scene, adding a dream-like state to the footage. An overhead shot of her badly beaten face zooms out as the voice-over continues saying that she was hospitalized and treated for venereal disease and pregnancy. At no point during the rape do we see Elizabeth’s face. We do not get to see her fear or feel as though we are with her. Instead we are removed, given only glimpses of bound hands, and flashes of camouflaged men. This allows the audience to see the rape take place without actually seeing it take place. By not focusing on Elizabeth in the scene it makes her invisible and her suffering secondary.

The film is more focused on Brenner’s journey than Elizabeth’s. Even Sunhill becomes secondary to Brenner, and in fact, we find out that she and Brenner used to be romantically linked, creating a sub plot entwined with flirtatious banter and hope for a rekindled romance. This lends the film towards certain romantic genre conventions. Sunhill, although an intelligent woman, finds herself in places where she needs to be rescued by men, or protected by them. As Brenner works the investigation it is his desires, wants and needs that the film values. He becomes the hero because he uncovers the truth and confronts the General while Elizabeth remains a victim. As Brenner salutes Elizabeth’s coffin Tasker says, “In the process male masculinity is also valourized and honored” (267, 2011). By the end of the film Elizabeth’s murderer has confessed and killed himself, but her rapists are never really mentioned again.

At the film’s end a title in the credits tells us, “General Joseph Campbell was court-martialed and found guilty for his involvement in the cover-up of his daughter’s rape. He

subsequently withdrew from public life.” The use of this title card makes it appear as though the film were based on a true story, even though it is not. By claiming that the General has been punished for his involvement the film portrays the military as just, a place where truth will be uncovered and those responsible held accountable. *The Invisible War* tells a different story, where victims are blamed, subjected to harassment after reporting their attacks, and perpetrators are allowed to go unpunished. The last title card in the credits is a quote from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: “Today, nearly 200,000 women serve on active duty in the military services. My sense is we are on a countdown to the days when there won’t be a position in the military that women can’t and won’t occupy.” This quote has no place within the context of the film. The story is not about Elizabeth as a captain, or her military position. It is about her rape and murder. Adding this quote gives the appearance of Hollywood attempting to cater to the public attention given to women in the military at that time. However, instead of creating a film that focuses on a female soldier’s experience, the film relegates Elizabeth to the sideline, and her rape, and murder become a vessel for the heroification and validation of the male soldier to play out.

Although *The General’s Daughter* takes a step further than most war films in depicting a rape within the military, its portrayal of Elizabeth as sexually deviant places blame on her. By focusing the plot around her murder rather than her rape the film neglects to use the opportunity to put military rape in the spotlight. Like *Casualties of War* and *Platoon* the inclusion of rape becomes about the male soldier, not the victim. Elizabeth is never really given an opportunity to be seen by the audience. Rather, she is seen through the eyes of others, the eyes of men like the General, Brenner, Elby and Kent. She, like her rape, becomes invisible and any opportunity to provide a discussion of military rape disappears.

“Just treat me the same. No better. No worse.”

I would now like to turn the focus onto the masculinization of the female soldier and the portrayal of military sexual assault in the film *G.I. Jane*. *G.I. Jane* tells the fictional story of the first woman, Lt. Jordan O’Neill (Demi Moore), to be allowed in the training program for the Navy Combined Reconnaissance Team (a fictional team based on the Navy Seals). O’Neill is picked by Senator Lillian DeHaven (Anne Bancroft) to be the first female team member. From day one of her training O’Neill comes up against sexual harassment at the hands of her fellow soldiers and her superior officer, Master Chief John James Urgayle (Viggo Mortensen). The film opens at a committee hearing where Senator DeHaven challenges the Navy’s gender integration process. She is deeply disturbed by the report and says, “nearly one quarter of all the jobs in the U.S. military are off limits to women and that has got to change.” When we first meet O’Neill she is working at the Naval Intelligence Centre. She is wearing her uniform with her hair in a bun and has pearl earrings. She appears feminine and dedicated to her job. DeHaven and her team look through photos of potential women for the integration trial. They find one who on paper looks great, but is too masculine in image. Then they come across O’Neill who fits their requirements: skilled and feminine.

Throughout the start of her training O’Neill is depicted in opposition to the men around her, particularly the aggressive Urgayle. T.S Nelson, in discussing basic training, says that references are constantly made to the masculine, and that the feminine is seen as something “weaker, powerless and physically unequal to their male counterparts” (67). As they go through the grueling training O’Neill’s long hair gets in the way. She is shunned by the other soldiers who tell her that she does not belong there because she is a woman, while simultaneously being

treated differently by her superiors due to her gender. O'Neill goes to her commanding officer and says that she has been given a double standard because she is a woman and that it is his fault; he has set her up as an outsider. He tells her that he resents that he has to cater to having her in the military. She tells him she just wants to be treated the same, no better, no worse. In order to take control over her image O'Neill goes into a barbershop and shaves off her hair. This transformation moves her from the feminine to the masculine. Peach argues that war has always been a theatre in which men can demonstrate their masculinity, and that masculinity has been a prerequisite for success, whereas femininity is belittled and any such traits are suppressed (161). Tasker suggests, "Since masculine is commonly reserved as a term to describe men and their relationships to each other, female characters in the movies are often, by default, left with a femininity constructed in opposition, pieced together out of remnants and discarded values" (214-215 2002). O'Neill's transformation acts as a bridge between the feminine and the masculine. She sees that in order to succeed she must expunge her femininity and mimic the men around her. Tasker asserts that this transformation is physical in her distancing herself from her femininity and also gendered, in the way that she shaves her head in order to integrate herself into the masculine environment. (245, 2011). Upon physically assimilating into the group she is able to prove herself an equal among the men, and earn their respect.

By incorporating this physical transformation the film places itself in the position of viewing the feminine as weak and the masculine as strong. Yes, O'Neill is a woman who proves herself during training, but only once she has taken a more masculine approach. Ilene Feinman claims, "In *G.I. Jane*, a woman can be a warrior if she can become the man..." (70). O'Neill is unable to maintain her femininity if she wishes to succeed among the men. Therefore the film, although it appears to make a case for women in the military, is actually echoing the very

misogyny it is attempting to fight. A series of shots depict O'Neill working out in short shorts and a crop top, the camera sexualizing her, intercut with her at training. This sets up a mixed presentation of O'Neill. She as a character is attempting to assimilate into the masculine culture of the army. She is shown doing one-armed push ups, her strength on display. However, the choice of costuming along with the camerawork create an opportunity for O'Neill to be seen through the male gaze, to be objectified rather than viewed as equal to her fellow male soldiers.

During a training exercise O'Neill is put in charge of a squad. They are taken at one point in a mock kidnapping. They are all put in a cage and are individually interrogated. When O'Neill is taken inside for questioning, Urgayle hits her, his attacks becoming more aggressive as she refuses to give him information. Outside the men listen as she is being beaten. Another superior tries to call Urgayle off and is sent outside. Urgayle throws O'Neill outside and puts her head in water, holding it down, while asking for information from the men. When that does not work he simulates raping her in front of the men. He leans her over a barrel, forcing her down with her hands behind her back. He takes a knife and cuts her belt, exposing her. The following dialogue takes place:

Urgayle: "Ever think about what happens when you're captured Lieutenant?"

O'Neill: "Oh yeah, just like the men do?"

Urgayle: "We practice these things so you know what to expect."

The other men appear disgusted at Urgayle's actions, but she tells them not to say anything. She fights back and hits Urgayle with her head. He falls back and she knees him in the groin. He hits her back until she falls down. One of the men says in anger to Urgayle, "You're a real fucken hero man." The rest of the squad appears to be disappointed in Urgayle's attack of O'Neill. Urgayle says "her presence makes us all vulnerable," to which O'Neill replies "suck my dick."

The men applaud and begin chanting, “suck my dick” in chorus. The use of the line “suck my dick” positions O’Neill in the masculine, making her equal with the men in both skill and gender. The cheering response of the men assumes their acceptance of her into the masculinity. However what becomes apparent is how little the simulated rape bears on the plot. It is never discussed again, nor is Urgayle punished for it. Instead, he along with everyone else celebrates her success, and she is shown to be grateful for his guidance. The film therefore fails to bring to light the realities of sexual violence against women in the military; instead it focuses on removing the feminine entirely.

In order for O’Neill to succeed in the film she must stop being a woman. She goes through a physical transformation and is able to gain the respect of her fellow soldiers when she embraces a more masculine approach, as is shown with her “suck my dick” retort. When it comes to the fictionalized female soldier, Tasker notes, “On the one hand she is associated with sex; she embodies a sexuality with the potential to disrupt established masculine hierarchies. On the other she is associated with androgyny and gender confusion; as tough and ambitious, “one of the boys,” the fictional military woman can function as a soldier to the extent that she is not a woman” (257, 2011). O’Neill must become masculine to be equal to men. When she appears to be gaining success however, she must be reminded that she is a woman. The simulated rape is designed to do this. Tasker suggests that women are either raped or threatened with rape when they become too successful in military narratives (257, 2011). O’Neill embraces the masculine and finds success, is threatened with rape while being reminded of her ‘weaknesses’ as a woman, and must re-embrace the masculine to overcome her attacker. The rape therefore is not in the film to bring to light the harsh realities of sexual violence in the military, instead it functions to remind the viewer that no matter how masculine O’Neill gets, she can always be dominated

sexually by a man. In order to be successful she must shed her perceived feminine weaknesses, but these weaknesses can be forced upon her at any time through the threat of sexual assault.

“Perhaps more women will be raped”

During World War II women were not given the opportunity to fight alongside the men though they proved their strengths in other ways: working in factories, running farms, and healing the wounded on the front lines. In the decades that followed women showed a desire for military inclusion. The combat exclusion policy kept them from being able to fight in combat zones but they continued to play important roles, such as flight rescue operations during the Gulf War. As the number of women in the military increased so too did the public’s awareness of the female soldier. Until 2013 women were excluded from combat due to the perceived danger they could face, and yet women in the U.S. military were daily threatened with sexual harassment and assault from within their own forces.

As I have detailed throughout this chapter, the issues of rape and sexual violence in the military have been invisible for the most part. Hollywood has failed to represent military sexual assault in a way that opens up the discourse further. Kirby Dick’s *The Invisible War* is the first film that details the extent of military sexual violence. Through the use of statistics from the U.S. government, the film depicts an epidemic of assault that is difficult to argue with. It has become a part of different political discussions and has started its own movement¹⁴. Hollywood war films depicting the Gulf and Iraq wars eliminate rape from the plot, choosing instead to focus on the male soldier’s perspective.

¹⁴ Visit <http://www.notinvisible.org/about> for more information about the movement as well as the creation of the Artemis Rising Invisible War Recovery Program™.

The General's Daughter, although portraying rape in the military, relegates the issue to the background in favour of focusing on the murder of Elizabeth. This creates a situation in which Brenner can emerge as the hero. Elizabeth remains the victim of what the film determines as her own circumstances. She is blamed somewhat for her own death because of her sexuality. The inclusion of her as a dominatrix has no importance in the plot except to paint her as deviant. Her rape and murder become entangled in this portrayal. Rather than allowing her to be completely innocent, she is depicted mainly through the eyes of men, and the film takes on the male gaze. Her rape is portrayed through stylistic filmmaking, taking away the realism of the attack. The film portrays her as a victim, sexually deviant, and the daughter of a general, it never really allows her the opportunity to portray herself beyond these things. Her rape is made invisible as her sexuality and murder take center stage.

G.I. Jane depicts a female soldier who can only succeed by relinquishing her femininity. As she transforms physically to her masculine surroundings she sheds what the film perceives as her feminine weaknesses. The film ends up taking part in the very misogyny it is trying to counter. O'Neill is allowed to be equal to the men but when she becomes too successful she is threatened with rape. In both *The General's Daughter* and *G.I. Jane*, Elizabeth and O'Neill are sexually assaulted because of their presence in the military. Whereas Elizabeth is brutally raped by her fellow soldiers, O'Neill is publicly humiliated with the threat of rape by her superior officer. However, both films fail to use the opportunity to bring forward a realistic portrayal of military rape. Instead, Elizabeth's character is called into question due to her sex life, and O'Neill's assault completely disappears from the plot afterwards.

In 1991 Susan Jeffords asked what would happen when women are finally able to enter into military combat. She posits varying scenarios: perhaps opinions will change; perhaps it will

increase the equality for women in other fields; perhaps there will be opportunity to reform masculinity; “and perhaps more women will be raped” (115, 1991). At the end of *The Invisible War* the survivor’s lawsuit, that a group of military rape victims had come together to present to congress, was dismissed under the ruling that “rape is an occupational hazard of the military.” What the documentary has shown is that the film industry has the ability to make change. It is a medium that can reach the majority and can provide for victims the opportunity to have a voice. Hollywood has long been rewriting military history. It is time for military film narratives to start telling the truth. There is place for the male hero, but there must also be a place for the female soldier. She has been fighting wars long before she was given access to the military and she is fighting a daily war within the military that society has ignored for too long. When Hollywood starts depicting the reality of sexual violence in war as well as the rape epidemic in the U.S. military then perhaps people will demand change. If we can acknowledge that it is a part of the past and present, then perhaps it does not have to be a part of the future.

Conclusion

It is impossible within the structural limitations of this thesis to cover the magnitude of wartime rape in history, and its portrayal throughout cinema. Instead within the framework of those limitations I chose to focus around sexual violence in contemporary American war cinema. This allows for in depth analysis of what turns out to be incredibly limited resources. What started out as a frustration, ended up being the very argument I wanted to make: the representation of sexual violence is invisible in both contemporary American war cinema, and in academic research.

Throughout this thesis I have endeavored to explore historical accounts of war rape in order to truly understand the scope of the epidemic. While I did not have the space in order to highlight the numerous wars where rape has taken place, I focused on the ones where we have evidence of rape occurring. As discussed in Chapter One, it is difficult to know the true extent of wartime rape due to the silence of the victims. Forced prostitution and comfort women during World War II have not commonly been studied as cases of rape, though they are, undeniably. Prostitution during the Vietnam War is often shown in cinema. The tracking camera work in the scene with the prostitute in *Full Metal Jacket* implies agency, that she has control of the situation. This is rarely the case. More often than not these women, and young girls were forced into these scenarios either by circumstance or a dominating other. Too often rape is seen as a casualty of war obscuring the reality of the ever-lasting effects it has on victims, their families, and their communities.

In Chapter One I looked not only at the history of war rape, but also at the literature available on rape in war cinema. Considering there is limited representation of cinematic war rape it is not surprising that there is a lack of literature on the topic. There is academic discussion of sexual violence in cinema, as shown with the example of the film *Irreversible*; however, with

war cinema rape is often neglected from the plot, and therefore academic discussion is lacking. The question becomes, what needs to happen first? Does contemporary American cinema need to incorporate more accurate war stories into film plots in order for academics to have a platform from which to explore? Or do academics need to invest more into the topic in order for Hollywood to respond?

Something that became evident in the research of Chapter One is the way in which cinema, history and the media can blend together. Take for example the case of Abu Ghraib. As discussed in the chapter the assaults at the prison had a resounding impact. The media focus on female soldiers challenged the perceived notion that women were not capable of such sexual atrocities. History up to that point had painted women as victims, not aggressors. Ehrenreich touched on this with her discussion of how men had been shown as perpetual perpetrators and women as perpetual victims (2). Then there is the change in cinema. In 2012 Kathryn Bigelow released her film *Zero Dark Thirty*, in which Maya (Jessica Chastain) is shown in a room watching the torture of a soldier in a Pakistan black site. She is portrayed as being horrified by the assaults, and yet when asked for a bucket of water, which will be used in the waterboarding of the prisoner, she obliges. Later in the film, as her desperation for answers increase she becomes the one ordering the assault on prisoners. It is difficult not to draw a line between Lynndie England of the Abu Ghraib scandal, and Maya. Though Maya is portrayed as a hero who is trying to find Osama Bin Laden, her prisoners are still being assaulted, their human rights denied. Would a character like Maya have been depicted in cinema had it not been for the Abu Ghraib scandal? I would argue that the scandal opened social awareness to the realities that women are as capable as men when it comes to violence in times of war.

In Chapter Two focus is placed entirely on rape in the Vietnam War. Of the wars of the last hundred years, the Vietnam War has a precarious place in public memory. It appears to be the war most would like to forget. For many Americans this is possible. The younger generations did not fight the war, nor did their fathers, and it has become more a part of cinematic memory than historical. For the Vietnamese whose homes were devastated by the war it is not so simple to forget, there is a living memory there. Where the war lives now for most Americans is in cinema, in films like *Platoon* and *Apocalypse Now*. Contemporary American cinema has an ability to rewrite history through its portrayal of this war on screen.

Gina Marie Weaver's concept of the erasure of rape in the Vietnam War extends to filmic representation. As discussed in Chapter Two, this idea that rape has been erased from history and memory is evident in the films based around the war. In this chapter I focused on *Casualties of War* and *Platoon* because they are the main two films I could find that actually portrayed rape in the war, and yet those portrayals ended up obscuring the assaults due to the camera work, and the way in which they became vessels for the white, male soldiers to become heroes. The victims remain for the most part invisible.

I could not explore rape in the Vietnam War without asking the question of why this happened. How did these boys, because for the most part they were just boys, go from being teenagers on American soil, to violent perpetrators in Vietnam? The idea of the collective is perhaps the only way to explain some of the behavior. As discussed in Chapter Two, this notion of the collective means that for some their fellow soldiers came to stand in for family, and the rules they created outweighed the rules they followed back home. In *Casualties of War* the effect of the collective is shown with the character of Diaz. At first he is horrified by the idea of raping Tran and vows not to take part. Then it seems he is more afraid of Meserve than his own

morality, and so joins the others in the assault. Is this what caused these boys to become monsters? Were they driven by fear? A desire to feel included in the group? Or did they value the lives of the Vietnamese so little that rape and murder became the norm? The only way to understand how events like the Mai Lai Massacre or the rape and murder of Phan Thi Mao could have happened is to make it a part of historical memory, of public memory. To attempt to forget these events not only erases them from history, but also allows for them to happen again. The act of rape cannot become synonymous with the act of war.

In Chapter Three focus shifted from a specific war to sexual violence in the American military. The documentary *The Invisible War* was one of the original resources that inspired this thesis. Never before had I encountered information like that given in the documentary. The pervasiveness of sexual assault within the American military was astonishing, but more so was the lack of accountability by military personnel, and the almost non-existence of consequences for the aggressors. It shone a light on the realities of what it is to be a woman in the military today. Throughout the third chapter I used the documentary as an example of not only the presence of women in the military, but also the epidemic of sexual violence. It left me with the question of why contemporary American cinema often denies representation of women soldiers, particularly in the Gulf and Iraq Wars. In the chapter I discussed the role women played in these wars, yet too often films depicting them relegate women to the roles of mothers, wives, reporters or victims. Rape and sexual assault are also missing from filmic portrayals, as though they were missing from the war experience also. This of course is not the case. *The Invisible War* tells us that the military has a long history of sexual assault within its own ranks. So why is this missing from cinematic representations of war experiences? And whose responsibility is it to make the necessary changes so that the truth of war rape is accurately depicted in cinema?

Hollywood, as the dominators of global commercial cinema, has an obligation to tell factual war stories. The tendency for Hollywood to rewrite history has a long-lasting, negative impact on society. By blending truth with fiction there is a great risk of obscuring the harsh realities of war with fictional portrayal. That is, of course, not to say that there is no place for fiction in the re-telling of war stories, rather that there is a need for more accurate portrayals to balance out the fictional. When contemporary American war cinema focuses solely on the male soldiers, it invalidates the complex, rich histories of any other outside the white, male war experience.

As discussed in detail, rape is a significant part of war and yet is significantly under-represented in contemporary American war cinema. In *Platoon* the rape scene is used as a means of furthering the storyline of Taylor, giving him a moment to shine as a hero. The victims stay not only nameless, but also faceless, removing them almost entirely from the story. What this does is make the rape invisible. The film presents it to the audience in such a way, using particular camera work, and obscuring the view of the child who was being attacked, that it is difficult for the scene to have any lasting effect on the audience. The surrounding violence of the war overtakes this one and the scene is left behind not only in the memory of the audience, but in the story also.

Casualties of War depicts the rapes from far away, keeping Tran distant from the camera, her voice silenced, her facial expressions denied to the audience. We are shown Eriksson's reactions, not hers, placing him as the victim. It is his life that the audience is told to worry for; he is the one taking the risk to tell the story of what happened to her. Half way through the film Tran has died, and her name only given at the very end of the film. The audience never sees her family after she is taken; we do not experience their grief or suffering, just as we never really get

to experience Tran's. It was never Tran's story. It was always Eriksson's. The kidnapping, the rape, and the eventual murder play out on a stage that allows for Eriksson to rise up as a hero. Although the events of the film are based on the kidnapping, rape and murder of Phan Thi Mao, there is more fiction than historical accuracy in the film. By denying the audience Tran's perspective she becomes a part of the story, not the story itself. Her rape is made invisible by the film's focus on Eriksson and the rapists, not only through the storyline, but also through the cinematography.

In *G.I. Jane* factual accuracy is so far removed from the storyline that the film creates its own military unit that does not actually exist, in order to portray something that has never happened. In the film O'Neill is depicted as an intelligent, beautiful, feminine woman. These are the traits that make her an ideal candidate for the program, according to the dialogue of Lillian DeHaven. Throughout the film the feminine is shown as weakness, and eventually O'Neill overcomes this weakness by becoming more masculine. When her superior officer Urgayle simulates rape on her she responds with her newfound masculine strength, hitting him in the head with her own, and telling him to "suck my dick". The film's statement seems to be that in order for women to join equally with men in the military they must deny their femininity for the masculine. Women are welcome, as long as they are not 'women'.

The General's Daughter, like *Casualties of War* denies the rape victim any perspective. Like O'Neill, Campbell is shown as an intelligent, beautiful, feminine woman in the military. However, she is also later depicted as a sexual deviant whose taste for the more marginal sexual experiences leads Brenner to say that she had died the way she lived. She is, therefore, according to Brenner, somewhat responsible for her own rape and eventual murder. Like Tran's rape, the camera work used in Campbell's rape removes the audience from the true horror of the assault.

Close-ups on hands, rather than her facial expressions, and stylized filmmaking allows the audience a distance from the attack and from the reality of it. Campbell, like Tran, is killed in the film, and her perspective never given. Instead she is remembered only by the men around her. The denial of her perspective lends to a masculine portrayal of her experiences. Her rape is also not the prominent case that is being solved it is her murder. The two are not connected, and yet we are given a conclusion to the murder, but never to the rape. The film does not depict any consequences for her rapists. Her rape is made invisible in the story and she merely becomes the vessel for which Brenner can redeem himself and become a hero.

Change is necessary in contemporary American war cinema. Although depictions of rape are troubling, they are a part of war, and therefore need to be a part of the wars we re-tell through the screen. The absence of accurate representations of not only sexual violence but also women in war in general are damaging to society as a whole. There needs to be perspective given to more than just the white, male soldier. The majority of today's audience will only see war through the screen. Therefore, the stories we tell have an impact on social memory and understanding of foreign events. In order for war rape to become a part of our past we must shine a light on it presently, and perhaps one of the most effective ways to do this is through the Hollywood lens.

It is not only Hollywood's responsibility, however. There is an obligation for academics to investigate more the truth of war rape. In the early stages of researching this thesis it became painfully apparent that there was a significant lack of research done in the areas of wartime rape, and representations of sexual violence on screen. In Chapter One I detailed the literature available on the history of war rape. Despite there being historical accounts of the magnitude of sexual assaults through war history, little academic focus is given to the topic. There are

numerous books on war and military history, but too often chapters on sexual violence are limited or missing entirely. Why is rape so often an afterthought in the research of war history? An argument could be made that it is due to the difficulty in finding evidence, since so many victims remain silent. I would argue, however, that academics have long researched challenging topics that have required difficult processes for finding factual accuracy.

There are, of course, academics that have dedicated time and energy to the epidemic that is war rape. My argument throughout this thesis is supported by many of these academics. However, there is a need for more. Brownmiller's *Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape* is an essential start to any academic's journey through the history of rape. Projansky, Weaver, Tasker and Skjelsbaek have continued from this with their own research whether it be from a historical perspective, as Weaver takes with rape in the Vietnam War, and Skjelsbaek explores with Bosnia-Herzegovina, or a cultural perspective as Tasker and Projansky take with their connections to rape and the screen. Going forward there is a need for academics to engage more with the continued abuse that is happening in war today. The more light we bring to this abuse, the harder it is to ignore. It needs to be a regular part of our discussion of war. Only then will contemporary cinema have a platform from which to represent these accounts on screen. Academics have a duty to be a part of the necessary change in the way we talk about wartime rape. It can no longer just be an afterthought in research.

The military has a significant part of the responsibility in ending military sexual assault. In Chapter Three I discussed *The Invisible War* and the astounding statistics on military sexual violence. The procedures within the military on how they deal with sexual assault do not work. There have been numerous positive outcomes since the documentary's release. The media began to report more on sexual assault in the military. There have also been policy changes made

within the military. According to Steve Pond, who wrote an article about the film, Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, announced a change in policy after watching the documentary. This new policy means that decisions relating to assaults will now be made higher up the chain of command, a decision made partly due to Panetta's reaction from seeing the film ("Military Rape Documentary 'Invisible War' Leads to Policy Changes Before its Opening). Hollywood and the military have always had a complex relationship, and this situation shows that film can have a positive impact on procedural policies. If contemporary cinema were to engage in more accurate portrayals of military sexual violence then there is potential for more positive changes to occur. The more that people know about the realities of wartime sexual assault, the greater the platform for discussion and change.

Finally, there is one other group that has a responsibility to help bring about the necessary changes to filmic representations of wartime sexual violence: the audience. We, as viewers, must open our minds to watching these scenarios on screen. We need to allow ourselves the discomfort of being witness to some of humanity's darkest moments. Film has never been shy of depicting violence. We have become an audience accustomed to a certain level of realism in war cinema. Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* was critically acclaimed for such depictions. Sexual violence carries a different level of discomfort for viewers, and that is perhaps why filmmakers often choose not to show such scenes, even when they are a part of the history the film is telling. On the other side of that is, as discussed in Chapter One, the risk of having a rape scene become too exploitative, removing the horror from it and replacing that with a certain voyeurism. It is a precarious balance that needs to be created in order for a rape scene to allow the audience to share an experience with a victim, while also allowing them space and time to

remove themselves from that depiction. It is an important depiction nonetheless. Only through our discomfort as an audience can we begin to understand the true magnitude of wartime rape.

What I propose is not an easy feat. It is a change in ideology needed, and those are not simple to achieve. They are not impossible though, history has shown us this. At the end of her book, Brownmiller states the following:

Fighting Back. On a multiplicity of levels, that is the activity we must engage in, together, if we – women - are to redress the imbalance and rid ourselves and men of the ideology of rape.

Rape can be eradicated, not merely controlled or avoided on an individual basis, but the approach must be long-range and cooperative, and must have the understanding and good will of many men as well as women. (404).

Perhaps one day film will only need to depict wartime rape as history, rather than the ongoing present struggle we face today. Before it becomes history, however, it must first become a part of our collective understanding of war. Only after we acknowledge it, can we eradicate it.

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