



T. S. Nelson. *For Love of Country: Confronting Rape and Sexual Harassment in the U.S. Military.* Binghamton and London: Haworth Maltreatment and Trauma Press, 2002. xv + 302 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7890-1222-7; \$95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7890-1221-0.



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The Enemy Within

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T. S. Nelson's detailed account of rape and sexual harassment in the American armed forces is a welcome addition to the literature on sexual violence. Nelson states that her book is "a documentation of the vast problem of sexual abuse in the military" (p. xi). It relies predominantly on the personal accounts of victims, buttressed by military documents, rape reports, press releases, news stories and other research studies. She herself is a psychotherapist specialising in sexual trauma recovery, and served in the United States Army for four years. Interestingly though, she does not discuss her own experience of being a woman in the military, nor explain this exclusion.

Nelson's book is a sensitive and sometimes moving approach to the subject matter, with a good mix of personal accounts and supporting official documents and statistics. However, it could have benefited from a more detailed methodological discussion than is provided. In the preface she explains that the participants in her study came from each of the military service branches, were women and men (though mostly women), officers and enlisted, victims and their families, non-victims (and pre-

sumably some abusers), and from diverse backgrounds, races, occupations and ages. Participants generally spoke anonymously, via letters, emails, responses to her research questionnaire, phone interviews, on Internet websites and so on. The study involved five years of research and over two hundred research participants (pp. xii-xiv). About halfway through the book she reflectively notes that although her study received very few positive statements about the military's response to victims who reported an abusive incident, one must be careful not to generalise too much "based solely on the input from a self-selected sample population" (pp. 133-134). Further, she comments that "persons who respond to such studies may be more likely to generate negative feedback. Persons with a positive or more neutral experience may not feel as compelled to speak out or to participate in such research. Nonetheless, the experiences and the feedback of any of the victims of abuse who provided input for the study should not be arbitrarily discounted" (p. 133). The work is clearly victim-centred, although she utilises statistics and reports and so on "to offer a more complete picture of the problem and of some potential resolutions," she also feels that "[t]here are times when some-

one's word is good enough." She feels that it is important to learn from the perspectives of victim-survivors about what needs to be done to improve the response of the military to victims and offenders as well as to the issue as a whole, adding that "[w]e might also learn how to put a stop to this cycle of abuse" (p. xiv). She makes the valid point that drawing heavily on the voices of victims "provides[s] an inside perspective that has virtually gone unheard of until now" (p. xi). While I have no problem whatsoever with a victim-centred approach that privileges the stories of victim-survivors in their own words, nowhere does Nelson discuss her research questionnaire or detail how her study was carried out in any greater depth than that mentioned above; this is problematic.

In my view, the major flaw in this work is that Nelson does not really address why rape and sexual harassment, primarily directed at women, is so prevalent in the military. This failure, naturally, also leads to rather thin policy suggestions. She simply concludes that "the U.S. military still has a long way to go to confront the enemy within and to achieve zero tolerance [on rape and harassment]. To do so, each and every service member should be valued.... No incident of abuse or harassment against another person should ever be blamed on the victim, go unnoticed, or be minimized" (p. 280). Nelson writes in very patriotic terms about the U.S. military, the values it supposedly fights for, and the people who enlist in it; she thus views sexual violence and harassment as constituting a loss of "honor" for those servicemen who commit such crimes, for those who cover them up and do not take them seriously, and for the institution as a whole. To her, they represent "a breakdown of values, a disconnection from the military's true mission, and a loss of honor for those involved" (p. 3). She clearly wants to rescue the military from this problem without challenging its fundamental basis or processes, and ultimately believes that this can be achieved; she argues that sexual assault and harassment "should be exposed—not to bring discredit to the military, but to strengthen the conviction to confront the problem" (p. 5). Thus the stories of victims "need to be told not to degrade the military, but as a step toward addressing the problem and restoring honor and integrity within the Armed Forces.... We owe this much to the women and men who, for love of country, have sacrificed and endured so much" (p. xiv). Further, "[f]rom at least one veteran [herself], hope for change does exist" (p. 280). Optimistically, she maintains that "[t]he military has faced some difficult social issues in the past, including racial discrimination, the integration of women, and the ongoing debate of accepting homosex-

uals into the service. It can rise to this challenge as well as strengthen the core values upon which our nation and our military services were founded" (p. 7). However, it can be (and has been) argued that the inability of such a masculinist institution as the military to properly integrate women into it in fact partially accounts for the disturbing prevalence of sexual violence towards women in the military.

Nelson does explicitly ask the question "[w]hy, then, is this [sexual abuse in the military] still such a pervasive, ongoing problem?" (p. 12) and asserts that some of the personal accounts in the book address this, yet the book does not in fact adequately answer this question—the question which is, after all, the most fundamental one of all. My impression is that despite her strong position against rape and sexual harassment, the author's ongoing overall commitment to and support of the U.S. military has prevented her from seriously engaging with the arguments of academics such as Cynthia Enloe (whose work she does briefly cite on p. 98, and who is listed in the bibliography) and others. Enloe is one of many feminist academics who investigate and critique militarism and its relationship to women and gender, constructions of gender within military institutions, and links between this and violence against women both within and outside the military.[1] Nelson also cites Linda Bird Francke's argument that rape was not explicitly considered a war crime until 1996 because "[s]exually assaulting women was ... a universally accepted by-product of military male behaviour",[2] but then states that "[a] more likely reason is because so few victims report the atrocities done to them" (p. 35). She does not further engage with this or with similar arguments. However, I would point out that like Francke, many feminists have argued that rape has long been viewed as a "bounty" of war and a "tolerated outlet" for soldiers,[3] a "just reward for war weary troops" and a means of "troop mollification".[4] It has even been argued that rape has historically been an unspoken part of the "rules" of war.[5] The experiences of women in the U.S. and other militaries show that if all this is true, it applies to one's "own" women, even female soldiers, just as it applies to "enemy" women during war, and that it occurs in peacetime as well as wartime, within the militarist and masculinist atmosphere of military institutions.

Nelson's overall failure to engage with the debates touched upon above strikes me as slightly odd, given that she does in places recognise that sexual violence against women is in fact a part of military culture itself: "there was ... reluctance on the part of Department of Defense officials and high-ranking military leaders to accept that

sexual abuse was indeed a part of the military culture.... Addressing the culture that tolerates the abuse is imperative to resolving this problem” (p. 48). Indeed, the experiences of many of her respondents illustrate the endemic nature of sexual harassment and violence in the military—for example, “[i]f you’re a woman in the military, sexual harassment is a part of the job” (p. 105). Nelson also states that “[a]s long as members of the predominate [sic] military culture continue to harbor underlying sentiments against women and homosexuals in the armed forces, the sexual harassment, coercion, violence, and potentially lethal attacks will likely continue within the ranks” (p. 63). She very briefly addresses the issue of gender socialising in the military, noting the “feminising” of male recruits—for example, referring to male troops as “ladies,” “girls,” “pussies” and so on as a way to degrade them. She notes that the male stereotype is “one that is strong, powerful, and in control, whereas the female stereotype is considered weaker, powerless, and physically unequal to their male counterparts. This particular aspect of military culture serves only to complicate the problems of integrating women as equal partners in the military” (p. 67). However, once again she comments simply that “[s]ome would argue that such attitudes about men and women contribute to the violent victimization of women in the military” (p. 67), but does not further elaborate this nor engage with it. Shortly thereafter she reports that “[s]ome speculate that the devaluation of females is the root cause of the military’s problems of widespread violence against women,” but herself contends that in fact “like any other social dilemma, many factors ultimately contribute to the problem of sexual assault in the military” (p. 70). If she disagrees with this analysis, what is her own analysis? What exactly are these “many factors” that she does not detail? Finally, Nelson also repeatedly refers to sexual violence in the military as “uncontrolled violence” (see pp. 4, 26-28, 42), which many others, as well as myself, would take exception to. Rape, molestation and sexual harassment are usually deliberate expressions of power and dominance on the part of the perpetrator, and as such it seems inappropriate to refer to this as “uncontrolled violence.”

Despite these criticisms and to be more generous to Nelson, it should be reasserted that the goal of her work is, primarily, merely to document the occurrence of sexual violence and harassment in the U.S. military through the stories and voices of victim-survivors. This is a very important project and the author should be highly praised both for achieving her aim with sensitiv-

ity, and for providing another potentially healing space for victim-survivors to share their stories; her commitment to the victims she writes about cannot be questioned. The book may be of value to psychologists and counsellors treating victims of rape by members of the military, as it will give them a deeper understanding of the context in which the rape occurred, and an insight into the possible mixed and confused feelings of servicewomen victims. It should also be used by government and military agencies in formulating policy on rape and sexual harassment in the military. Finally and perhaps most importantly, it is likely to be of great value to survivors of rape or harassment in the military, as it clearly demonstrates that victims, who may never have told anyone of their experiences, are not alone. However, I still feel that the project would have benefited from the addition of a greater analysis of why sexual violence against women is such a pervasive problem in the U.S. military (and in many other militaries), with reference to the ever-growing body of feminist work on gender, the military, militarism and war. This may well be an inappropriate undertaking for a psychotherapist alone; perhaps the work could have achieved this with the addition of a secondary author from a sociology/political science disciplinary background.

Notes

[1]. See for example Cynthia Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women’s Lives* (London: Pandora Press, 1983); *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[2]. *Ground Zero: The Gender Wars in the Military* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), p. 160.

[3]. Cheryl Benard, “Rape as Terror: The Case of Bosnia,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 6:1 (Spring 1994), pp. 29-43.

[4]. Tamara L Tompkins, “Prosecuting Rape as a War Crime: Speaking the Unspeakable,” *Notre Dame Law Review*, 70:4 (1995), pp. 845-890.

[5]. Ruth Seifert, “War and Rape: A Preliminary Analysis,” in *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Alexandra Stiglmayer, ed. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), pp. 54-72.

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