

# Media Criticism

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## Conflicting Feminist Perspectives

Rhetorical feminist perspective is becoming an increasingly ambiguous term. The feminist focus of the last 20 years has produced a variety of articles from different perspectives. Bonnie Dow acknowledges differing arguments in her article, "Hegemony, Feminist Criticism, and 'The Mary Tyle Moore' Show". She mentions feminist critics De Lauretis, Kuhn and Mulvey and their view that popular culture is "largely opposed to valorization of the female in any form" (Dow, 1988, p. 102). Other perspectives from Byars and Raykow call for a resistant interpretation through which the discourse of the dominant ideology can be read through an empowering lens for women. Additionally, Modleski's perspective deals with the feminization of male patriarchy in films as a post-feministic response to the women's movement. More recently, Baehr and Dyer have broadened their perspective of feminist criticism to women's situations as writers, actors, producers and audiences.

These perspectives add to the continuing dialogue and analysis of women in regard to their roles in society. As a result, women's place in society and the conception of womanhood has become an object of argument within feminist perspectives. As Dow noted, traditional feminist issues involved "equal pay, equal opportunity or sexual freedom" (p. 99). Today, feminist perspectives involve a much broader spectrum regarding patriarchal issues, supposed oppression of women within marriage and within the nuclear family, whether the definition of womanhood is socially constructed or biologically defined--just to name a few. As I said earlier, not all feminists agree on differing perspectives and we see this tension reflected in the ambiguity of feminist and feminist film criticism. I touched on this concept in my previous paper, noting, for example, how some writers accept Modleski's "male gaze" theory and her notions of post-feminism, while other scholars such as A. Kaplan and V. Tjissen reject it, preferring to focus on the transcendence of sexual difference.

## Conflicting Feminist Perspectives in "G.I. Jane"

Differing feminist perspectives can be interpreted and argued in the film, G.I. Jane. Dr. Caryl Rivers, a journalism professor from Boston University heralded the depiction of Demi Moore's character (the first woman accepted into the Navy S.E.A.L.S.), as "the dawn of (the) Millennial Woman" (San Jose Mercury News, p. 1P). Rivers claims that the film reflects

"... a major shift in gender patterns in the industrialized world. A new reproductive paradigm is developing, and as it does, past constraints on female behavior are easing." Rivers applauds the fact that women are "moving increasingly into ... combat, but they are also engaging in ... risky behavior. They are driving more aggressively and getting into more accidents, taking part in risky sports such as mountain climbing and boxing. And around the world female involvement in violent crime is rising rapidly. Women are rejecting ages-old arguments about their physical frailty."

Surely, many feminists and feminist film critics would agree with Rivers' analysis. Indeed, as I watched the film in the movie theatre, the audience reacted enthusiastically to the movie's stance regarding women's capabilities in combat. I even found myself cheering for Moore as she proved herself just as capable and tough as men. The film is full of contrasts between the softness and hardness of Moore's body. We see the beautiful feminine curves of her breasts and bottom along with the hardness of her rippling muscles. Thus, we (men and women) see the images of the female body out of the traditional contexts of the "male gaze" theory (where men consciously and unconsciously control and create images of women that satisfy the desires and needs of men). We delight in her femininity, but are proud of her physical strength at the same time. Moore seems to say through visual imagery: "These are my breasts--yes, they are beautiful and sexy, but I am more than just breasts." The audience is asked to acknowledge her femaleness, but in addition, to look beyond it. However, herein lies the problem and thus my research questions: How does the text ultimately fail feminism? Are women searching for a usable feminist text? What is a useful feminist text? What feminist text would stand the test of time? That is not to say that G.I. Jane's definition of women doesn't have merit as it discards the traditional notion of women and proclaims women as physically and mentally able as men. Yet, I see the need for a united, congruent definition of what a woman is. To achieve this, feminists need to change the focus on definition in terms of defining women within the circumference of the abilities of men.

## **OPPOSITIONAL IDEOLOGY**

The feminist shows of the 1960's and 70's, That Girl, starring Marlo Thomas, as a young single woman trying to live independently, and The Mary Tyler Moore Show, starring Mary Tyler Moore as an older, educated, unmarried, successful career woman, did not stand the test of time, nor live up to feminist ideology. Marlo Thomas' character relied heavily upon the help of her boyfriend and father. Whenever she got in trouble, the men

in her life (both older, wiser and more experienced) were there to "bail her out". The series ended when Thomas became engaged to her boyfriend and they supposedly lived "happily ever after". Conversely, Mary Tyler Moore had no television father or boyfriend though her boss, Lou Grant, acted as a father figure on more than one episode as critic Bonnie Dow points out in her piece, "Hegemony, Feminist Criticism, and The Mary Tyler Moore Show". Dow exposes the hegemonic devices that contradict the progressive feminist premise of the show and how it "offers a traditional picture of the female within the family through Mary Richards's implicit roles as wife, mother, and daughter. The relationship of Mary Richards to the larger female community reinforces the public/private dichotomy that devalues women's relationships as well as positioning Mary as an idealized token version of the successful, single woman" (Dow, p. 105). As I stated in my previous paper, we see the same hegemonic devices at work in the 1980's television show China Beach where Vande Berg highlights the notion of feminized patriarchy which serves to undermine feminist ideology.

In today's latest feminist film, G.I. Jane, the problem lies in the film's efforts to "push the envelope" by asking the audience to look beyond--too far beyond--gender differences to the point of seeing Demi Moore as a man. In asking the audience to look beyond gender by looking totally at the spirit and not the body, the film ignores the genetic reality of gender (women still have sex, menstruate, get pregnant, lactate and are subject to rape) and in turn denies womanhood altogether. Truly, the conflicts in feminist theory and feminist film theory are evolving, but ever present nonetheless.

For the purpose of this paper, I will argue that G.I. Jane undermines feminism and does not provide a usable feminist text. Using the same skeletal framework as Vande Berg in her piece on China Beach, I will implement the oppositional ideology or "reading against the grain of classical cinema" approach. To briefly review, this assumption implies not so much that images of women are inaccurate or distorted (even though they are, this notion is secondary), but they are components in a system. In other words, this methodology focuses on the irony and contradictions of what the film would have the viewer believe. I will point out lapses in what first appears to be a coherently structured whole. As a result, we shall see how the oppositional ideology of the film absorbs and contains feminism while reaffirming patriarchal notions of masculinity and militarism.

Furthermore, I will also expose the hegemonic strategies at work in the film. Generally, according to Gramsci's notion of hegemony, hegemonic processes refer to the "various

means through which those who support the dominant ideology in a culture are able continually to reproduce that ideology in cultural institutions and products while gaining the tacit approval of those whom the ideology oppresses" (Dow, p. 102). Undoubtedly, the "male gaze" theory is applicable in this film, but Moore goes a step further by placing herself in a patriarchal position behind the camera as a "man" and thus embraces and perpetuates hegemonic processes of blatant misogyny and patriarchy in the military system. Vande Berg argued in her piece on China Beach that the male occupies the site of femininity, thus exemplifying gender oppositional ideology. Moore, however, takes the opposite stance: As a female, she occupies the site of masculinity by embracing patriarchy and misogynist practices within the military of which I will detail later on. Consequently, this stance exemplifies gender oppositional ideology that contradicts feminist ideology as well.

I will also argue that the 1982 movie, Private Benjamin, starring Goldie Hawn, does indeed provide a useable feminist text and has successfully withstood the test of time. I will compare this movie to G.I. Jane and how both movies, in their attempts to promote feminist ideology through texts and visual images, Private Benjamin succeeds and G.I. Jane fails.

I will use van Vucht Tijssen theory of transcendence in analyzing both movies. Tijssen sees this transcendence as a "major step in breaking down the barriers between the sexes and creating a situation in which equality means the possibility of being" (Vande Berg, 1993, p. 363). Within this model, I will examine the notion of a hero and the hero's journey as a hero transcends him/herself and also transcends gender. I will show how Benjamin is a true hero, and Moore, a false one.

First, I will briefly explain the plot to Private Benjamin in order for the reader to understand the contrast with G.I. Jane more clearly. Hawn plays a spoiled, pampered rich girl who has always relied on her father or husbands to take care of her. When her second husband dies suddenly, Hawn comes face to face with her own vulnerability as she suffers an identity crisis. She wails, "I've never not belonged to anyone . . . I've never been alone. If I'm not married, I don't know what to do with myself." She is conned into joining the army thinking of it in terms of a vacation where she can "get herself together". Obviously, she finds a different army, one that is structured, disciplined and touch--it is and embraces everything she is not. Hawn becomes so discouraged that she almost quits and goes home with her indulging parents. Her father chastises her by saying, "You've

never been a smart girl, you're incapable of making your own decisions." Her moment of truth comes when she rejects her father's definition of her and decides to stay in the army to "find" herself. Even though her army experiences are difficult, Hawn transcends herself and learns what she is capable of in terms of mental and physical abilities. She also learns to become independent and to trust her own instincts. The climax of the movie comes when Hawn meets a rich man who offers her love, comfort and security. In the process of their relationship, however, Hawn starts to revert back to her old self full of self-doubt and insecurity. She molds herself to fit her lover's definition of a woman, submits to his authority and once again becomes weak spiritually, mentally and emotionally. She has second thoughts about the marriage right before the ceremony and experiences flashbacks of her life before the army when everyone made decisions for her. When she expresses her desire to cancel the wedding, her fiance says, "Don't be stupid-- look what you are giving up. I will give you a decent name, a home, money. You were nothing before you met me--you were in the army." Hawn responds, "Don't call me stupid." When he moves toward her, she automatically takes a fighting stance and then quickly leaves the room. Outside, she takes off her wedding veil and throws it to the wind and then walks down a dirt road that runs through a nearby forest.

### Transcendence of Gender

At the heart of both movies, lies the post-structuralist feminist theory of van Vucht Tijssen, who "rejects the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical or biological and aims at transcendence of the categories of sexual difference--or at least a recognition of their cultural construction" (Kaplan, 1992, p. 261). Yet, both movies interpret and respond to this notion differently. Private Benjamin promotes a healthy definition of women because it lets a woman define herself on an individual basis, and not on a collective basis as G.I. Jane demands. Private Benjamin asks women to define themselves on their own terms and within the realms of their own life stories. The army is symbolic of our own difficulties and it asks us to transcend them and ourselves by becoming a new, strong, independent creature. The notion of gender is primary in terms of emotional strength and mental capabilities, but the movie focuses more on the spirit and not the female body. Nor does it perpetually compare female capabilities to that of males. In other words, Private Benjamin helps in a conceptualization of a new definition of women because it defines women in terms of a transcendence of the human body just as Tijssen theorizes. The movie allows individuals to take care of those conceptual issues themselves. Its focus is more on the individual woman. G.I. Jane focuses on the human

spirit as well (but always within the context of women's sameness to men) and in the process denies femaleness yet paradoxically focuses on the female body visually and textually which I will further detail later.

Thus, the problem or contradiction in feminist film theory seems to be rooted within the female body. This, too, is an ongoing debate. The uterus has always been a site of conflict, whether it be the birth control battles of the earlier part of this century or abortion rights today. As I stated previously, women will always menstruate and be susceptible to pregnancy. For the most part, their body weight and strength isn't as great as that of men. In other words, the biological gender differences will always be an issue that cannot be ignored which G.I. Jane attempts to do. Ironically, the military rejects men with bad eyesight or slight physical defects. Yet, G.I. Jane is asking the military to accept and embrace women in combat who menstruate, suffer from cramps, P.M.S., and who could at any time become pregnant. Thus, femaleness, instead of being celebrated, is cut out of the issue altogether leaving feminism's needs unmet by G.I. Jane. On the other hand, Private Benjamin services feminism in its attempts to bring about wholeness to femininity by celebrating it on an individual basis, not ignoring it.

For instance, Demi Moore's commanding officer reassures her, "We're not trying to change your sex." He doesn't have to because Moore makes the attempt all by herself. In her claims that genitals aren't important, Moore splits herself off and denies her own femininity. She plays the part of an imposter: she lies and claims to have a penis when she challenges her master chief (who after having beaten and tortured her to test her stamina and toughness) to, "Suck my dick!" She thus defines herself as a male and throughout the movie promotes hegemony and patriarchy by defining herself and abilities by male standards and expectations of what defines men. Ironically, the traditional notion of feminist ideology wants to escape being defined by one's genitals. Instead, Moore defiantly defines herself by having male genitals in claiming to have a penis.

Her challenge to, "Suck my dick" becomes the rallying point of the movie as it is taken in by this male chant. In fact, a bar room scene shows Moore's colleagues drinking and chanting with her, "Suck my dick!" Yet again, this is an incongruent lie because in reality no one can really "suck her dick" because she doesn't have one. Realistically, as a woman, she is the only one who is really in a position to do the actual sucking, not be the recipient of it! This is a classic act of female subordination since she must kneel before the man to do the deed. Thus, feminism does not work in this conceptual definition of

femaleness. Conversely, Private Benjamin's rallying cry is, "Don't call me stupid." Again, this cry transcends gender differences and focuses on the human spirit and the call to transcend oneself without a "battle of the sexes".

### A Hero's Journey

Since society is always looking for heroes and G.I. Jane touts Moore has a feminist hero, I would like to show how Private Benjamin fits into the pattern of the hero's journey and G.I. Jane does not. In other words, Benjamin emerges as the true hero and Moore does not; rather she emerges as a victim. (This idea came from a discussion with my friend, Sonya Farnsworth.) A hero is defined as a person who, through courageous and difficult deeds, transcends his own needs, comfort and safety for the greater good and benefit of others. He or she has a spiritually and emotionally whole. There is a pulling of balance or a "ying-yang" notion of fulness as a person in G.I. Jane that we don't see in Private Benjamin. We can look at this fulness or spiritual balance as a hero's journey: it is a journey toward spiritual wholeness. In ancient Greek and English mythology, and in Christianity, heroes such as Prometheus, King Arthur, and Christian saints, like Abraham and Paul, are voluntarily or involuntarily taken out of their place of comfort or safety into dangerous or difficult circumstances. Their spiritual journey is one toward spiritual wholeness as they transcend their fractured selves. For example, Paul (or Saul, rather) is spiritually fractured (though doesn't recognize it) as he persecutes Christians. He is thrust out of his comfort zone when Christ visits him on the road to Damascus. Consequently, his name is changed to Paul and he becomes spiritually whole when he takes upon himself Christ's new name for him and the cause of Christianity. Even though he suffers physical hardship at the hands of persecutors, he is spiritually whole and at peace. Adam and Eve also fit into this profile of the hero's journey as they were thrust out from the Garden of Eden and no longer able to enjoy its comforts, as well as the presence of God. In the real world, they too, had to heal their fractured selves by learning to recognize their spiritual selves.

Hawn's character in Private Benjamin was brought to the audience in an already fractured state. She was in her own "Garden of Eden" although her eyes were not yet opened to her fractured state (she could not take care of herself and had not lived up to her potential) until she left "the garden" and found her spiritual self within the army. She returns to her former "garden place" when she meets her new fiance and lives with him in his castle before they are married. Yet, in her return, she recognizes her own spiritual self for the

first time because she in turn, recognizes how fractured her former self was. Femaleness and maleness, are secondary issues here. The female body is not an issue at all. Judy Benjamen's journey as the hero transcends gender differences by focusing on her individual journey without denying her femaleness. Thus, women (and men) can relate to her journey because we are all fractured in some way and we too, are on a journey faced with binary opposition. We struggle to find out who we are individually and where we fit into society. In the process, we do not have to deny our femaleness.

Furthermore, the name "Private Benjamen" has two connotations. "Private" can be symbolic of the notion of femaleness being relegated to the private sphere of the individual. We as individual women are empowered as we define our own femaleness. "Benjamen" as a male name, thus symbolic of maleness can be joined with the private sphere of femaleness and symbolize a coming together of two fractured parts to create a spiritual whole. This coming together transcends gender differences.

### Hegemonic Devices

There are many hidden hegemonic devices at work within G.I. Jane of which I will point out throughout this paper. Moore's character in G.I. Jane is flouted from one side of gender to the other. Moore too, is in her own "Garden of Eden" at the beginning of the movie. She enjoys a successful military career and a successful relationship. As the hero, she voluntarily places herself in danger in her attempts to become the first woman S.E.A.L. Her discomfort and danger lies in the relentless hazing by the men. The difference between her a Benjamen, however, is that she loses her spiritual mooring in the hazing and doesn't recognize it. She is forced to come out of her femaleness and voluntarily comes into maleness. She sees the blatant patriarchy and misogynist tactics of the military, yet embraces these notions of maleness by proving that she can be a man like too. For instance, she continually implores her superiors to treat her no differently because of her sex. In other words, she wants to be treated like a man. As she denies her gender and shifts further away from her femaleness to become male-like, she begins to sink spiritually. (We know that when ships shift their cargo too much to one side, they sink.) She also allows herself to be physically abused as part of the hazing process. Her sargeant master, as I mentioned previously, tortures her in his attempts to toughen her up. The men in her unit are disgusted with the sargeant master's abuse of a woman and ask him to stop. Yet in the process of being kicked, shoved, and beaten, she implores her unit



to deny her femaleness; she's afraid the sargeant will stop beating her because she's female. Later, she no longer knows who she is when she says, "Suck my dick."

Additionally, the sargeant master reads a poem at the beginning of the movie when Moore first enters S.E.A.L.S. training:

"I never saw a wild thing feel sorry for itself. A  
sparrow will fall frozen dead from a bough without  
ever having felt sorry for itself."

Moore symbolizes the bird because she is willing to "fall frozen dead" if necessary to prove that she is as capable as a man. Spiritually, however, Moore does die and she never feels sorry for herself because she doesn't realize her spiritual fall. At the end of the movie, the sargeant master leaves the poem in her locker as a tribute to her stamina and determination. On the other hand, we can look at this poem as a symbol and recognition of her spiritual death. She has fallen from the spiritual bough without ever feeling sorry for herself because she has lost her spiritual bearings and doesn't recognize her fall and subsequent death.

It seems likely then, that the average woman would have a difficult time relating to this notion of femaleness. Do we want to be beaten and bloodied to prove that we are just as tough as men? Do we have to be broken spiritually and physically by men in order to define ourselves as women? Must we embrace misogynistic devices and blatant patriarchy and live within those contexts to prove we are able women? Moore's journey as a hero does not come together in a spiritual whole because she learns to define herself and her worth in terms of traditional maleness (physical ability and endurance, toughness, machismo, etc.) while in the process of denying her femaleness.

Furthermore, the name "G.I. Jane" has its own connotations as well. "G.I." can symbolize the public aspect of femaleness since "G.I." is a military label for anyone that seeks it. "Jane" can symbolize the private aspect of femaleness as that is a female name for private citizens. However, the movie denies or ignores the femaleness of "Jane" and thus cuts her (and the name "G.I. Jane"), in half (again fracturing the spiritual self) while promoting the public label of "G.I." which is usually a label for men. There is a loss of the individual self and no healing or coming together ever occurs within the movie.

Feminism is fractured as well because it seems to hate men. In some ways feminism denies its own femaleness, and cannot seem to find a holistic approach in terms of what it means to be a woman. Instead of asking if we can transcend our gender differences on a collective basis, perhaps feminists should focus on whether we can transcend our gender differences on an individual basis. Private Benjamin's text and images affirm this notion. Judy Benjamin proved to herself that she didn't need a man to turn her into a hero or even a princess. She didn't need a prince to make herself into a princess. Conversely, Jane had to debase herself to get her fair share of resources. She needed men to show her how to be a man.

### Imagery in "Private Benjamin and "G.I. Jane"

The imagery in both movies is almost, if not as significant, as the texts. There is a strong connection between my method of showing Modleski's model (taken to an extreme), the "male gaze" theory and the images in the films. In other words, the images help to vividly illustrate the method. For example, if one looks closely, one can see religious symbols used as persuasive tools toward certain feminist perspectives. As I stated previously, Private Benjamin ends with Judy outside her lover's castle where she has been living for the past few months. She is wearing her white wedding dress. She pauses, takes off her veil, smiles, and throws the veil into the wind. She then proceeds to walk down a dirt road that leads away from the castle and into a forest. She looks like a princess who walks into the "Enchanted Forest". Her white dress is a symbolic "color" of spiritual purity; she is now spiritually whole and no longer in a fractured state. Her regal or queenly attire also suggests empowerment. Moreover, the bridal veil that covered or "blinded" her eyes has been stripped away by her own doing. She opened her own eyes and thus rescued herself. She had no need of a prince to rescue her. Moreover, her journey into the forest is a solo one as she no longer needs "the prince" to take care of her. The road is before her and the clearing of trees with the road paved through them, suggests that the way is opened before her and obstacles no longer hinder her progress or journey. Truly, the ending of the movie is a happy one for Judy Benjamin is spiritually healed as she transcended above her own weaknesses and spiritual blindness as well as escaping those who would injure her.

Conversely, G.I. Jane ends with stark imagery; Moore has a battered and bruised face caused by relentless hazing from her male superiors. She has shaved her head in order to "fit in" with her fellow male officers (she felt she needed to look like them in order to be

"taken seriously" by them). As a result of the hazing, Moore does indeed look wounded. The viewer is left to wonder: Must a woman be wounded by her male superiors in order to gain self-respect? Since most women would cower at such a proposition, we (at least I was), left feeling cowardly and downright "wimpy"! Is Moore a hero because she stoically endured physical and emotional abuse from men? While drinking in a bar and subsequently going into a restroom, a female patron studies Moore's face and tells her: "It's none of my business, but you need to get rid of the guy." The line is meant to be humorous and the audience did respond in the intended manner. However, there is no question that Moore was indeed abused not by one male, but by many males. Even more chilling is that this kind of abuse is institutionalized under patriarchy and then embraced and encouraged by Moore, the victim. Therefore, feminists must ask themselves: Is this movie how women want to define feminism? Does Moore really personify the ideal feminist woman? The imagery is a good example of oppositional ideology as the text and imagery purports to support feminism, but when examined at a closer level, is really anti-feminist. Ironically, feminists complain that patriarchy embraces this same concept; patriarchy is a philosophy or system that tells women what is not real, IS real when it comes to the role of women. Likewise, G.I. Jane engages the audience in the same sort of deception: what is not feminist, really IS feminist.

G.I. Jane's last scene also contains religious and spiritual symbolism. For instance, the sargeant-master leaves the "sparrow" poem along with his "Purple Heart" medal in Moore's locker for her to keep--a gesture of respect for her endurance and courage during the hazing process. The sparrow was used as a metaphor by Jesus Christ in the New Testament (Matthew: 11: 38-31) to symbolize all individuals as God's children; that He is watching over them:

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."

The sargeant master, in giving Moore the poem, is telling her that she symbolizes the sparrow. Even though the hazing nearly killed her physically and emotionally, she refused to feel sorry for herself. However, when we take a closer look at this metaphor and compare it to Christ's usage of the sparrow, we see an anti-feminist, hegemonic device at work. The underlying message of this scene tells women that they are no better

than a frozen, dead sparrow. Women should accept patriarchal rules and certain expectations in life without complaint or self-pity, just as Moore accepted the relentless patriarchal, hegemonic hazing without complaint or self-pity. Only then, will women gain the respect of their "male superiors". Conversely, Christ's use of the sparrow metaphor is much more humane, as well as transcends gender in its usage: If a sparrow falls dead from a tree, God notices it. Christ assures us that we as human beings are far more valuable than many sparrows. God doesn't expect us to fall frozen to the ground in order to gain His respect. He loves/accepts us unconditionally, unlike the sargeant master or the military who expects women to suffer great physical and emotional pain in order to gain the respect of men.

Interestingly, Private Benjamen also used a bird metaphor. Judy is rewarded for her ingenuity in a "war game" and is thus assigned to a special training crew called "The Thorbirds". Judy expresses her dismay at being included in the group by commenting, "They don't have women Thorbirds! They'll make a man out of me!" She understands and is repulsed by the notion of denying her femininity and allowing the military to make her into a man. She joins the unit anyway and is successful in her endeavors without denying or compromising her womanhood; the Thorbirds do not appear to have any hazing rituals and her femininity never seems to be an issue. Her superior male officer does try to rape her though, and Judy escapes but uses her attempted rape as leverage to get out of the Thorbirds. Here, a woman uses her brain and not her body to get what she wants out of "the system": Even though her male superior attempted to rape her, Judy fought back and used the rape to her advantage to get out of that particular system and thus be transferred to a glamorous European country to work. I wonder if rape had been a part of the hazing process in G.I. Jane, would Moore have accepted that act of humiliation and subjection as she did everything else in order to prove how tough she was? Her sargeant master does make a half-hearted attempt to pull off her pants during a hazing scene, but Moore kicks him in the groin and sucessfully fights him off in hand-to-hand "combat". (Now really, how many women have that kind of physical strength and prowess?)

Another symbol used in the last scene of G.I. Jane is the sargeant master's "Purple Heart". The medal is shaped like a cross; the cross being the symbol of Christianity. Christ was a willing martyr who was tortured and wounded on the cross, resulting in the redemption and spiritual healing of humankind. Similary, Moore seems to be a willing martyr who allows men to torture and wound her as well. She is supposedly redeeming and healing

the oppression of women. However, Moore is really asking women to be martyrs like herself by allowing themselves to be tortured and abused by men.

Furthermore, the "Purple Heart" usually represents a soldier wounded in battle. Moore was indeed wounded physically and emotionally in the hazing process, and thus the audience reaction would be that she does deserve a medal. Unfortunately, we see another hegemonic device at work: The symbol is trying to persuade the audience that being wounded is actually healing and thus the medal is presented as a sort of wholeness of mind and body. Moore is so touched by this gesture that she sheds her first tear during the movie and accepts and embraces this false patriarchal propaganda that woundedness at the hands of men is in reality healing.

Thus, the contrast in the physical appearance of Hawn and Moore is truly oppositional in the final scenes: Hawn is clean, beautiful in a white dress, feminine-looking, and has a smile on her face. Moore is bald, bruised, wearing army fatigues and tearful; a hurt, spiritually fractured soul whose male superiors waited and hoped for her to "fall dead from the tree".

### Male Gaze Theory

As I mentioned previously, Moore takes the traditional notion of the "male gaze" theory a step further by positioning herself "behind the camera" and becoming a "male", thus participating in her own oppression and furthering and encouraging hegemonic practices. That isn't to say that the traditional notion of the "male gaze" theory isn't operative in this movie as well. G.I. Jane contains several scenes showing Moore's body in sexually provocative positions. For instance, we see her in the typical female pose: Moore is taking a bubble bath and the bubbles are strategically placed over her breasts. We also see her nipples showing through a wet t-shirt on more than one occasion. A male colleague even remarks, "It's not nice to point.", and she responds with a shy smile. We see her whole backside in a shower scene with a superior male officer staring at her breasts. She makes no attempt to cover herself and proudly lets him gaze at her. During her workouts, the camera focuses in on her bottom.

On the other hand, Hawn does not seem go behind the camera and participate in the hegemonic devices as Moore does. If hegemonic devices are at work, they aren't nearly as blatant as they are in G.I. Jane. Any hegemonic devices perpetuated by men are ultimately shot down and rejected by Hawn's cleverness and determination as she uses

her mind and not her body. Additionally, Hawn is never seen without her clothes on, nor is she ever dressed or postured in a provocative way. Her body and physical ability is simply not an issue in the movie as Moore's is. Hawn does become sexually empowered when she orgasms for the first time and also has her first casual sex encounter without any sort of commitment or expectations.

### Summary

We see how Private Benjamen presents a successful text and imagery in its application of Tijssen's transcendence of the sexes by focusing on the spirit and spiritual healing/wholeness rather than focusing on the body and its physical limitations and differences from males. Tijssen's theory asks feminists to transcend gender differences whereas G.I. Jane adheres to patriarchal notions and demands that women become like men in order to gain power.

We also see how G.I. Jane doesn't fully match the Modleski model. As I said earlier, the movie takes Modleski's model of feminized patriarchy (and how it encourages female subjectivity by occupying the site of femininity) a step further by placing Moore behind the camera as a perpetuator of her own oppression. Thus, the military is by no means over-feminized. Rather, it is blatantly patriarchal and not only attempts to absorb and contain feminism, but attempts to kill it. Moore embraces and participates in this type of hegemony and therefore does not personify a true feminist, rather a perpetuator of the ultimate in patriarchal subordination and subjugation of women. Furthermore, the movie also tries to absorb the viewer; we are enlisted to watch and adopt patriarchy.

Unlike Judy Benjamen, Moore doesn't change herself, the men change her. They pretend to have a new attitude toward her and accept her as a woman once she has "proved herself". In reality, however, she has turned herself into a man and has taken on the cloak of male genitalia. Only after she has made this transformation, do the men accept and like her. Thus, the movie seems to try to fit within the Modleski model, but simply gets it wrong! Furthermore, G.I. Jane attempts to show how women are excluded from certain jobs and power, yet at the same time says that in order for women to attain the same status as men, they must become men. Therefore, wholeness is not achieved

China Beach at least made the attempt to acknowledge women's contributions in the military as does Private Benjamen. G.I. Jane does little to recognize women's

contributions and instead focuses on what they have not contributed to--and if they wish to contribute to those areas, they must accept male patriarchy and play by men's rules. (Ironically, if men were expected to play by women's rules and become women, we would find the notion comical. When men dress and act like women, we laugh. When women dress and act like men, as in Moore's case, we respect them.)

Finally, Private Benjamen is not a real war story. It is a story of a hero's journey who transcends her own selfish needs and desires and shows the viewer how to become spiritually whole through one's own transformation. G.I. Jane, on the other hand, is a story about war and the military and its ritualistic hazings. Moore attempts the hero's journey and is conned into thinking she is one, when in reality she is a victim. Ironically, the viewer remembers Private Benjamen's name because it is real. I don't remember the character's name (and I doubt others do either) in G.I. Jane since Jane is not her real name; it is just a generalization--one among many patriarchal and hegemonic generalizations that the film asserts.

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