5 Motives and methods: using multi-sited ethnography to study US national security discourses

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> I needed an approach that didn't require bad guys with bad attitudes . . . an approach that would let you look at the nature of the way the whole thing was put together.   (Hacker 1990)

Follow the metaphor

I embarked on my research on gender and security in the mid-1980s, during the height of the Cold War and the so-called "nuclear arms race" between the USA and the Soviet Union. The manufacture and stockpiling of tens of thousands of nuclear weapons, the quest for more "useable nukes" and more "survivable" weapons delivery systems – all of it seemed so wildly irrational to me that I was consumed by the questions: "*How* can they do this? How can they even *think* this way?"

Initially, those questions were more expressions of moral anguish and political despair than anything I might have ever thought of as "a good research question." However, the intensity of my concern led me to take an opportunity to learn about nuclear weapons from some of the men who made their living thinking about nuclear weaponry and strategy. And that experience, my first close encounter with the discursive universe of national security elites, ultimately led me into an extensive, multi-sited study of the role of gender in shaping US national security paradigms, policies, and practices (Cohn, forthcoming). This chapter is a reflection on the methodological choices I made in the course of that study.

Here is an understatement: in the course of my research, many things shifted.

My questions changed. As I became acculturated into a community of civilian nuclear defense intellectuals, my question changed from "How can *they* think that way about nuclear weapons" to "How can any of us?"

The context within which national security discourse is situated changed, as the Soviet Union split apart and the Cold War ended. The

US military participated in two regional wars and numerous peacekeeping missions. And the military itself was rocked by its own "gender wars" (see Stiehm 1996; Enloe 2000; Herbert 2000).

Thus, the scope of my inquiry changed as well, as I moved from studying nuclear techno-strategic discourse to national security discourse more broadly.

As I engaged in conversation with people in different parts of the national security community, both civilian and military, and as I listened to what they said, my question changed again, from "What is the nature of this discourse?" to "In what ways does gender affect national security paradigms, policies, and practices?"

My subject has been a moving target.

To complicate matters further: national security discourse is a complex cultural phenomenon which is produced and deployed in a wide variety of sites (see, for example, P. J. Katzenstein 1996; Weldes et al. 1999; Evangelista 1999). To study it, I needed a transdisciplinary approach and a composite methodology that combines cultural analysis and qualitative, ethnographic methods. My approach draws upon fieldwork with national security elites and military personnel, as well as upon textual analysis of Department of Defense official reports, military documents, transcripts of Congressional hearings, news media accounts (including print media, radio, and television), and popular film, to explore the ways in which national security policies and practices are deeply shaped, limited, and distorted by gender.

Naming it

In casting about to describe my method, I find myself at an interdisciplinary juncture and quandary. My eclectic background includes a proclivity both for philosophical and cultural studies analyses and for the ethnographic methods of anthropology and sociology; I am never as happy as when I am in there, able to hang out, ask questions, observe, and interview. So, I find myself working in both worlds. Ultimately, my study includes cultural studies interpretation, based in my longstanding engagement in national security issues, where every interpretation both builds on and potentially contradicts every other one. It is also based in the grounded methods of qualitative sociology and ethnographic anthropology. "Blurred genres," indeed (Geertz 1973).

In bringing the two together, I heard voices in my head. First, the objection that any empirical social scientist would have to a cultural studies analysis: "You don't really justify why you chose *these* things to

analyze and not others. Since there is an infinite world out there, what's your sampling technique?"

The cultural studies voice responds: "There isn't really an answer. All you can say is, these ones were available to me. My method derives its strength from the juxtaposition and layering of many different windows. Someone else who chose ten different windows might have come up with a very different analysis. I know that. But I think there is a lot of power in the fact that there are ten windows open, and among them, I have found these continuities."

The feminist qualitative researcher chimes in: "Any investigation, and especially one of a field so vast as the production and deployment of national security discourse, is of necessity partial, in a variety of important ways."

One of the most useful ways I found to get the voices to stop talking past each other, and to articulate some aspects of the nature and logic of my approach, comes from anthropologist George Marcus.[1] In his description of multi-sited ethnography, Marcus (1995: 102) figures the mapping of a mobile and multiply situated object of study as occurring on a "fractured, discontinuous plane of movement and discovery among sites"[2] – and that seems to me to be the perfect description of the "chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, [and] juxtapositions of locations" that structure my work. In addition, in Marcus's characterizations of the different modes and techniques through which multi-sited ethnographies define their objects of study, one seemed custom-built to describe the activity that propelled me along my study's fractured, discontinuous path – "Follow the Metaphor" (1995: 108). I have been following gender as metaphor and meaning system through the multi-sited terrain of national security.

Over a decade and a half, my initial interest in ways of thinking about the discourse of nuclear defense intellectuals expanded to an interest in ways of thinking about national security more broadly, at different locations in American society. These included the mass media, Congressional hearings, nuclear weapons laboratories, military bases, and elite military professional education institutions. It is probably a good thing that I undertook my study of gender and national security in stages,

[1] At this point I should add something that will be obvious to many readers: this study shares many characteristics with what is known as feminist methodology. For those unfamiliar with this term, a useful overview can be found in DeVault 1999. Two works that have been particularly influential in feminist sociology are Cook and Fonow 1986; Reinharz 1992.
[2] For additional discussions of ethnographic methods when the object of analysis does not have clear boundaries, see also Appadurai 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1997. For a description of the multi-sited critic as drawn from many feminist sources see Ackerly 2000.

adding on pieces as they became salient, rather than starting with the direct question of how to study the thinking that shapes national security practices, paradigms, and policies – for obviously, the question has no simple or single answer. National security discourse and policies are created by the workings of many complex social organizations, including universities and think-tanks, legislative and executive branches of government, the military, corporations that contract with the military, technological research and development labs, and the mass media. And the discourses used to articulate purposes and policies are not uniform throughout these different locations.

My selection of sites to investigate was both "pre-planned" and "opportunistic," very much shaped by both the nation's history and my own. When I first went to spend two weeks in a summer program run by nuclear defense intellectuals, I did not expect to become so involved in the process of thinking about their thinking. But I was almost instantly intrigued and morbidly fascinated by their world, so, given the opportunity to stay for a year, I jumped at it. Once caught up in the elaborate linguistic and conceptual systems of nuclear strategic analysis, I began to dig deeper into its premises, and started to see their ramifications far outside the specialized world of nuclear strategy (see Gusterson 1996). As the Cold War ended and nuclear weapons began to recede from the front-and-center position in public consciousness (although not from US arsenals or strategic doctrines), a series of other national security events and institutions came into the news, including the Gulf War and the military sex-and-gender controversies. As each heated up, it seemed to me an ideal site to explore the discourses through which national security is constructed and represented. In writing up my research, I sought to "bring these sites into the same frame of study" and "to make connections through translations and tracings among distinctive discourses from site to site" (Marcus 1995: 100–101).

Doing it

In addition to the choice of sites, another inevitable source of partiality comes from the practices I used to investigate my chosen sites. As Marcus describes multi-sited ethnography, "not all sites are treated by a uniform set of fieldwork practices of the same intensity. Multi-sited ethnographies inevitably are the product of knowledge bases of varying intensities and qualities" (Marcus 1995: 100). Inevitably, I could not do in-depth research at each of the kinds of sites where national security discourse is produced and deployed, and there are gaps in my knowledge, as the research had no obvious, inherent situational boundaries.

In my research I engaged in a variety of research practices. Participant observation was central to my investigation. My participant observation started with a year at each of two different institutions where nuclear defense intellectuals work and are trained (1984–5 and 1987–8). I also, throughout a decade and a half, engaged in more discontinuous, sporadic participant observation in the world of defense intellectuals through regular attendance at lectures, seminars, and conferences, both short and long, where defense intellectuals (and, occasionally, their critics) articulated their own framings of national security, and contested each other's. At these events I wrote detailed notes about what people said in their presentations, as well as how they framed their casual asides and conversations.

In addition to maintaining that participation in the civilian theoretician's world, I spent short periods, typically about a week at a time, at various military sites, including two sites where young military officers are trained (military academies) and two where more senior officers receive advanced education (war colleges); three Army bases; four Air Force bases; and four specialized military installations. My research at these sites clusters roughly into one period at the height of the Cold War (1984–9), when my interest was principally in the military variations of civilian national security discourse, and a second in the post-Cold War, post-Gulf War era (1996–9), when I had added a focus on military gender integration to my investigative agenda. In one instance, I was able to spend a week at the same site, a war college, in each of these two very different periods, and to witness both the discontinuities, and the far greater number of continuities, in the professional discourses and practices. As in the civilian part of this study, I also, throughout the entire period, attended conferences and meetings where members of the military speak to each other, as well as six conferences specifically designed to enable academics and military personnel to learn from each other. And again, I took extensive fieldnotes.

Much of the material on which my study is based came from my observations at these sites, as well as the conversations I witnessed and in which I participated. Many of the ones I "participated in" involved my asking endless questions, getting people to explain how and why they understand the world in the ways that they do. When people suggested readings to me, or when I heard readings being referred to, those, too, became part of the material I analyzed.

Aside from my endless informal interrogations, my methods also included more formal, in-depth interviews. I did eight in my earlier research with civilian defense intellectuals, one with a nuclear weapons designer, and eighty-three with members of the military, all but seven of

the latter taking place between 1997 and 1999. In addition, I conducted twelve interviews with "wives" – wives of nuclear weapons designers, of military officers, of Citadel graduates, of defense intellectuals. These interviews often lent invaluable perspectives that changed my interpretations of what I was seeing and hearing (cf. Enloe 1989; Sylvester 2002a).

My interviews ran from forty-five minutes to six hours. All but twenty-one were taped and transcribed, and the rest contemporaneously documented with extensive notes. The average interview lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. Most were done in person, although I also did seven over the phone, as a way of gathering background about the gender issues at specific locales prior to my arrival. All those cases but two were followed up with second, face-to-face interviews. In nine cases I conducted a series of several follow-up interviews with the same individual over days or months, and in five cases, these interviewees have become people I consider friends, people I am in touch with about military matters on a regular basis. All but four of the interviews were one on one; each of those four included two or three people at the same time. The taped interviews were all transcribed, and read over and over again. In four cases, I was able to do follow-up interviews after studying the transcripts.

When I broadened out my research to include, not only the national security discourses used by civilian and military professionals, but also an examination of the role of gender discourse in more public, popular debates about national security issues, I drew on different kinds of source materials. For my analyses of the Gulf War, the debate on gays in the military, and *Courage Under Fire* and *GI Jane,* I continued to do interviews, but also relied far more heavily on written and visual texts (see also Youngs, Lisle, and Zalewski 1999). Since my interest in the Gulf War and the debate on gays in the military was in their public representation, I watched C-SPAN religiously, read two daily newspapers, and did online searches for newspaper stories and radio and television transcripts. In addition, for the gay debate, I relied on the Congressional record. My choice of the particular two films I analyzed was purely a result of having been asked to give a guest lecture about them at a military academy.

Asking it

But the description of the interviews in the section above is, of course, far too cut and dried. There was an "I" who asked the questions, and inevitably, who I am shaped not only what I noticed and was able to

hear, but also what people what would say *to* me and *in front of* me. At the time I started, in the mid-1980s, being a young woman in the entirely white male world of nuclear defense intellectuals, or in the nearly equally white male world of military officers, was probably a help. As a woman in a male domain, at a time when feminist critique had not really reached it, I was unthreatening. My asking questions did not change that – questions about what people think and why they think that way tend be heard as naïve questions, and naïveté has always been acceptable for a young woman, in a way it is usually not for a man. As long as I made some attempt to frame my queries in the terms of the professional discourse, I could ask questions without evoking the dismissal or contempt that might devolve on a male questioner who appeared so ignorant. Instead, it tended to evoke a straightforward, pedagogical response, or a courtly paternalism, with considerable time taken to explain things to me. In the military, I sometimes found that officers misheard my questions, not expecting the kind of question I was asking to come out of my mouth – and then, the misreadings were fascinating.

I also found that my questions were not likely to be experienced as challenging, since no one expected me truly to understand what they did, and since issues of masculine competition were not evoked by my interactions. I became aware of this during a part of the project when I was working with a distinguished white male psychiatrist, perhaps twenty years my senior. In the interviews he conducted with powerful nuclear decision-makers, he said he often found that he became competitive with them, and vice versa – alpha males from different domains scrambling for dominance in the interviews. Further, when it happened, he said that it became personally difficult for him to ask questions perceived as "naïve" – it was too hard in the competitive environment to give up the mantle of expertise. I, on the other hand, given my age and gender, was perceived as neither an authority in a different domain nor a competitor. And I suspect that being seen as ignorant was an experience that gender, age, and status made far easier for me to deal with than it did him. In short, I think it was very easy for civilian defense intellectuals to talk in front of me without self-consciousness, and they tended to be very generous and forthcoming in responding to my questions.[3]

By the time I started asking questions about gender in the military, both the political context and some of my own identity markers had changed. The context was one of heightened sensitivity around gender issues; the military was not only undergoing continuing conflict about

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[3] For an interesting discussion of viewing the self "as resource rather than contaminant" see Krieger 1991.

such issues as whether women should be in combat roles, or whether gender integration had "feminized" the military, but was also still dealing with the fallout from highly visible sexual harassment and assault scandals of the 1990s (see M. F. Katzenstein 1998). There was the clear perception among many military men that it might no longer be advisable to voice certain thoughts and opinions about women in the military, unless among friends. I, in the meantime, was still a white middle-class woman, but now in the categories of "middle-aged" and "mother." My motherhood probably served to normalize me to many military men.[4] In contrast, my status as "college professor," which had normalized me to academic civilian defense intellectuals, did not have such a positive effect in the military.

At the risk of stating the obvious, I came to the military officers as an outsider. Not only did they have no particular reason to trust me, but also many probably felt they had reasons not to. In a military context, as quickly became evident, the salient features of my identity were that I was a white woman, a civilian, and a college professor. None of these was a plus. Military alienation from civilian society is a problem that many see as greatly exacerbated in recent years. In military culture at present, there is a general belief that civilians just don't understand the military, as well as an increasing antipathy toward what they perceive as a dissolute, immoral, and undisciplined civilian culture.[5] In addition, considerable resentment is evoked by the perception that civilians are simultaneously attempting to make the military into a social laboratory (for example, through demanding completely equal treatment for women, or attempting to end the homosexual exclusion policy) disregarding and disrespecting its true mission, and, at the same time, deeply cutting the military budget and asking them to do more with less. As to college professors, I must admit that I was taken by surprise by the degree of suspicion and animosity toward college professors evidenced by a large number of officers. That animosity is based on the perception that college professors cluster at the left-liberal to flaming radical end of the political spectrum, and have little regard for truth, fairness, and objectivity because they are so dedicated to so-called "political correctness." Although (not surprisingly) no one stated this directly to me in an

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[4] Dana Isaacoff, who in 1993 was a US Army captain and an assistant professor of political science at the United States Military Academy, when she spoke about becoming pregnant while on the USMA faculty, said that it made it much easier for many men on the faculty to deal with her. Comments at the Workshop on Institutional Change and the US Military: The Changing Role of Women, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, November 13–14, 1993.
[5] For an influential account of this divide, see Ricks 1997.

interview, I became painfully aware of this fact when I attended a lecture by a conservative journalist at one of the war colleges. When he made a disparaging remark about Harvard having more Marxists than Russia does, the normally quiet audience of several hundred senior officers roared its assent. I was sitting with a few officers whom I had got to know fairly well, and at the break, I broke my characteristic reserve and vented my anger at the remark, having spent quite a bit of time at Harvard without meeting any Marxists. They seemed interested and surprised (very much as some of my academic colleagues are when I speak about intelligent, thoughtful military officers), and we then got into a discussion in which they offered counter-examples, which they had heard or read about, of egregious discrimination by liberal professors against conservative students.

My status as a civilian professor was exacerbated, of course, by being a white woman, since when you put those together it translates to liberal white woman, which in turn translates to "anti-male" and pro-women's equality in the military. All this before I opened my mouth. In addition, I initially introduced myself as a researcher interested in gender integration in the military, who taught sociology and women's studies at a liberal arts college. But "women's studies" is instantly equated with "feminist," and for many male officers, there was no space between that term and "feminazi" – making the possibility that I would be viewed as a researcher genuinely interested in their perspectives recede yet further into the distance. In later interviews, I introduced myself as a sociologist interested in gender, an only slightly less inflammatory label. As a civilian white woman academic asking questions about gender integration, I was most often assumed to be in favor of it, and against men who resisted it, unless proven otherwise. A further wrinkle in the fabric of who I was perceived as being came from the fact that I was often asked to send a resumé before I arrived. Usually, I suspect these were just filed. But in two cases, officers went to the library, read some of my writing, and reviewed it for others. This made for some interesting conversations; it did not, to my knowledge, prevent many from happening.

But the vast majority of the people I interviewed had read neither my resumé nor my articles, so "white woman civilian college professor asking about gender" probably sums up the terms in which initial assumptions were made. As I hope is clear, I am pointing to these assumptions because they bear on methodological and epistemological issues, not to disparage these officers for having a series of stereotypes. Everyone makes a series of default assumptions based on gender, race, class, and occupation, to name a few; and it is most unlikely that a group of feminist academics would make any fewer about, or be any less

suspicious of, a white male military officer who came to interview them. The point is that the usual issues of gaining some degree of trust that are always part of the process of interviewing are compounded in this instance by a set of assumptions rooted in a deep cultural divide between military and civilian, as well as gender difference.

I had some, limited, ways of dealing with this. First, at sites where my participant observation would include formal interviews, I tried, whenever possible, to come to military installations in some official capacity *in addition to* that of research interviewer; for instance, to give a lecture (albeit about gender), or to participate in a seminar, or as a "civic leader" on a public affairs tour. This not only gave me some (*very*) small imprimatur of acceptance, but also, more to the point, gave the officers some time and space to get to know me before we actually sat down for an interview. In this way, many discovered that I did not, in fact, fit their worst nightmare stereotypes.

Second, in this kind of situation, "snowball sampling" becomes crucial. I had the most access, and the best possibility of trust, when one particular officer got to know me over a period of time and then buttonholed others, asking them to let me interview them, vouching for "the way I did business." (Here again, being somewhere for several days before interviewing starts makes it much more possible to develop this kind of relationship.) In this situation I would also tell that officer that I was interested in people with a wide range of positions on the matter, from those very supportive of gender integration to those very opposed, and he or she could quickly arrange for me to get a wider range of opinions than I would have been likely to be able to arrange myself.

Third, at the beginning of an interview, in explaining what I wanted to interview them about, I directly stated to the officers that my interest was not in trying to justify or support any particular position on women in the military. Rather, as a researcher, my assumption was that different people had different opinions, that those opinions developed in understandable ways from their own experiences, and that I wanted to understand more about how people thought about the issue, and what experiences and ideas led them to think that way.

Fourth, before starting each formal interview, I discussed the means by which I intended to protect confidentiality and anonymity, and asked each officer to write, directly on the consent form, a phrase I might use to refer to him (or her) that was sufficiently general not to compromise anonymity. If I had come to the post under the auspices of a high-ranking officer, I was also careful to state that I would not report to him anything people said in the interviews. In addition, both verbally and on the consent form, we agreed on the standard disclaimers – that

whatever was said would be the opinion of the individual, and that she or he in no way represented the position of the military institution, branch of service, or the US Department of Defense.

What was the result? Varying degrees of openness and willingness to talk. A very high percentage of people seemed extremely open and forthcoming, often revealing things that clearly would cause difficulties for them if exposed, or clearly deviating from "the official line." Others were guarded, but in only one case did I have the clear sense that an informant had decided he was just going to stonewall straight through the interview. Interestingly, he was the officer who had carried "the football" (the case containing nuclear launch codes) for a past president, a fact he obviously took pride in. But one thing is certain – no matter how open men became in the course of our interviews, none of them ever spoke to me in the same ways they would talk to their buddies in the cockpit or over a beer. So it is safe to say that there was not only a fair amount of self-censorship going on, but also conscious choices about how to say things – not only because I remained an outsider, a member of several different classes of people who were not easily respected or trusted, but also because of the more regular ways in which any of us gauge what it is appropriate to reveal, in what language, to different people in different contexts. But it is also safe to say that, in whichever of their ways of framing their experiences and ideas that people chose, many of them were extraordinarily revealing.

"Getting it"

As part of my fieldwork, one of the ways in which I attempted to assess whether or not I've "got it" – that is, the usefulness of my insights and the persuasiveness of my arguments – was through giving public talks, seminars, and briefings to people in the discourse communities I wrote about.[6] Upon the sixteen occasions when I did so, I received feedback in several forms. First, the questions and comments during the event itself were usually lively, intense, and sometimes contentious. I would always stand at the podium or sit at the seminar table with a pad and pen, and try, at breakneck speed, to write everything people said, before

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[6] The legitimating criteria important to me in my work include understanding rather than validity, persuasiveness, and pragmatic use (in the sense both of insights that can help produce new ways of seeing things and understanding one's situation, and of contributing to processes of social change). This now would be categorized as a "post-foundational approach to validity and textual authority" (Denzin 1995). See also Ackerly and True, this volume.

I responded to their comments. Second, in many cases I was also able to have more extended dialogues with individuals who attended. Sometimes, these were in the form of the ten-minute conversations you have with people who come up to speak after a talk, or the dinner conversations you have with someone who wants to discuss a paper you have just given at a conference. As quickly as possible after each of these, I would again take detailed notes on what was said.

The third form of feedback I got came in formal interviews. In some instances, these had been scheduled ahead of time, as when I went to give a briefing at a military installation. As the interviews progressed, although my questions were not about the topic of talk, people often got round to telling me what they thought about what I'd said, what I'd got right or wrong, or what new way of thinking about an experience my talk had given them. If they did not, in some instances I would ask, saying that, as an outsider looking in, it would be very helpful to me to hear what they thought I was missing. Although I'm sure that the terms in which they answered were often different from those they had used when speaking to the guy next to them in the audience, people were rarely shy about answering. I am grateful for their willingness to "talk back" to my talk, to challenge my discursive framework with their own; I learned a tremendous amount from those interactions.

Some interviews arose out of other contexts, where I had gone to give a talk as a "one-shot" deal. If someone in the audience had had a lot to say during my presentation, I might approach him or her at the end, and ask if he or she would be willing to talk with me further. I would frequently ask the same thing of people who came up to talk when my presentation was over. If they said yes, we would set up a formal, taped interview.

The fact that my research took place over an extended time, and that I published several articles based on it along the way, provided me with another means by which to assess how well I "got it." A cover story in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* generated voluminous mail from defense intellectuals, as well as phone calls and interviews. It has also meant that for years, whenever I have attended a conference or seminar in the civilian defense intellectual community, the line that follows introductions is often, "Are you the Carol Cohn who . . .?" Lively conversations frequently ensue – and I go back to my room and take more notes.

Finally, I was also fortunate to have trusted insiders in the communities I wrote about, who generously agreed to review my work. I asked them to read drafts to make sure that I would do no harm by inadvertently violating anonymity (or by other means), to try to rescue me if I fell

into one of my own knowledge gaps, and to let me know if they thought I had "got it."

Studying up and "listening to the material"

Now, here is a differently voiced version of the story of my methodological choices. I started my study of nuclear discourse because I was deeply troubled by it – a feeling undiminished by the intervening years, and the end of the Cold War. I have long felt that US national security policies, both nuclear and conventional, have been terribly wrong-headed. I thought that I might get a better handle on how to change them by "studying up" – Laura Nader's term for doing anthropological research about "those who shape attitudes and actually control institutional structures" (1972: 284).[7]

My first question came from hearing public figures talk about nuclear war. *How,* I wondered, can *they* think this way? When I met and listened to some of these men close-up, the question intensified. But my (temporary) residence in their "discourse community"[8] had effects on how I thought, and my question changed from "How can *they* think this way?" to "How can any of us?" In other words, my focus shifted from trying to think about individuals and their possible motivations, to the power of language and professional discourses in shaping how and what people think.

My approach has its roots in two places: in social constructionist theory, and in the practice of classroom teaching. My starting point is one that is taken for granted in many academic circles, and either foreign to or hotly contested by the people I write about. I understand reality as a social construction. This is not to say that "there's no *there*, there"

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[7] Nader's decades-old plea for "studying up" is still quite relevant, and worth reproducing: "Anthropologists have a great deal to contribute to our understanding of the processes whereby power and responsibility are exercised in the United States. Moreover, there is a certain urgency to the kind of anthropology that is concerned with power [cf. D. L. Wolf 1969], for the quality of life and our lives themselves may depend upon the extent to which citizens understand those who shape attitudes and actually control institutional structures. The study of man is confronted with an unprecedented situation: never before have so few, by their actions and inactions, had the power of life and death over so many members of the species." There is now a small emergent literature of anthropologists "studying up," and investigating powerful institutions. Important examples include Gusterson 1996; Kunda 1992; Marcus 1992; Zonabend 1993; and Traweek 1988. For more recent, sociological articulation of the importance of studying the "relations of ruling," see D. E. Smith 1987; 1990a; 1990b; Mohanty 1991a; 1991b. For an example in feminist IR see Prügl 1999.

[8] The term is Clifford Geertz's (Geertz 1973).

(Gertrude Stein's unkind remark about Philadelphia), but that the "there" is accessible to us only through language and other forms of representation. And in our speaking about and representing the world to, with, and for each other, we construct it.[9]

The practice of teaching has also focused my attention on language. In conversations in the classroom, I am repeatedly struck by George Orwell's point that clear thinking is not possible without clear language – and that true democratic politics is not possible without both. Orwell has been my longtime grounding and orienting influence. In many ways, his whole journey might be traced back to his essay "Politics and the English Language"(Orwell 1954) (although rereading it is always a painful reminder of one's own limitations as a writer).

Listening

My study of national security discourse is the product of combining my political concerns with my intellectual interests in how people think, and the role of language in not only constructing and reflecting meaning, but also in shaping systems of thought. Although what impelled me into this research was a political critique, in the actual doing of the work I have had to try to put that aside. This is not because I hold a positivist notion of objectivity, but for several reasons. First, because my goal is to learn, to find out what's out there, without imposing preconceptions about what people are like, what the issues are, or what form of analysis or theoretical framework is most appropriate to engage. I was not trying to prove a point or test a hypothesis, but to see what was there and think about it. I am not as hopelessly naïve as that may sound. Inevitably, everything about who I am – how I am embodied, what my life and intellectual history have been, and so on – shapes what I do and do not notice as significant, and how I interpret it.[10] Other people, with diverse past experiences, political commitments, and favored analytic frameworks would no doubt look at and hear the same things that I heard, and inevitably notice different things and come to different conclusions. But within and despite an awareness of those limits, my thinking about research is in part reflected in the way that Barbara McClintock spoke

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[9] This is not the place for a detailed exposition of social constructionism. Texts influential in forming my understanding of it include Berger and Luckmann 1966; Foucault 1972; 1980; Latour and Woolgar 1979; Lyotard 1984.

[10] Numerous authors emphasize that the social position of the knower shapes the knowledge he or she produces. Among them I have been especially influenced by Collins 1986; 1989; 1990; Cook and Fonow 1986; Haraway 1988; Harding 1986; Hartsock 1983; [1983] 2003; D. E. Smith 1987); 1990b.

about her work in corn genetics. She emphasized the importance of trying imaginatively to get down there in the kernel of corn, to "listen to the material and let the experiment tell you what to do" (Keller 1985: 162). I think that the material can sometimes even point you towards the tools you need to understand it; not because there is only one, true, accurate understanding to which any one of us has privileged access, but precisely because "nature [and social life] is characterized by an a priori complexity that vastly exceeds the capacities of the human imagination."[11] Each of us will bring different insights to understanding and interpreting that complexity, if we "listen to the material." More than twenty years ago, my sister-in-law came to this country from Japan. Shortly afterwards, when I asked her how New York compared to what she expected, she shook her head, and explained, "Before I came here, I made my mind a blank sheet of paper." Postmodern epistemologies tell us to forget about that possibility. But we can still try to take as many as possible of the sheets that are written all over, and put them aside for a while.

My other reasons for always trying to set aside my politics, opinions, and analyses were much more personal. And since I believe that our research agendas and methodological preferences are shaped not only by intellectual commitment, but also by personal, emotional predilection, I want to note them. First, temperamentally, I am a listener. In a conversation, give me the choice between telling people what I think about something, or finding out how they think about it, and I will almost always choose the latter. After all, I already *know* what I think. I have always loved traveling and talking with people in very different places, getting glimpses into, and trying to imagine, lives very different from my own.

Second, I find it excruciatingly painful to have direct confrontations with very powerful people who are doing (or have done, or will do) what I consider to be terrible things, or things with terrible effects. And I do not see the point in it. All evidence suggests that if I were to argue with them, trying to get them to see their decisions differently, it would have no effect. And it is very painful to be so powerless to stop actions I see as morally reprehensible.

Finally, and maybe most significantly, I find it both personally and professionally untenable to talk with people without being able to be honest about what I want to know, and why I am talking with them. To do that, I have to let my genuine interest in how the world looks to them, and why it does so, be what I and my research are about.

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[11] Keller describing McClintock's worldview (Keller 1985: 162).

Putting genuine intellectual curiosity – the desire to understand – at the center of who I am when doing research is not difficult. But some of the situations in which I have practiced that centering have made me feel that my head would explode. I will never forget sitting and having lunch with former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. For the preceding twenty-five years, he had been to me an icon of arrogant immorality, a man with the blood of hundreds of thousands of innocent people on his hands. It is hard for me adequately to describe the intensity of my feelings about him, especially during the height of the Vietnam War. And now here I was, sitting next to him – we placed our cloth napkins in our laps, were served by uniformed waiters, sipped our wine, and chatted, all as in any other upscale luncheon – except that I have always thought of him as a war criminal. I put that thought aside, and recentered myself in my interest in how he thinks about nuclear weapons now, and why. (This was when he was still holding his long public silence on Vietnam – I knew that it could not be a subject of my questions.) I asked what were for me genuine questions about what he had said, why he believed it, and why he did not take some other position. I was impressed by his thoughtfulness and his intelligence. I remembered the blood. I returned to the connection and respect I felt for him in the moment. It happened several more times before the meal was over. I have never been able to sort out the morality of that particular interaction to my own satisfaction.

Although, in the midst of the incident I have just described, I kept putting them aside, I have, throughout my research, tried to pay attention to feelings. That includes both those of the people I have observed and talked with, and my own. In participant observation and interviews, I've listened for differences in emotional tone and intensity that accompany different utterances, and the focus on both the apparent presence and apparent absence of emotion has been part of what guides my attention to issues that merit further analytic curiosity. I've also found that paying attention to my own feelings has at times been key to my understandings. In my first experience of participant observation among nuclear defense intellectuals, I took the feelings I had while being enculturated, learning techno-strategic discourse, and asked what they could reveal about the discourse and the process of professionalization. I was fascinated to find, after my reflections were published in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, that several defense intellectuals told me variations on the same theme – "Yeah, I had those feelings, too, but didn't think they were something to *think* about." It is precisely because techno-strategic discourse rests on the radical separation of thought from feeling, on the assumed necessity of excluding emotions from rational

thought (or rather, excluding anything *recognized* as emotions), that acknowledging the integration of thought and feeling is so important to me here. Noticing, and thinking about, feelings has consistently pushed my thinking further – and not only in learning about techno-strategic discourse. The fact that I have liked, and in a variety of ways respected, so many people whose choices and actions I not only "disagree" with but am sometimes enraged by and despairing about, has consistently led me to realize the limits of my understandings, and that I had to go further.

Ending

My method derives its strength from the juxtaposition and layering of what I found in different sites, in different contexts, with different constituencies. I chose what I think of as several different windows through which to look at national security discourses. I know that someone else would have chosen other windows, and, even looking through the same windows, would have been likely to come up with a different analysis. I know that had I listened at a different think-tank, interviewed at a different base, watched C-SPAN on different days, or read different newspapers, I would have heard different things, and might conceivably have come up with a different analysis myself. Nonetheless, it is significant that over fifteen years, as I looked through a variety of windows, and listened to multiple local discourses and contextual permutations of national security discourses, I heard things in common, threads that could be pulled through; whether talking to generals or enlisted men, liberal strategists or a Secretary of Defense, certain continuities could be found. I am very aware of the disjunctures as well as the resonances across the domains I have been privileged to enter, and understand that the discontinuities are also tremendously important, and that, for the sake of my argument, I have probably leaned on the continuities more than on the discontinuities. However, I believe that the continuities across sites are telling, and significant. To study them, I used a variety of methods, and participated in different locations in varied ways. The persuasiveness of my study derives from and must rest upon the very multiplicity of spaces within which I trace metaphoric gendered themes and their variations in the production of national security paradigms, policies, and practices.