

## The Torture Matrix

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After the events of 9/11, torture has been much discussed about the idea of torture. Questions focus on whether torture and humiliation are viable weapons against terror, and in which situations such torture should be applied, as well as what the limits of such torture are. Drawing on Baudrillard, the paper explores how these seemingly "theoretical" questions about torture in the United States, heralded and supported by American academics, have hidden some of the actual, underlying problems with pursuing a policy in which torture is "sometimes" permitted under certain specific circumstances. More precisely, the academic debate around whether torture is permissible in situations in which there is a 'ticking time bomb' scenario has obscured the psychological effects of performing the 'torturer' as well as the psychological effects of being 'tortured.'

As a person who has been tortured – in my case by military officials punishing me for my gay rights activism in Egypt – I can provide some psychological insights into the torturer-tortured relationship. Although sharing some similarities, the relationship between torturer-tortured is a distinctive type of master-slave relationship in which the tortured person is likely to engage in which the tortured person forfeits his agency to the torturer, also referred to as Stockholm syndrome, as a way to find freedom in loci in which radical oppression is experienced. The paper deploys existential notions such as 'freedom,' 'responsibility,' and 'choice' as a means to describe the tortured person's internal, psychological struggle when being tortured by her torturer. To demonstrate this, the paper explores the case example of Abu Ghraib, where the American military engaged in humiliating and tortuous practices to detained Iraqis, in order to demonstrate how the psychological processes underlying the torturer-tortured relationship. As part of the analysis of torture in Abu Ghraib, I will also provide commentary about my own personal experience of torture.

Taken together, and through the optic of the case example of Abu Ghraib, the paper will advance the idea that the torture that was perpetrated against Iraqi detainees by the American military constitutes a type of 'simulation.' This simulation can also be referred to as a 'matrix or simulation of torture,' or what the paper refers to as a 'torture matrix.' The torture matrix describes how the technical, militaristic, and academic discourses obscure the torturer's passions and exhilarations that are evident in the now infamous Abu Ghraib pictures. Also, the torture matrix obscures the tortured person's passion to forfeit her agency in her quest to continue to survive and restore herself through the vicarious participation of her will with that of her torturer as a means to 'find some modicum of herself' as the experience of torture produces a sense in which her 'self' or

'being' seem to not only be under attack, but seems to be moving in the direction of complete annihilation – a process of total de-selfing.