

PLAYING GOD WITH BRADLEY MANNING

Back in 2002, Gitmo's Standard Operating Procedures advocated stripping detainees of clothing as a way of demonstrating the omnipotence of the captors.

In addition to degradation of the detainee, stripping can be used to demonstrate the omnipotence of the captor or to debilitate the detainee.

With Abu Zubaydah—as Jane Mayer has written—they explicitly tied this to becoming his “God.”

... the CIA interrogators also announced they planned to become Zubaydah's “God.” They reportedly took his clothing as punishment, and reduced his human interaction to a single daily visit in which they would say simply, “You know what I want,” and then leave.

That's striking given that—according to Bradley Manning's Article 138 complaint, written in his own voice—Commander James Averhart put Manning on suicide watch on January 18 to demonstrate that he was, for all practical purposes, God.

After being returned to my cell, I started to read a book. About 30 minutes later, the PCF Commander, CW04 James Averhart, came to my cell. He asked me what had happened during my recreation call. As I tried to explain to him what had occurred, CW04 Averhart stopped me and said “I am the commander” and that “no one could tell him what to do.” **He also said that he was, for all practical purposes, “God.”** I responded by saying “you still have to follow Brig procedures.” I also said “everyone has a boss that they have to answer to.” As soon as I said this, CW04 Averhart

ordered that I be placed in Suicide Risk Status.

Following Averhart's order that Manning be labeled a suicide risk, he ordered guards to take his clothing.

He instructed the guards to enter my cell and take all my clothing. At first I tried to reason with CW04 Averhart by telling him that I had been a model detainee and by asking him to just tell me what he wanted me to do and that I would do it. However, I gave up trying to reason with him once the guards entered my cell and ordered me to strip. Instead, I lowered my head and starting taking off my clothes.

Manning's Article 138 complaint shows far more. It shows how the Brig Psychiatrist recommended at least 16 times between August 27 and January 21 that Manning be removed from Prevention of Injury watch. It shows that the day Manning was placed on suicide watch, there was a protest in support of him outside of Quantico. According to Manning, the guards harassed him, demanding he respond to every order with "Aye" rather than "Yes." And except for that day (when he said "Yes" instead of "Aye" and then asked Averhart why that was happening to him), Manning was never deemed to present disciplinary problem.

Manning also describes the whole reason he is now being stripped every night: because he again asked why he is being treated this way.

On March 2, I was informed of your decision regarding my Article 138 complaint. Understandably frustrated by this decision after enduring over seven months of unduly harsh confinement conditions, I asked the Brig Operations Officer, MSG Papakie, what I needed to do in order to be downgraded from Maximum Custody and POI Status. MSG

Papakie responded by telling me that there was nothing I could do to downgrade my detainee status and that the Brig simply considered me a risk of self-harm. Out of frustration, I responded that the POI restrictions were absurd and sarcastically told him if I really wanted to harm myself, that I could conceivably do so with the elastic waistband of my underwear or with my flip-flops.

The government torture canon makes it clear: their plan to break prisoners requires prisoners learn helplessness. A key part of that is—as Averhart himself explicitly described it—playing God.

It is clear the government's program of abuse remains the same. This is the procedure they used on Abu Zubaydah. It is the procedure they used in Gitmo. They are now using it on an American citizen detained on American soil.

And surprisingly, they're still describing their abuse in the very same term: God.