

# Gendered Categories in Presidential Rhetoric: Legitimation and the Gulf War

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**Abstract.** Presidential rhetoric in the United States provides a window into the ideological legitimation of the state, including its military activities abroad. An analysis of rhetorical strategies in George Bush's public speech at the time of the Persian Gulf War reveals how gendered categories are employed to justify the war to the American public. Drawing on a dualistic conceptualization of "good" (hegemonic) versus "bad" (subordinate) masculinities, the President's war narrative describes a "noble" American military pitted against a "bestial" enemy. This process of legitimation is inseparable from a broader "moral regulation" of American society in which gendered identities are selectively cultivated and marginalized. Presidential rhetoric helps to reify these identities, which become, in turn, indispensable to the war effort.

## INTRODUCTION

I come to this House of the people, to speak to you and all Americans, certain that we stand at a defining hour. Halfway around the world, we are engaged in a great struggle in the skies and on the seas and sands. We know why we're there. We are Americans: part of something larger than ourselves. For two centuries, we've done the hard work of freedom. And tonight we lead the world in facing down a threat to decency and humanity (George Bush, *Congressional Quarterly* 2/2/91:308).

Two years ago President George Bush, the Commander-in-Chief of a triumphant military in a foreign land, soared in the polls toward what appeared to be an inevitable victory in his bid for a second term. Now his defeat is history because, the polls and pundits report, Americans were preoccupied with domestic issues. Yet this distinction between the President's role at home and abroad, although meaningful at the policy level, breaks down from the standpoint of the legitimation process that occurs during wartime. Indeed, this process is bound up with (and forms links between) the projection of power overseas and the state's role in identity construction at home. When Bush informs Americans that we are "part of something larger than ourselves," and explains in dozens of public statements exactly

what that something is, he wants to rally support for U.S. military intervention. But he is also conducting the "moral regulation" (Corrigan and Sayer 1985) of American society, telling us who we are and who we *should not* be. Moreover, because of the "persuasive masculinity of 'the state'" (Corrigan and Sayer 1985:12; see also Connell 1987:128), both state legitimation and moral regulation are profoundly gendered projects.

This paper studies these projects through an analysis of George Bush's public speech shortly before, during, and after the Persian Gulf War. My chief aim is to demonstrate how presidential rhetoric relies on gendered categories, embedded in a dominant masculinist ideology, to paint the United States as a "Just Warrior" (Elshtain 1987), while transforming an erstwhile ally into a new "Evil Empire" in a post-Soviet world in which America's justification for playing planetary policeman has withered. I also suggest that the reification of these categories in the foreign policy context serves to "naturalize" hegemonic masculinity, which, in turn, legitimates the state's militarist response to global conflict (Enloe 1989:13).

#### METHODOLOGY

Twenty-two press conferences, state-of-the-union speeches, and presidential addresses were chosen randomly from among all transcripts of George Bush's public appearances as printed in the Congressional Quarterly (CQ), Reuter Transcript Reports, and Associated Press releases between August 8, 1990, when Bush announced the deployment of forces to Saudi Arabia, and April 20, 1991, approximately seven weeks after the President declared victory. The analysis consists principally of identifying recurrent rhetorical strategies that rely on metaphors, images, and phrase patterns that serve as "codes" (Dumm 1989) for gendered categories enmeshed in a dominant masculine ideology. All the strategies discussed occur at least a half-dozen times. I have grouped them into four primary categories and several subcategories.

The choice of the presidential "sound bite" as a unit of analysis raises important questions about exactly what is being measured and how it can be delimited. These are not Bush's words alone but those of advisors and speech writers. In the case of responses to press questions, they are somewhat more impromptu. In both cases, however, these words emanate from a particular set of definitions and assumptions about social reality. Analyzing presidential rhetoric can provide insights into that reality.

STATE FORMATION, HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY,  
AND PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC

Why study “presidential rhetoric,” a phenomenon that, admittedly, does not resonate with the menacing tones of state domination? A “realist pluralist” would no doubt argue that, in a democratic society, only the more overtly authoritarian manifestations of state power, such as physical coercion, are cause for concern. In America, after all, every citizen has the power of the “off” button—and besides, the President is only doing his job when he seeks to persuade the public in its own interest. If we take critiques of ideology seriously, however, we begin to suspect that such conceptual compartmentalization of power works to legitimate the exercise of that power. It is relatively difficult to hide an army, but, when the state exercises its might through ideas, “the location of power and domination is mystified” (Peterson 1991a:10). Philip Abrams argues that the state is itself “an exercise in legitimation” that intentionally misrepresents its own domination. The state “is first and foremost an exercise in legitimation — and what is being legitimated is, we may assume, something which if seen directly as itself would be illegitimate, an unacceptable domination” (Abrams 1981:76).

This domination is “unacceptable” because it enacts and justifies a project to erase the multiplicity of experience, which, in bourgeois society, is grossly unequal along lines of gender, class, ethnicity, etc. (Corrigan and Sayer 1985:4). This erasure of difference is carried out in the form of “moral regulation,” through which the state constructs individual and collective identities by delimiting what is possible and what is not, what is defined as “natural” and what is marginalized (Corrigan and Sayer 1985:4). This has the effect of legitimizing the state, “erasing” the multiplicity of social realities, and catching people in a “totalizing” and “individualizing” process of identity construction in which their collective identification and individual subjectivities are shaped (Corrigan and Sayer 1985:5).

These insights elucidate the ideological dimension of state coercion but leave unanswered this question: What gives presidential rhetoric its ideological weight? Why, in other words, don’t people simply change the channel? A partial response is that the ideological and coercive functions of the state are always entangled and mutually reinforcing, even if we can distinguish them analytically (Peterson 1991a). But this should not be taken to underestimate the power of ideology. Raymond Williams (1977) clarifies this point in his usage of “common sense” to indicate the quotidian, mostly unreflexive, way in which peoples’ thoughts and experience come to reflect dominant ideology:

to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political, and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense (Williams 1977:110).

State legitimation, therefore, depends largely on whether its "claim to legitimacy" (Abrams 1981) is woven into the fabric of common sense. If, as Anderson (1991) argues, the nation is an "imagined community," the state's job is to make sure that most people are imagining it more or less the same way most of the time. This imagery, in turn, "transforms history into nature" (Barthes 1973:129). Public narratives, the stories we are told and repeat like commercial jingles we just can't seem to get out of our heads, are powerful vehicles for these images.

Presidential rhetoric is a potent force because it "educates" consent without overtly coercing it (Gramsci 1971:217), while simultaneously concealing the intent of this educational process by making it appear "natural" (Corrigan and Sayer 1985:4). Moreover, this "public education" is embedded in a "hegemonic masculinity" that naturalizes hierarchical gender relations and the state's role in maintaining them. In wartime, gendered categories take on a particular cast that legitimates aggression by naturalizing the notion of men as violent but just, and women as weak and in need of protection—what Elshtain (1987) terms "Just Warriors" and "Beautiful Souls."

This hegemonic masculinity is an ideology that legitimates particular masculinities and naturalizes male domination. Because masculinity is socially constructed, it reflects the social and historical context of the moment (Brittan 1989). Under contemporary patriarchal capitalism, this context is colored mainly by "the global dominance of men over women" (Connell 1987:183). This naturalized hierarchy is based on a dualism in which masculinity is defined in large measure by its difference from (and exclusion of) femininity and *visa versa*. At the subaltern end of the dichotomy, femininity is associated with weakness and irrationality, whereas dominant masculinity, defined as its opposite, represents potency and reason. Furthermore, the state institutionalizes these gendered power relations, and this institutionalization in turn justifies the exercise of state power both domestically and internationally by relying on the values that emerge from this gendered order. Given this characterization of masculinism and its relationship to state power, it should come as no surprise that Bush's rhetorical strategies for legitimating the Gulf War rely on gendered categories. This becomes all the more clear when we observe the centrality of violence and militarism in hegemonic masculinity and the "ideological

and cultural conflation of manhood, militarism and national chauvinism” (Peterson 1991a:22).

I spend far more time here talking about constructions of masculinity than femininity because my analysis reveals a much more explicit focus on masculine imagery. But because masculinity and femininity shape and define each other, it must be remembered that the latter does not disappear but rather becomes the “unmarked term” in the grand narrative of the struggle between good and evil recounted by the President. Hegemonic masculinity is “rational” and “strong” because it avoids femininity, which is “irrational” and “weak.” In addition, it is superior to alternative forms of masculinity in large measure *because* it protects the virtues of women whose very frailty makes them vulnerable to harm from the “darker” side of masculinity (see Elshtain 1987 and Enloe 1989). In fact, hegemonic masculinity defines itself against subordinated masculinities as well as femininity (Connell 1987). As I hope to make clear below, such an interplay is central to the rhetorical strategies employed by Bush to legitimate the Gulf War. In this way hegemonic masculinity, represented by Bush and the military and nation he commands, is constructed as noble and civilized in relation to the subordinate masculinity of Saddam Hussein and Iraq, portrayed as bestial and without honor.

#### DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In this analysis I have sought to denaturalize and deconstruct the gendered categories undergirding Bush’s rhetorical strategies (Peterson 1991a). The task has proven somewhat more complex and subtle than I anticipated. When I began to read transcripts of Bush’s speeches and press conferences, I expected to discover very explicit gendered categories. But where I looked for references to women keeping the home fires burning for men battling villainy across the globe, I found instead carefully balanced anecdotes describing both women *and* men left behind. In addition, approximately three-quarters of the specific references to troops mention the fact that women as well as men were stationed in the Gulf (the other references are gender-neutral). At times the President seems to want to draw special attention to this situation:

Seven years ago, Diana Kryptovich worried at home while her husband, Walter, steamed off the Lebanon coast on the USS New Jersey, defending the Marines. Today their roles are reversed. Retired, Walter is at home with their 6-year old son, and Diana serves aboard the destroyer, USS Yellowstone (CQ 8/25/90:2734).

No doubt this is due in part to public recognition of the fact that many of the military personnel in the Gulf were women. Even for an administration whose agenda for women is ambivalent at best, the history of the feminist movement has made it difficult to ignore women in certain public contexts. In another vein, Cynthia Enloe suggests that the visibility of female soldiers in the media served as a strategic comparison with less "liberated" Arab women, helping to prove that a "civilizing mission" from the West was necessary. For example, Enloe argues that by:

contrasting the allegedly liberated American woman tank mechanic with the Saudi woman deprived of a driver's license, American reporters are implying that the United States is the advanced civilized country whose duty it is to take the lead in resolving the Persian Gulf crisis (Enloe 1990:30).

While other explicit references to gender are rare in Bush's statements, implicitly gendered comparisons run throughout. These most commonly take the form of hierarchical dualisms that "contain an implicit value judgement" (Thiele 1986:37), making them useful for classifying the world in terms of "rational-irrational, order-anarchy, mind-body," etc. (Peterson 1991b:8). In the following sections I break these dualisms and other patterns into four general categories.

### **1. The Evil Scoundrel v. A Kinder, Gentler War Chief**

The use of gendered dualisms is notably stark in this first category. In implicit comparisons between Saddam Hussein and himself, Bush sustains the fiction that they are two different types of men representing two different types of masculinity, each defined in relation to the other. Bush signifies hegemonic masculinity in the form of rationality, upright character, and the side of "right." Saddam Hussein, lacking these qualities, epitomizes a subordinated masculinity that is irrational, bestial, evil. In the absence of this fiction, other alternatives might be imagined, so that each man's actions could be evaluated and debated according to more complex, less monolithic criteria.

A key element of this rhetorical strategy is the separation of Saddam Hussein from the concept of Iraq as a collectivity:

[T]he United States has no quarrel with the Iraqi people. Our quarrel is with Iraq's dictator and with his aggression (CQ 9/15/90:2954).

This distancing serves two purposes. First, it enables Bush to vilify the enemy without opening himself to charges of racism against an entire group of people.<sup>1</sup> Second, and more significantly, making Saddam Hussein the recipient of our air strikes conveniently obfuscates the fact that tens of thousands of Iraqis, including many civilians, were killed (Gusterson 1991).

The characterization of Saddam Hussein falls roughly into two categories. The first depicts him as animalistic, cruel, irrational, and insensitive to human suffering. This depiction is supported by claims that he is a terrorist and “rapist”:

We're in the gulf because...of the brutality of Saddam Hussein. We're dealing with a dangerous dictator all too willing to use force... (CQ 12/1/90:4010).

His actions are frequently described as irrational and beyond comprehension:

I can't figure out what he's thinking and neither do the coalition partners with whom I am in touch (CQ 2/9/91:388).

His tactics are associated with “terrorism” as distinct from the presumably less terrifying fighting style of the Allies:

Saddam has sickened the world with his use of Scud missiles, those inaccurate bombs that indiscriminately strike cities and innocent civilians in both Israel and Saudi Arabia. These weapons are nothing more than tools of terror, and they do nothing but strengthen our resolve to act against a dictator unmoved by human decency (Associated Press report 1/23/91:2).

The metaphor of rape is used abundantly, with the innocence of Saddam's victims often emphasized, as if to suggest that rape might be more justifiable if its victims were less vulnerable:

While the world waited, Saddam Hussein systematically raped, pillaged and plundered a tiny nation, no threat to his own. He subjected the people of Kuwait to unspeakable atrocities, and among those maimed and murdered, innocent children (Reuter Transcript Report 1/17/91:A7).

This tactic of painting the enemy as evil or inferior is of course not new to George Bush and the Gulf War. Configuring the enemy as “the

representative of a principle of evil one must stomp out" justifies unleashing our own aggressive masculinity, which is transformed into a "crusading ethos" (Elshtain 1987:201). Our own use of violence is thus ennobled because its goal is to extinguish tyranny.

In the second category, Saddam Hussein is portrayed not as evil, but as lacking the masculine qualities of honor and a sense of fair play. As a "rogue," he deserves the rough treatment he receives, much as the playground bully deserves the beatings from his victim's big brother. This depiction is supported by claims that Saddam is a liar and a cheat who betrays his friends:

Saddam Hussein promised his friends he would not invade Kuwait. And four days ago, he promised the world he would withdraw. And twice we have seen what his promises mean. His promises mean nothing (CQ 8/11/90:2614).

In the early morning hours of Aug. 2, following negotiations and promises by Iraq's dictator Saddam Hussein not to use force, a powerful Iraqi army invaded its trusting and much weaker neighbor, Kuwait (CQ 9/15/90:2953).

These images are bolstered by claims that Saddam repeatedly rejected peaceful conflict resolution in favor of confrontation:

But time and again, Saddam Hussein flatly rejected the path of diplomacy and peace (CQ 2/2/91:310).

Even as a leader of his own people, Saddam Hussein remains the bully who, in contrast to the caring Bush, is unconcerned about the well-being of his troops:

What concerns me are the lives of our troops...and Saddam Hussein should be concerned about the Iraqi forces. But how concerned he is I don't know, 'cause when you shove people into the people, pushing them from behind, to be defeated, clearly and surely, or when you send your airplanes up and the score is totally one-sided...you have to wonder how he looks at—at what you're asking about, how he feels about it (CQ 2/9/91:388).

In contrast to Saddam Hussein's fallen masculinity, Bush attempts to paint himself as the "right kind of man" for the job of America's Commander-in-Chief. Interestingly, this appears to be a much more complex task than the monolithic portraiture of Saddam Hussein as evil. The difficulty lies in the question of what masculine qualities the War Chief



ought to have, a question that causes Bush some confusion. As we saw above, Bush feels it is important to demonstrate that he is a caring leader, and yet, enmeshed in a hegemonic masculinity accentuating “toughness and force” (Connell 1987:125-126), he wants to appear strong. When asked why he was spending so much time vacationing during the war, he responds:

I am not going to be held captive in the White House by Saddam Hussein of Iraq (CQ 2/2/91:283).

When a reporter asks “How seriously do you take his public threats?” Bush answers:

The United States won't be threatened (CQ 8/25/90:2736).

Yet, ever-conscious of the defining line between himself and his adversary, Bush tries to avoid sounding like a bully, claiming he prefers peace to confrontation:

[E]ven as planes of the multinational forces attack Iraq, I prefer to think of peace, not war (Associated Press report 1/17/91:2).

Evidently, this balance between toughness and a “kinder, gentler” approach to war is difficult to maintain. At stake is Bush's ability to represent to the American people an image of a man who is not too darkly belligerent nor too “unmanly.” I quote the following press question-and-response at length to demonstrate the convolutions necessary to maintain this balance:

Q: Mr. President, we've heard from your wife recently that you haven't been sleeping so well, and we've also heard the drums [of anti-war protesters] outside are keeping you awake. My question is if you could just share with us what kind of personal toll this war is taking on you as far as your routine, your moods, your emotions?

A: Hey, Maureen, look, my wife—normally I stick by everything she says, but I'm sleeping very well...I'm sleeping quite well as a matter of fact...I can't tell you that I don't worry a lot about our families, the families of the troops. I'll tell you what was emotional for me...was this visit down to the three bases I went to, and it was very, very moving. But what I came back with was the—the sense of—sense of wonder at the way these spouses are staying together, totally supportive of their spouses across the way. So I got a lift—when I said I got lifted up, my morale was not down, it's been good, and I'm just so confident of how this thing's going to work out. But it was better, my morale was better when it was—I saw these families, and when

I talked to some who had loved ones missing or held prisoner, I just—I just wondered at their strength... So my-my own feeling is I know what I've got to do, I've got very good people helping me do it. I don't really lose sleep. I can't tell you I don't shed a tear for—for families of—and for those that might be lost in—in combat. We've had very few losses, and yet I got to tell you I feel each one. But we're going to continue this and we're going to prevail... (CQ 2/9/91:390).

Unsure how to maneuver among the jagged rocks, Bush shoots the contradictory rapids of masculine identity in his leaky canoe. Does he sound loyal or "hen-pecked" if he agrees with his wife (and a female reporter) that he's losing sleep? Is sleeplessness a symbol of deep concern for the troops or of weakness and self-doubt? Is being moved by the courage of families a sign that his morale was too low to begin with, or does it indicate sensitivity to their plight? Does "shedding a tear" over U.S. losses balance his eagerness to use force with emotional sensitivity, or is it an admission that he cannot control the outcome of the war he began? George Bush's confusion over how to portray his own masculine identity, his lack of certainty about the contents of hegemonic masculinity, demonstrates how complex the legitimation process can be, even for those who have it in their job description. Thrown off guard by a question that threatened to define him in "feminine" terms—how do you *feel* about orchestrating this war—Bush responded to the reporter and, indirectly, to his wife, by insisting on his masculinity. But he could not get it to come out sounding quite right. Unknowingly, George Bush became for a moment a model of the post-modern Man, simultaneously constructing and deconstructing his masculine identity in public. For a moment, these gendered categories ceased to appear so "natural" as presidential rhetoric foundered on the rocks of a contradictory masculinity.

## 2. The Duality of Violence and the Disappearing Body

Just as Bush depicts two kinds of men representing opposing masculinities, he constructs two contrasting types of violence, one mean-spirited, aggressive, "dirty," the other just, principled, and "clean." Because the Iraqi discourse on war lauds the destruction of bodies in combat (no doubt rooted in a different set of conceptualizations of hegemonic masculinity) while the U.S. discourse tries to hide them, it is easy to make the Iraqis appear more aggressive, despite the fact that American actions were far more deadly (Gusterson 1991). Gusterson documents the rhetorical strategy of the "disappearing body" among Defense Department officials:

On the rare occasions when American leaders were asked about the dead Iraqis, their corpses vanished in the middle of sentences. For example, Brent Scowcroft...told Sam Donaldson "our goal was not to kill people. Our goal was to destroy the Iraqi army." Similarly, General Schwartzkopf at his triumphal briefing told a reporter who asked about Iraqi casualties "we are not in the business of killing" (1991:51).

This strategy fueled the American consensus that the Gulf war "represented the triumph...of decency over violence—a triumph not so much in war as over war" (Gusterson 1991:52).

Along the same lines, and in keeping with his portrayal of the "benign violence" of U.S. forces, Bush virtually never mentions Iraqi dead. As noted above, when an enemy is identified, it is always Saddam Hussein himself who is being shot at, along with faceless military installations and tanks. Deliberate obfuscations occur through euphemisms such as "collateral damage," implying that casualties that were not *intended* targets do not "count.:"

[W]e are doing everything possible and with great success to minimize collateral damage, despite the fact that Saddam is now relocating some military functions, such as command and control headquarters, in civilian areas such as schools (CQ 2/9/91:387).

### 3. The Just and Noble War(rior)

Large portions of Bush's speech are devoted to descriptions of U.S. soldiers in the Gulf, including anecdotes and excerpts from soldiers' letters home. These provide images of what Elshtain calls the "Just Warrior," which has a long history in the West (1987:137). The Just Warrior identity draws on masculinist values of bravery, self-sacrifice, and that peculiar combination of pacifism and a willingness to fight:

A soldier, Pfc. Wade Merritt of Knoxville, Tenn., now stationed in Saudi Arabia, wrote his parents of his worries, his love of family, and his hopes for peace. But Wade wrote: I am proud of my country and its firm stand against inhumane aggression. I am proud of my army and its men. I am proud to serve my country (CQ 9/15/90:2953).

Closely related to the "Just Warrior" is the "hero" who epitomizes and legitimates dominant masculine qualities by making them appear monolithically virtuous. According to Connell, "hegemonic masculinity is naturalized in the form of the hero and presented through forms that

revolve around heroes..." (Connell 1987:249). Referring to the occupation of Panama, Bush uses a soldier's heroic behavior to justify uninhibited use of force against Iraq:

Cpl. Roderick Ringstaff spoke of combat, and he spoke of the heroics of others, but not of his own. Next to him was his commanding officer, and so his commanding officer filled in the rest. This medic had been wounded but repeatedly braved fire to rescue other wounded, pulling soldier after soldier to safety. For that he was awarded the Silver Star for bravery. In listening, I thought to myself, I will never send young men and women into battle with less than the very best that this nation can provide them (CQ 8/25/90:2734).

This last refrain is sounded louder and louder as war becomes imminent: the promise that America will not confront Saddam Hussein with half-measures. "Vietnam" and the "Vietnam Syndrome" become the code words for what is implicitly identified as a "feminine" approach to conflict: one in which people doubt the prudence of unmitigated violence and defy the government to seek other means for solving global problems. The recurrent metaphor of the fighter with "one hand tied behind his back" implies the "emasculatation" of the troops in the Vietnam War. The Gulf War, in contrast, is the right kind of war, Bush insists, because it is a masculine war in which violence is not restrained:

I've told the American people before that this will not be another Vietnam, and I repeat this here tonight. Our troops will have the best possible support in the entire world, and they will not be asked to fight with one hand tied behind their back (Reuter Transcript Report 1/16/91:A8).

It's a proud day for America and, by God, we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all (CQ 3/2/91:549).

As noted above, a principal rhetorical strategy is to distinguish two kinds of violence, rooted in two opposing conceptualizations of masculinity. This is further evidenced in Bush's insistence that the U.S. is really a peace-loving nation and fights only when compelled to, just as its warriors must fight their natural pacifist tendencies to battle aggression. Once aggression has been stopped, this kind spirit inevitably reemerges. This, in turn, proves that *our* violence is obligatory, not instinctual:

I'm sure many of you saw on television the unforgettable scene of four terrified Iraqi soldiers surrendering. They emerged from their bunker broken, tears streaming from their eyes, fearing the worst. And then there

was an American soldier. Remember what he said? He said: 'It's okay, you're all right now, you're all right now.' That scene says a lot about America, a lot about who we are. Americans are a caring people. We are a good people, a generous people. Let us always be caring and good and generous in all we do (CQ 3/9/91:624).

We are, however, always ready to fight:

No one, friend or foe, would doubt our desire for peace, and no one should underestimate our determination to confront aggression (CQ 8/11/90:2614).

The potentially paradoxical relationship between kindness and aggression is smoothed over by the close association of ("just") war with peace. In other words, war is legitimated by defining it as a necessary prerequisite for peace when faced with an aggressive, irrational foe. The logic, at first elusive but made compelling by repetition, states that America fights *in order to* achieve peace, while its enemy fights to achieve aggression. Our violence affirms our nobility, whereas their violence proves their bestiality:

In the life of a nation, we're called upon to define who we are and what we believe. Sometimes, these choices are not easy. But today, as president, I ask for your support in a decision I've made to stand up for what's right and condemn what's wrong, all in the cause of peace (CQ 8/11/90:2614).

So that peace can prevail, we will prevail (CQ 2/2/91:310).

Along similar lines, Bush insists repeatedly that we have gone to the Gulf to "help our friends." Again, violence in the defense of friends transforms aggression into kindness. We are not the bully; we are the righteous, avenging big brother:

[W]hile one should not underestimate those who endanger peace, an even greater mistake would be to underestimate America's commitment to our friends when our friends are imperiled (CQ 8/25/90:2733).

According to Elshain, this image of the U.S. as peace-loving but willing to "fight the good fight" goes back at least to World War I. In this tradition, America fights only when "the nefarious deeds of others" drive us to it so that our own militarist and nationalist motivations "get hidden within a story of a great and diverse people coming together only under extreme provocation to enter conflicts we had no real hand in "starting"

(Elshtain 1987:110). This image of the reluctant but willing warrior nation is sustained by Bush's insistence that the U.S. and its allies did everything possible to achieve peace before turning to the last resort of war:

The war in the Gulf is not a war we wanted. We worked hard to avoid war...If we fight in anger, it is only because we have to fight at all. And all of us yearn for a world where we will never have to fight again (CQ 2/2/91:310).

Yet there is much contrary evidence that war was far from a last resort. For example, when Iraq hinted it would negotiate a withdrawal from Kuwait in mid-February, 1991, the administration bypassed the opportunity for fear that protracted talks would eat away at U.S. military advantage (CQ 2/23/91:477). Soviet efforts to mediate a settlement also met a lukewarm response from the Bush administration (CQ 2/23/91:478).

In George Bush's narrative, the U.S. is a nation of "just warriors," in contrast to Saddam Hussein's nefarious motivations and tactics. We fight motivated by the desire not only for peace but for an image of goodness, nobility, and morality rooted in a "positive" masculinity, the mirror opposite of Iraq's "negative" masculinity:

This we do know: our cause is just, our cause is moral, our cause is right. Let future generations...know that together, we affirmed America and the world as a community of conscience (CQ 2/2/91:310).

Americans have always tried to serve, to sacrifice nobly for what we believe to be right (CQ 3/9/91:624).

This hegemonic masculinity includes a seemingly endless list of masculine qualities: principled, unwavering, steadfast, dutiful, resolute:

Standing up for our principles is an American tradition...America has never wavered when her purpose is driven by principle... (CQ 8/11/90:2615).

We in this Union enter the last decade of the 20th century thankful for our blessings, steadfast in our purpose, aware of our difficulties and responsive to our duties at home and around the world (CQ 2/2/91:308).

Throughout our history, we've been resolute in our support of justice, freedom and human dignity... (CQ 1/12/91:134).

Whereas American bodies "disappear" under the destructiveness of war, they reappear to signify American virility and self-assurance:

Let no one doubt our staying power... (CQ 9/15/90:2954).

I don't think there will ever be a perception that the United States is going to blink in this situation (CQ 12/1/90:4011).

We are a nation of rock-solid realism and clear-eyed idealism. We are Americans (CQ 2/2/91:308).

We're coming home now—proud, confident, heads high...We are Americans (CQ 3/9/91:624).

Collectively, these qualities confer on the United States a unique leadership role: the heroic elder brother who not only beats up the bully but acts as role model for boys aspiring to manhood:

Among the nations of the world, only the United States of America has had both the moral standing and the means to back it up. We are the only nation on this Earth that could assemble the forces of peace. This is the burden of leadership—and the strength that has made America the beacon of freedom in a searching world (CQ 2/2/91:310).

#### 4. War as Civilizing Mission

This last category of rhetorical strategies relies on notions of “rationality,” “legality,” and “civilized behavior” to discredit Iraq and legitimate American actions. This is evident in the contrast made between Allied “cooperative” aggression and Iraqi isolation:

[W]e are not acting alone but in concert...By itself, America can do much. Together, with its friends and allies, America can do much more for peace and justice (CQ 8/25/90:2733).

It is between Iraq and the entire world community, Arab and non-Arab alike, all the nations of the world lined up, that oppose aggression (CQ 8/25/90:2735).

Cooperation confers legitimacy on U.S. belligerence in part because it makes it appear “rational.” *We* are not motivated by the dark impulses of the loner, the rapist whom no “rational man” can understand. Not only do other nations share our rational assessment that this is a “just war,” but it is condoned by the chief instrument of international rationalism and legalism, the U.N. Security Council:

America was not alone in confronting Saddam. No less than 12 resolutions of the United Nations Security Council condemned the invasion demanding Iraq's withdrawal, without condition and without delay (Associated Press report 1/23/91:1).

Bush's insistence that the U.S. is in the Gulf to reestablish the "rule of law" serves as a code for replacing bestial masculinity with "civilized" masculinity:

America stands where it always has—against aggression, against those who use force to replace the rule of law (CQ 8/25/90:2733).

Most Americans...know that we need to build a new, enduring peace—based not on arms races and confrontation, but on shared principles and the rule of law (CQ 2/2/91:310).

Significantly, Bush's discourse on masculinity and international conflict does not always employ "legality" in the same manner. Dumm (1989) points out that in the 1988 campaign "law" stood for the emasculation of hegemonic masculinity:

Bush had demonstrated throughout the campaign that the category of the "legal" must be disregarded in the name of strength. To refer to legality is to refer to weakness, in foreign policy, where strictures such as the Boland Amendment had "tied the hands of the President" in fighting Communism (1989:36-37).

This ambivalence towards the law points to an important aspect of presidential rhetoric. With the U.S. military monolith in the process of ravaging Iraq, it was beholden on the President to balance out this image of aggressive masculinity in order to distinguish it (once again) from Saddam's savagery. We are strong but we are law-abiding (and peace-loving, moral, principled, and so on). The devastation we wreak is legitimate because it uses legal means towards legal ends.

The idea of "civilization" plays a comparable role but is less ambiguous:

Iraq's invasion was more than a military attack on tiny Kuwait. It was a ruthless assault on the very essence of international order and civilized ideals (CQ 8/25/90:2733).

So tonight, I want to talk to you about what's at stake, what we must do together to defend civilized values around the world (CQ 9/15/90:2953).



[T]oday that new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we've known, a world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle (CQ 9/15/90:2953).

Equating Iraq with a lawless jungle is not meant simply as a slur, but as a reminder that in the "new world order" those who do not follow the rules will not be allowed to play the game:

We have before us the opportunity to forge for ourselves and for future generations a new world order, a world where the rule of law, not the law of the jungle governs the conduct of nations (Reuter Transcript Report 1/16/91:A8).

The world can therefore seize this opportunity to fulfill the long-held promise of a new world order—where brutality will go unrewarded and aggression will meet collective resistance (CQ 2/2/91:310).

We can see that the metaphor of the elder brother is incomplete: We are not there just to punish the bully but to civilize him, even if we must destroy him in the process. Perhaps "lion tamer" is more apt: We strafe the jungle to rehabilitate the lion in order to keep him from trampling our treeless "new world."

### CONCLUSION

In this paper I have sought to demonstrate how presidential rhetoric relied on gendered categories to legitimate the U.S. war against Iraq. By breaking down President Bush's rhetorical strategies into analytical categories, I hoped to "denaturalize" these gendered constructions. Making use primarily of a dualistic conceptualization of "good" (hegemonic) versus "bad" (subordinate) masculinity, Bush painted a portrait of a U.S. military and its Commander-in-Chief as not only justified in its use of devastating violence against a "deserving" enemy but "virtuous" as well. The fact that these are only very narrow and manipulative notions of justice and virtue is concealed by the same rhetoric that constructs them.

I also began by suggesting that this legitimization process is inseparable from the gendered "moral regulation" of American society. In other words, the same public narrative that legitimates the war generates "pressures and limits" on what we perceive and experience as possible and impossible masculine and feminine identities. These truncated identities then act back on that legitimization process, providing the right kinds of subjects—Just Warriors and Beautiful Souls—to conduct the right kind of war. But

perhaps the most important point to note is that these processes *can* be deconstructed and reevaluated, crucial steps in challenging state power.

### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>However, Bush's failure to denounce soundly the outbreak of anti-Arab sentiments and violence during the war suggests that he was not unwilling to let people draw racist conclusions from the conflict. In addition, his portrait of Saddam Hussein relies on stereotypes of Arab men that reinforce racism against Arabs.

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