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Cowboy of the World? Gender Discourse and the Iraq War Debate

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Abstract In this article we examine the debate preceding the most recent war in Iraq to show how gendered framing can compromise the quality of debate. Drawing on a sample of national news discourse in the year before the war began, we show that both anti-war and pro-war speakers draw on binary images of gender to construct their cases for or against war. Speakers cast the Bush administration's argument for invasion either as a correct "macho" stance or as inappropriate, out-of-control masculinity. The most prominent gendered image in war debate is that of the cowboy, used to characterize both President Bush and US foreign policy in general. The cowboy is positioned against a diplomatic form of masculinity that is associated with Europe and valued by anti-war speakers, but criticized by pro-war speakers. Articles that draw on gender images show a lower quality of the debate, measured by the extent to which reasons rather than *ad hominem* arguments are used to support or rebut assertions.

Keywords Gender · Iraq war · News debate · Cowboy masculinity

Introduction

In the spring of 2002, the Bush Administration began publicly to discuss the possibility of US military action against Iraq and by spring 2003, the invasion of Iraq had begun. In retrospect, media commentators have asked why they were not more critical of the administration's war plans, and why reservations about going to war expressed by some of the US's closest allies were not taken more seriously. In this paper, we argue that the use of gender images and metaphors in this public debate impoverished the quality of media coverage of the issues. As such, it is an excellent example of the symbolic power of gender to frame issues and constrain alternatives.

Cultural ideologies such as gender form an implicit framework for popular thought and are available to be mobilized in public policy discussions (Stone 1988), especially when gendered images can serve as portrayals of other binary oppositions (us/them, good/evil, offense/

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defense). However, it is important to note that such ideologies are always multiple and open to contestation (Scott 1986; Smith 1999). When gendered symbols are employed rhetorically to frame political issues, the speakers align themselves with particular understandings of gender as well as express their positions in relation to specific policies. As a consequence, media discourse preceding the war in Iraq became a debate both about which notions of masculinity are positively valued and about the appropriateness of a decision to go to war, with each side of the war debate simultaneously contesting both the policy and the versions of masculinity symbolically invoked to justify their positions.

In this paper we use a content analysis of the year-long debate preceding the war in Iraq to show how images of Bush as a "cowboy" and Europe as a "wimp" were advanced and contested by those favoring and opposing the war. We further show that the organization of war debate in gendered terms expressed and encouraged binary thinking and so lowered the quality of war debate. Although we do not claim that the gendered nature of the debate preceding the 2003 war caused the nation's failure to focus on the complex issues that the invasion proved to raise, we argue that symbolically mobilizing masculinity in this context contributed to the shallowness of media debate by placing the voices for peace, both in the US and in Europe, on a devalued, feminized footing and by casting the Administration's posture of masculinity as the multivalent, but quintessentially American, "cowboy."

The American cowboy represents both the power of "civilization" against the "savage" and "outlaw" forces of disorder and the more "raw" and "untamed" American West against the "effete," urban and over-refined East. As such the cowboy is associated with negative values of racism and imperialism as well as with positive images of law, independence and freedom; the opposite of the cowboy image is not merely a positive view of urban masculinity as civilized, rational, educated but also a negative one of such men being under the power of women, bosses and the discipline of the workplace (Desmond 2007). Moreover, the cowboy is associated not merely with masculinity but with American culture as such (Kimmel 1996), making the debate about cowboy masculinity also about American nationalism.

Gendered symbols such as cowboys form a complex system of reference. As Joan Scott (1986, p. 1096) has argued, gender is not only "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes" but also "a primary way of signifying relationships of power." This is a relationship of reciprocal signification: Invoking gender carries connotations of strength or weakness, as in references to "emasculating America," and invoking images of strength and weakness, such as the "pitiful, helpless giant," carry connotations of gender (Scott 1986; Cohn 1993). Since nation-states are powerful forces and the decision to use military force is an extreme expression of this power, war debate is an excellent forum for seeing the co-connotations of gender and power at work symbolically.

Our empirical case is developed in three steps: we first show the relevance of gendered imagery in the debate running up to the Iraq war by examining the frequency of gender language in news media, in both those sources that are more typically critical and those more typically affirmative of the Bush Administration. We then examine the gendered language to see how particular versions of masculinity are debated in concert with debates about appropriate policy toward Iraq. We focus on the memorable image of G.W. Bush as a "cowboy," showing how the cowboy image is contested by both sides. Finally, we show that the news stories that rely on gendered images are more likely than others to have a less reasoned debate.

Media masculinities and the discourse of war and peace

Gender enters media debates about war and peace in three steps. At the most basic level, gender is a symbolic resource in the media, regardless of issue. The mass media are a crucial part of the

public sphere in modern societies, being the place in which democratic policy debates can be conducted in more than a face-to-face way (Gamson 1992). Second, gender is preferentially used to frame issues of peace and war, the association of masculinity with war being seen as "natural." Finally, debating masculinities in war debates can restrict discussion of alternatives to binary choices, with the "less" masculine, including the non-heterosexual and non-violent, being made into femininity.

Gendered media discourse

News debate is part of the "textually mediated discourses" which organize the social world (Smith 1999, p. 158). The news media shape public understanding of policy issues by mediating popular perceptions of what is important and why (Gitlin 2003; Tuchman 1978; Stone 1988). Stories try to create clear, simple pictures of otherwise complex issues by using thematic frames, such as labels of "hawk," "liberal," and "conservative" (Bennett 2001). The use of framing by the media is a key site of cultural struggle, in which political interests and interest groups intervene to shape the terms of a debate with greater or lesser effect (Gamson 1992; Benford and Snow 2000; Snow 2004).

Gender is part of this political framing process. Journalists actively frame specific issues in relation to gender interests based on the social location of readers, sources and the journalists themselves (Brown and Ferree 2005; Wade 2006). Gendered language often appears in political debates about something other than gender. As a symbolic system gender "interweaves with other discourses and shapes them—and therefore shapes other aspects of our world" (Cohn 1993, p. 228). For example, advocates of animal rights avoid using female spokespeople in political debates because they believe women speakers will be understood as motivated by emotional sympathy with animals, while the men who speak for the movement are more easily heard as offering rational, scientific reasons for their position (Einwohner 1999). The gender association of purity and weakness with "women-and-children" has often been used strategically to argue for the need to defend a threatened national "homeland" (Yuval-Davis 1997; Enloe 1990, 1993). Gender ideologies symbolically structure the social world, organize power relations, and provide a catalyst for historical change (Scott 1986).

American political discourse is generally structured by binary codes, whether of our two party system, adversarial legal system, or even the journalistic notion of "balance" that reduces any issue to two equal sides. Ferree (2003) shows that US media, unlike the German media, put coverage of abortion rights into a two-sided debate in which they try to be "balanced" regardless of the distribution of political forces. Alexander and Smith (1993) show that American civil discourse is ordered around democratic and counter-democratic ideologies that map onto to other binaries such as active/passive, controlled/passionate, and realistic/unrealistic. More recently, Alexander (2004) shows that the discourse surrounding terrorism post-9/11 is organized in binary oppositions—East/West, rational/irrational, and equal/dominating, and Wade (2006) shows that media coverage of female genital cutting defines it as evil, backward, and oppressive and the US as inherently good, modern, and liberating. In both these cases the binary oppositions structure policy options in a way that prevents mutually respectful negotiation and resolution of value conflicts. These exaggerated oppositions lend themselves to being depicted by the use of a symbolic binary, of which gender is the archetype (Lorber 1994).

Paradoxically, the symbolic power of gender for expressing duality lies in its multiplicity, specifically in the hierarchy of differently valued femininities and masculinities (Connell 1987). The image of male versus female as a natural dualism allows differences among masculinities to be constructed as masculine–feminine; hegemonic masculinity, the version that is valued

more highly than other kinds of masculinity, is constructed against these other subordinated masculinities, which by being "not masculine" are therefore framed as feminine. Although non-heterosexual, non-violent, non-dominant ways of being are open to attack as "deviant" and "not masculine," they also can be embraced, in both discourse and practice, as alternatives to hegemonic power (Butler 1990). Whether labeled as feminist, feminine, effeminate or queer, such challenges to hegemonic masculinity as a human standard also challenge institutional relations that sustain domination. On the one hand, the construction and defense of dominant notions of masculinity occurs in part through the discourses of powerful institutions like the media (Connell 2002; Smith 1999). On the other hand, contrasting images of masculinity (or femininity) are tools employed strategically by actors within policy circles and within the media to structure political debate to their advantage (Hoganson 1998; Cohn 1993).

As Deborah Stone (1988) shows, interjecting symbolic meaning into ambiguous circumstances does not control how readers or viewers make sense of what is presented, but it narrows the options and focuses debate on the "two sides" created by the media's quest for "balance." In striving for "balance," American journalists are particularly likely to restructure complex issues to reflect a dual-sided debate (Gamson 1992). The choice of culturally understood symbols to frame a debate thus places the "sides" in relation to each other while anything that falls outside of this ideological frame can be discursively dismissed (Smith 1999). Using gender to organize the binary positions of war and peace not only tilts the balance of the debate toward the more culturally valued masculine side, but excludes considerations of options and issues that fall outside the binary framework altogether. By connecting the diversity of interests of those on each "side" into a gendered package, a binary framing of war debate is lent a logic that does not inherently belong to the constellation of concerns that diverse speakers have.

The gendered language of war and peace

Kristen Hoganson (1998) provides a compelling example of the gendering of an ambiguous war debate, using the case of US newspaper discourse in the run-up to the Spanish American War. In a notable parallel to the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, the sinking of the battleship *Maine* in 1898 provided a symbolic justification of the need to "fight for American manhood" by defending the honor of the nation, as if challenged to a duel. The anti-war speakers in this debate proposed a kind of manhood that was about "moral maturity, and self-control more than physical power and belligerence" (p. 164), but these "arbitrationist" speakers were denigrated by pro-war speakers as wearing "petticoats" and being cowed by suffragists. Depicting their opponents as "less manly," the nationalist "jingos" claimed that war would strengthen the national character of Americans by restoring its masculinity. They not only pushed a reluctant President to declare war, but also created a climate in which Teddy Roosevelt's "Rough Rider" masculinity could help mobilize voters in the following election.

Hoganson does not claim that the Spanish American War was only or even primarily about gender, but that gender was a "mortar" that connected diverse elements of interests into coherent symbolic packages and a lens through which motivations could be interpreted. Deciding who was a credible speaker was framed by gender. She argues that "both sides of the war debate employed ideals of manliness," asking: "Did political convictions determine their character assessments or their character assessments determine their political convictions?" She concludes that the influence ran in both directions. The "different ways the two sides defined manliness" meant that "gender beliefs affected activists' views of the president and his policies" (Hoganson 1998, p. 94). Following Hoganson, we suggest that the influence of political party and policy preferences in the Iraq war debate made certain gender images preferable to use as

tools, but also that the different definitions of manliness that speakers held affected their views of President Bush, European countries, and the Iraq war as a political project.

Another influential analyst of gender in the language of war and peace, Carol Cohn (1987), argues that US government defense and security discourse during the Cold War was organized around masculinity as an unemotional display of strength, justifying callousness toward what was termed "collateral damage," i.e., killing civilians by the millions. She suggests that for the first Iraq War as well the value placed on callousness as masculinity was expressed by contrasting it with masculinity that was framed as "not masculine enough" to be "tough." In this debate, the use of diplomacy became a sign of lacking masculinity, the debate became binary and the association of femininity with weakness was used discursively to devalue national security stances that were not "strong enough." (Cohn 1993).

Other researchers have noted the prevalence of masculinity discourses in the wake of 9/11. Drew (2004) points to how fear and vulnerability in the aftermath of the attack were associated with weakness and femininity, while the media constructed an assertively masculine alternative by playing up "narratives of heroism" from New York City firefighters and rescue crews. The Bush Administration then adopted this rhetoric of "being tough," and "not wimping out." Clark (2004) and Young (2003) argue that after 9/11 Bush was constructed as a "father figure" for the nation with the responsibility to discipline those who invaded the safe space of the national family.

These are illustrations of how, using what Iris Marion Young (2003) calls "the logic of masculinist protection," gender is a powerful tool for mobilizing support for national security measures. Young argues that the logic of masculinist protection evokes fear to set up binaries of "good men/bad men" and "good women/bad women" that are mapped on to policy positions. A "good man" risks himself to protect his dependents (women and children) from "bad men" who are constructed as "uncivilized" and "barbaric." "Good women" accept this protection, and honor their protectors, while "bad women" challenge and reject protection. Dissent becomes associated with "bad women" and is devalued. In our case, the "bad woman" role was assigned by pro-war speakers to Europeans, who were actively demasculinized as wimps and sissies, and framed as "ungrateful" for US protection. The language of "wimp" and "sissy" simultaneously challenges men's heterosexuality and thus their honor as protectors, and casts countries as women, therefore as dependents in need of protection.

Gender binaries and cowboy masculinity

While gender ideology works hard to simplify the presentation of masculinity and femininity into binary oppositions (Lorber 1994), symbolic gender images always remain open to multiple, contested interpretations—in Joan Scott's (1986, p. 1074) classic terms, they are both "empty and overflowing." The cowboy, as a specific image of masculinity that is particularly American, is well suited to provide a locus for symbolic struggles over the role of America in the world. It is thus hardly surprising that much use was made of the cowboy image to characterize President Bush in the debates leading up to the war in Iraq. Yet, like other gender symbols that are not exhausted by normative efforts to define them into a single oppositional dimension, the cowboy image is not easily reduced to a single binary.

As a "man of action, grim, lean, of few topics and not too many words" (Kimmel 1996, p. 149), the mythic cowboy prefers simple binary choices—as movie cowboy actor John Wayne explains "They tell me everything isn't black and white....[W]ell, I say why the hell not" (Kimmel 1996, p. 253). Although John Wayne might not believe it, the cowboy icon is not dichotomously good or bad. The cowboy icon appears in myth both as a hero lawman and a sympathetic outlaw (Garceau 2001; Corkin 2004). The cowboy as a symbol of

masculinity is positively associated with the mythic taming of both the "wild, uncivilized" Native American "Indians" and the "wild west" of the country itself (Clark and Nagel 2001; Kimmel 1996). The cowboy icon is constructed in American popular cultural as "fierce and brave," "willing to venture into unknown territory" with "guts and glory" thus representing the expansion of the boundaries of "civilization" by force of arms (Kimmel 1996). However, the cowboy is also associated with the wildness of the West and "rugged, outdoors masculinity," contrasted with the effete East and urban gentlemen. He acts according to his own moral compass rather than as an accountable member of a formal organization; he prefers the loneliness of the open prairie to living in settled communities, association with women, or following laws. Therefore, the American cowboy was mythically opposed to the city, the European, the woman, and the gentleman as well as to the dangerous "Indians" and other threats against which he was their rude but effective protector.

The cowboy stands for America but also in opposition to modern life and modern masculinity. The modern image of manhood specifically values talk, maturity, intellect, respect for women and self-control as signs of the progress of "civilized man." Already in 1898, those who called for war against Spain were framing this sort of masculinity as "foppish" and "foolish," and celebrating instead "backwoods" manhood (Hoganson 1998). "Backwoods," or as Desmond (2007) calls it, "country masculinity," is associated with the American West, and among the ethnically diverse wildfire fighters he studied, it was embraced by them as alternative to Eastern, urban masculinity even when its demands put their own lives at risk.

When political theorist Robert Kagan (2002) asserted that "Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus," he invoked a strongly gendered metaphor to guide thinking about international relations, playing on the title of John Gray's popular self-help book, *Men are From Mars*, *Women are From Venus*, that provides advice on how to handle relationships in the face of "fundamental" differences between men (Mars) and women (Venus). Kagan's use of the "Mars and Venus" metaphor in war debate constructs countries as gendered actors, while drawing on culturally understood and widely popular notions of male/female relationships to dichotomize differences between the US and Europe in their approaches to foreign policy. This binary emphasizes the aspects of America that are congruent with "cowboy" masculinity, while presenting Europeans as "feminized" and ineffectual men, symbolized as Venus and representing weakness. This allowed the diverse policy opinions expressed in the US and Europe to be reduced to a gender binary that captured the familiar division between modern masculinity and the masculinity of the "cowboy."

The evaluations given to "cowboy" masculinity and to urban, cosmopolitan, modern manhood express cultural values that are the "mortar" connecting other social, political and even geographic interests into a coherent whole. The debate over the Second Iraq War offers a context in which the image of George W. Bush as a "cowboy" can be used to both attack and defend his policies. His personal style, no less than his politics, offers images that crystallize particular meanings of masculinity, and are available to be debated in relation to the speakers' own attitudes toward an attack on Iraq. "Cowboy" masculinity, because it is quintessentially an American form of masculinity, is well suited to express support or opposition to American policy.

Effects of gender media frames

The literature reviewed above leads to specific hypotheses about how media framing will affect the nature of the debate leading up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. As Hoganson (1998) and Cohn (1993) argue, when binary meanings of gender are mobilized, ideas that fall outside of this binary are strategically excluded. The cultural comfort that speakers have in using

gendered dichotomies makes it likely that the use of gendered language will support binary framing generally.

Moreover, negative gender images can trivialize and demean opponents without offering a rebuttal to their substantive claims. Gendering nations and policy positions can make them appealing or ridiculous by bringing the meaning of the gender symbols into the argument. Thus, if the US has to fear "emasculation" and "defend its honor" by a show of "manly strength," a positive value is placed on shows of force without needing to explicitly consider the merits of alternative, non-military policies. To present European countries as "women" is also to discredit their claims. To attempt to argue that a policy could simultaneously be both "more feminine" and "better" creates a symbolic conflict that is difficult to process, like trying to read the word "purple" when it is written in green letters or recognize a red ace of spades (Banaji and Dasgupta 1998). We thus anticipate anti-war speakers to use positive images of more modern styles of masculinity rather than of femininity, and that anti-war positions and speakers will be trivialized as feminine by pro-invasion speakers.

Methodology

To see how gender was used in the run-up to the Iraq invasion, we selected sources from three kinds of mainstream US news media—newspapers, television news and news radio—in the period from March 1, 2002 through March 19, 2003; roughly the beginning of public debate about invading Iraq to the day the US attacked Iraq. We purposively sampled news sources with political positions from moderate left to moderate right in terms of sympathy to the Bush administration, choosing *The New York Times*, *National Public Radio*, *USA Today* and *Fox News Network* to represent these positions. To capture war debate, we selected articles that did more than report events. To be included, an article had to have at least one speaker who expressed at least one viewpoint regarding the pros and cons of going to war with Iraq. We then randomly drew a 20% sample from these four sources, stratified by source and month. Because it is a constant percentage of coverage, this self-weighting sample accurately represents the various bursts and lulls of war debate during this year as well as the extent and character of the debate in each source.

In addition, to be able to analyze the nature of gendered speech more closely, we drew a supplemental sample of articles based on keyword searches for gendered images. Using keywords such as masculine*, macho, cowboy, wimp, sissy/sissies, Mars/Venus[1] we sought to locate additional war debate articles in this time period that included gender language and were not already in our representative sample. We also examined a non-random sample of US and European editorial cartoons that presented Bush and Iraq in gendered fashion to help further to understand the imagery. We drew 370 articles for the representative sample, and located 84 additional articles using gendered language from these sources. From the approximately 150 cartoons we reviewed, we selected four to graphically represent this contest over gender imagery.

Coding and analysis procedures

We worked at two levels of coding: the article level, and the utterance level. For each article and transcript, we coded the overall political slant according to whether or not there was a relatively

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[1] The selection of keywords was based on examination of the gendered images in the representative sample. The full list included: pansy, fag*, girly, feminine, unmanly, limp, or impotent, stud, heroic, tough, strong, and manly.

equal amount of text given to pro- and anti-war sentiments (balanced)[2], or if one side of the debate was significantly more prominent than the other (anti-war or pro-war).[3] Each single statement by an actor and each transition to a different actor or to a new paragraph was considered an utterance; it was coded for political role and affiliation (if reported), and slant of all the speaker's utterances taken together (Ferree et al. 2002).[4] In addition to the stance and gender of the speaker, utterances were also coded for the target (to whom or what the speaker was referring, such as Bush, Saddam, Bin Laden, Rumsfeld, the US or Iraq). Within utterances, each single use of gender language or metaphor was coded as an incident of gendered language.

In the representative sample of 370 articles, 65 (17%) contain gendered language. Some articles use more than one metaphor or image, making a total of 182 such uses in the 65 articles. For the supplemental sample, we identified 84 additional articles with gender language. Based on examination of the random sample, our over-sample of gender language appears to capture the same main ideas of gender being used in the debate. Drawing from both these sources, we have 402 incidences of gender imagery to analyze.

Each gendered metaphor was coded for whether it was used negatively (devalued) or positively (valued). This coding took into account the stance of the speaker, so that when an anti-war actor referred to Bush critically as a "cowboy," that was coded as a negative use but when a pro-war speaker used "macho" as a quality necessary for going to war, this was coded as a positive use. Utterances were also coded for whether they expressed other binary conceptualizations (us/them, good/evil, right/wrong, strong/weak, etc.) and whether they included other concepts potentially relevant to differences of values associated with masculine images (civilization, savagery, backwardness, modernity, reasoning, rationality, emotion).

To examine the effects of gendering war debate on the quality and complexity of debate, we counted the number of assertions made and then examined the justifications offered for them in each of the 370 articles in the representative sample. Any statement made in favor of, or against, the invasion counted as an assertion. When speakers gave evidence for their assertions we counted these as reasons, regardless of later determinations of facticity (e.g. the presence of WMDs). Some assertions were made without any reasons and some had multiple reasons, and we counted each reason separately. For example, this pro-war writer provides multiple reasons to assertion that Saddam must go: "First, his mere possession of such weapons would give him daunting power in a vital region. The second...is that this is a beastly regime, chronically brutal and episodically genocidal..." (*NYT* 1/25/03). A statement such as "The risks of doing nothing, the risks of assuming the best of Saddam Hussein, is just a risk not worth taking" (*NYT* 1/30/03) counted as an assertion without a reason. Additionally, each time a speaker's assertion was justified by an attack on or ridicule of the other side's personal character, behavior, appearance or beliefs, we counted this as an *ad hominem* charge. For example, in a discussion on *Fox News* a Congresswoman's beliefs are portrayed as foolishness rather than substantively rebutted: "What is it about you that you don't get it; you're being played.... You're being very naïve...." (9/24/02).

In total, we identified 6,182 assertions, 3,217 reasons, and 433 *ad hominem* statements in 370 articles. For each article we calculated a quality ratio comparing the number of reasons

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[2] The preponderance of balanced articles shows the strength of the balance norm in American journalism, but a "balanced" article is not inherently a better one by our coding.

[3] The majority of articles from the *New York Times* (54%) are anti-war, while most articles from *USA Today*, *Fox News*, and *National Public Radio* are balanced (65%, 48%, and 59%, respectively). The highest percentage of pro-war articles comes from *Fox News* (38%).

[4] We therefore collected 6,822 (gendered and non-gendered) utterances of which 402 (6%) were gendered.

to the number of assertions. An article with higher quality debate has a higher number of reasons per assertion, while a lower quality debate offers fewer reasons per assertion in the article as a whole. We also noted the slant and gendering of each reason, assertion, and *ad hominem* attack as well as the presence of gendered language in the article and its overall slant.

Findings

The most basic level of results reflects the frequencies with which each source offered arguments pro- or anti-invasion, and the likelihood of their including gendered language in these articles. As the simple quantitative overview of the representative sample in Table 1 indicates, the *Times* and *NPR* were more likely to offer articles that took an antiwar stance than *USA Today* or *Fox*, but the probability of their using gendered language was approximately equal. What varied instead was the meaning given to gender and how it was used to legitimate or discredit each point of view. For this qualitative analysis of gendered meanings in context, we turn to our enhanced sample of 149 articles with gender images (65 from the representative sample and 84 from the oversample).

Men are from Mars

Pro-war actors often made their argument by mobilizing gendered metaphors to challenge the masculinity of the anti-war position. This discursive strategy constructed the anti-war position is as either not sufficiently masculine or as expressing an insufficiently dominant or heterosexual kind of masculinity. Looking at the 402 gendered images used in these 149 articles, we find that 76 (19%) present those who are anti-war as unmanly. Even balanced or anti-war stories echo the framing of "being masculine enough" as an issue for anti-war speakers: "Some of the war hawks are saying that Powell is not strong enough, that he's something of a sissy" (*NPR* 8/19/02). Sissy and wimp are used interchangeably in an *ad hominem* way to dismiss any opposition to going to war, as this pro-war speaker in a balanced discussion on *NPR* asserts: "the EU is a bunch of worthless wimps—they're not good for anything, you can't take them seriously; they're not valuable partners" (*NPR* 4/21/

Table 1 Gendered imagery by sources and slants of articles (representative sample)

Sources	Contains gender imagery					Does not contain gender imagery			
	Pro-War	Balanced	Anti-War	Total	Percent Gendered	Pro-War	Balanced	Anti-War	Total
Fox News	28% (10)	56% (20)	17% (6)	100% (36)	46% (78)	14% (6)	64% (27)	21% (9)	100% (42)
National Public Radio	40% (18)	47% (21)	13% (6)	100% (45)	39% (115)	34% (24)	50% (35)	16% (11)	100% (70)
New York Times	33% (11)	42% (14)	24% (8)	100% (33)	45% (66)	22% (18)	32% (26)	46% (37)	100% (81)
USA Today	27% (7)	58% (15)	15% (4)	100% (26)	41% (63)	11% (4)	73% (27)	16% (6)	100% (37)
Total (*n*)	33% (46)	50% (70)	17% (24)	100% (140)	38% (370)	23% (52)	50% (115)	27% (63)	100% (230)

02). The equation of power and masculinity is further underlined in the image of "impotence," as a pro-war speaker on Fox News asserts: "the UN has become impotent thanks to the Democrats, thanks to the French, thanks to the Germans" (*Fox News* 1/23/03). Such unmasculine actors are weak and unable to act, and thus "worthless."

In constructing the anti-war position as unmasculine, the pro-war position frames toughness as the opposite of both femininity and homosexuality, both coded as non-hegemonic masculinity. In a discussion on *Fox News* about the United Nations' refusal to mandate immediate invasion of Iraq, a pro-war actor chastises the US for ever seeking UN authority for invasion: "if we would have done this right off the bat, what we would have ended up getting was a slap on the wrist from a limp-wristed organization" (*Fox News* 3/10/03). Dismissing the United Nations as "limp-wristed" ties the anti-invasion position to homosexuality, and makes the inappropriateness of this position seem self-evident to any who share a positive regard for "country masculinity." Similarly, opposition to pro-war policy is packaged as a lack of nationalism and masculinity together, as one military analyst reports, "There's a few people in the Pentagon who basically say...that [for] people who disagree, it's not just a question of loyal opposition; this is disloyalty, and these are wimps" (*NPR* 3/9/02). The homosexual or "wimpy" male is defined as disloyal to "real" masculinity and US interests, which are conflated.

The contrast between the US as "Mars" and Europe as "Venus" is sometimes explicitly invoked as a gendered reason for why these nations have different policy preferences, as when as pro-war editorial in the *NYT* points to the "Venus–Mars disconnect over Iraq" (*NYT* 2/16/03). The Kagan model of the US as masculine and Europe as feminine is by no means restricted to the Mars–Venus analogy alone, but instead is used by both sides to depict European countries as metaphorically women. A pro-war article describes Germany in feminine terms asking; "Who knew the Germans were such delicate, easily intimidated creatures?" (*NYT* 1/26/03), while an anti-war editorial calling for more diplomacy, chastises the Bush Administration, saying, "Germany is not some wimpy republic you can just date at your convenience and never call again" (*NPR* 3/18/03).

This gendered relationship metaphor (dating, marriage, dancing together) appears in both text and editorial cartoons, using the supposed power of the United States to cast it as the "man" in the relationship and Europe as the subordinate, and therefore womanly "partner." One anti-war speaker opens a discussion by asking "how can the marriage of Europe and the US be saved?" (*NPR* 5/28/02) Editorial cartoons in Europe as well as the US took up this gendered framing. Figure 1, an editorial cartoon that appeared in the *Baltimore Sun*, shows a charming Bush stepping on the toes of his female dance partner, Europe. Figure 2, from a Swedish newspaper, depicts Bush as a cowboy wooing a disinterested woman/Europe. The partnership of unequals politically signified by these courtship images is used in both papers to criticize Bush as an awkward suitor, but casting the US as "the man" naturalizes American leadership and places it beyond debate while also framing marriage as inherently an unequal partnership between "a man" and "a woman."

Europe is portrayed in the US not only as a woman, but as a "bad" and ungrateful woman who fails to appreciate the protective role of the masculine US. For example, a pro-war editorial argues: "France threatens to use its veto in the United Nations Security Council over Iraq. That veto power is undeserved, because France was a World War II wimp" (*USA Today* 3/7/03). The theme that Europe should be more grateful and appreciative also appears with images of Europeans as "hysterical women, throwing fits and whining" (*NYT* 1/26/03). Or as a pro-war journalist claims, the US takes action against Iraq, while European countries just "watch and whine" (*Fox News* 1/23/03).

In sum, the war debate between European allies and the US is sometimes cast in terms of a troubled marriage or dating relationship, one in which the strength and power of the US

Fig. 1 An editorial cartoon which shows a charming Bush stepping on the toes of his female dance partner, Europe. Source: Mike Lane, *Baltimore Sun*

makes it the "man" who legitimately has the right to make decisions. The views of those who take issue with the rush to war are characterized in negatively feminized terms as "wimps" and "whining." Men who fail to take the "manly" posture of "Mars" are denigrated as "sissies" and their actions are "limp-wristed." This hegemonic view of masculinity as powerful, decisive, heterosexual and unwilling to listen to the "whining" of women is not left uncontested, however.

Debating cowboy masculinity

The image of a dating relationship offers not only the opportunity to characterize Europe as a woman, but also to debate the value of different ways of being men. On the anti-war side, the case for a more gentlemanly and diplomatic masculinity is made in terms of arguing that "there is sometimes a little bit too much testosterone in the air in these trans-Atlantic exchanges" and then suggesting that "sometimes in these matters flirtation and compliments do more good" (*NYT* 2/16/03). The masculinity suggested here is more "gentleman" than cowboy. This contrast appears explicitly in a few articles, such as when an anti-war activist baldly states "I would have been more comfortable putting this in the hands of an administration that had fewer cowboys and more diplomats" (*NYT* 10/4/02).

Fig. 2 A cartoon which depicts Bush as a cowboy wooing a disinterested woman/Europe. Source: Olle Johansson, Sweden

Because the contrast between cowboy and "diplomat" is about gender, the speaker's attitude toward cowboy masculinity is used to express an attitude about the war. Both sides use the cowboy metaphor, but they contest its meaning. In fact, the anti-war side invokes the cowboy metaphor more often than pro-war speakers do (46 times compared to 33), and predominantly frames cowboy masculinity as less valued. For these anti-war speakers, being a "cowboy" evokes connotations of lawlessness, crudeness, and isolation; for the pro-war speakers, it means being a plainspoken American, enforcing the law, and spreading civilization. Overall, "cowboy masculinity" saturates war debate as the most common gendered image, which is present in 31% of all incidents of gendered discourse. President G.W. Bush, the Bush administration, and the US as a nation are referred to as "cowboys" in 11% of the representative sample of articles.

Pro-war speakers embrace of the ideal of cowboy masculinity as a justification for an attack. A pro-war piece about Bush's attempt to gain international support for military action notes this, saying that Europeans have a "favorite image of Mr. Bush as a gun-slinging cowboy. In the past, the White House has always dismissed that view as a gross caricature, meant to exaggerate Mr. Bush's views so that they could be discredited. But now, Mr. Bush's allies—and his political advisers—have decided that the image may have its advantages" (*NYT* 3/18/03). Vice-President Cheney's defense of the president against criticisms of being a cowboy exemplifies this strategy: "Cheney said [that] as a Westerner, he didn't think that's necessarily a very bad idea; that he cuts to the chase and that's exactly what the circumstances require" (*NPR* 3/17/03).

When pro-war speakers contend that a "big, strong, action-oriented cowboy" (*New York Times* 9/22/04) is what foreign policy needs, this gender imagery sets the values of "the West" against those of the East Coast "Dean and DeLuca set" (*NYT* 8/21/02), and those of

America against those of Europe. One speaker in a pro-war discussion contests the anti-war view of George W. Bush as a cowboy expressed in East Coast war protests; "They don't like his way of speaking, they don't like the way he uses his hands, they don't like his cowboy hat, they don't like where he's from. And they use the expression cowboy, as a pejorative where—where Bush is from it's quite an honor to be called a cowboy" (*Fox News* 1/24/03). As this *Fox News* discussant points out, cowboy masculinity is more valued in other parts of the country than on the East Coast.

The positive cowboy image is that of the force of law, bringing civilization to rougher, more savage parts of the world. This imperialist stance is itself sometimes resisted, by suggesting that, although a cowboy is a "good guy," there are reasons not to be a cowboy. For example, in a heated anti- and pro-war debate, the anti-war discussant argues "if we don't do it with the world community and we do it unilaterally, then we become the cowboy of the world. It's not our place" (*Fox News* 12/30/02). The idea of the cowboy as representing civilization moving to establish law in place of lawlessness is also invoked critically, by framing the US or Bush as a "lone ranger." For example, an anti-war editorial argued that "as a cowboy, Bush feels no need to take into account the views and sensitivities of others around the world" (*USA Today* 1/27/03).

The generally positive image of a cowboy as representing law and order is reflected in the "sheriff" metaphor that frames Saddam as an outlaw "wanted dead or alive" (*USA Today* 3/18/03). A *New York Times* article debating whether the US should "go it alone" in Iraq" quotes Bush; "contrary to my image as a Texan with two guns on my side, I'm more comfortable with a posse" (*NYT* 11/22/02). The cowboy as "lone ranger" is easier to critique than the sheriff, but the "posse" he leads neither challenges nor limits his authority. Like the naturalized authority of being the man in marriage, the sheriff is not questioned as a leader, but US unilateralism can be contested within this frame. An editorial supporting military action with UN sanction argues metaphorically: "President Bush is fond of cowboy imagery, so here's an image that comes to mind about our pending war with Iraq. In most cowboy movies, the good guys round up a posse before they ride into town and take on the black hats. We're doing just the opposite. We're riding into Baghdad pretty much alone and hoping to round up a posse after we get there" (*NYT* 3/19/03). The image of sheriff/posse used here places the value of cowboy masculinity beyond question, as representing the "good guys," the law confronting opponents who are "outlaws," but it places the cowboy not out on the lonely prairie, but at the head of an organized group. The cowboy is thus not seen as a "lone ranger" but as a "sheriff" and more aligned with law itself.

A more critical anti-war side frame defines cowboy masculinity as a social danger and as an uncivilized man. As the German magazine cover in Fig. 3 illustrates, Bush the cowboy is framed as a reckless, out-of-control force in the world, but also as too small for the job (his American-flag boots are too big for "the little sheriff"). In the US, an anti-war discussant argues that Bush's cowboy posture is not only inappropriate but dangerous; "Bush just wants to be a—prove he's a Texas cowboy and, frankly, at the cost of the lives of Americans, and it's outrageous and dangerous" (*Fox News* 1/23/03). A pro-war actor in a *New York Times* complains about anti-war perceptions: "despite the fact that Bush chose to go to the UN on Iraq, he is still seen as a cowboy with his finger on the trigger" (*NYT* 11/22/02). Despite their different positions on the war, these speakers agree that being a cowboy is undesirable.

This framing of cowboy masculinity positions it in opposition to the sophisticated, nuanced language of diplomacy that is associated with the United Nations and Europe. One pro-war speaker suggests Bush is having little success gaining European support because: "it may be more of style, this very blunt, plainspoken American cowboy, very simple language, black and white. It doesn't appeal to their sophisticated sense of grayness." The editorial cartoon from the

Fig. 3 A magazine cover which illustrates Bush as a cowboy framed as a reckless, out-of-control force in the world, but also as too small for the job. Source: *Der Spiegel*, Germany, April 23, 2001

Denver Post (Fig. 4) depicts cowboy Bush's choice between "cowboy rhetoric" and "diplo-macy" as illustrating the sharp differences between the UN/European and US positions. Anti-war speakers advocate this alternative to cowboy masculinity as a more modern and appropriate style of being a man. During a debate on *Fox News*, an anti-war discussant argues, "I think we, the president and the US, also need to show that it's a better citizen of the world than it has. Europeans in particular think of George W. Bush as the cowboy, out on his own, the lone

Fig. 4 An editorial cartoon depicts cowboy Bush's choice between "cowboy rhetoric" and "diplomacy" as illustrating the sharp differences between the UN/European and US positions. Source: Mike Keefe, *The Denver Post*, March 26, 2002

ranger, if you will. And I think that cannot be sustained in the globalized world we live in" (*Fox News* 9/16/02).

Pro-war actors contest the devaluation of the term cowboy, by distinguishing the cowboy as a real American, apart from Europe and Europeans as well as from the "upper class" East Coast. One such a pro-war actor states "I think a lot of Americans do resent the way the French characterize Bush, and they call him a cowboy, and that he's an ignoramus, and that he doesn't know what he's doing, and he is a loner" (*Fox News* 2/20/03). These speakers praise Bush's style of speaking as both simple and especially "American"—anything more elaborate than "quick speech and action" (*Fox News* 2/8/03) is not appropriate for dealing with "outlaws."

Whether figured as a pro-war sheriff or anti-war gunslinger, the cowboy becomes an icon for a certain type of masculinity that presents physical strength, linguistic simplicity and autonomy as "American" values, and arguments both for and against this masculinity place women, Europe, complexity, and consensus-seeking together in a category framed as the "other." This binary aligns political preferences with images of masculinity, but also uses these contrasting images of masculinity in and of themselves as arguments for and against invasion. The variety of ways this metaphor is evoked in war debate exemplifies how potent gender is as a "mortar" holding diverse political concerns together.

This reciprocity of meaning resonates differently for those who identify themselves with being urban and modern or those who identify with traditional, rural America. The cowboy image was popular because it captured this conflict of meanings in its own ambiguity as both a force for and a resistance to "civilization." From both a European and American perspective, the cowboy can stand as a metaphor for America as a whole, but with different consequences for mobilizing political sentiment. How the other binaries of good/evil, civilized/uncivilized, weak/strong are invoked in the course of the debate may reflect their packaging into symbolic

units implied by this gender language, and thus "over-package" policy alternatives into only two sides.

Gender binaries and the structure of discourse

Some media speakers connect the "simplicity" of the debate with the language of cowboy masculinity. As one editorial criticizes the Bush administration approach: "When the Bushies get into the bunker, democracy operates the way they like. It is not messy and cacophonous. It is orderly and symphonic. There are sheriffs and outlaws, patriots and madmen, good and evil, Churchills and Hitlers" (*NYT* 9/15/02). Although anti-war actors contest the framing of Bush and Saddam as sheriff and outlaw as too "orderly" for a situation with nuance and complexity, they also simplify their arguments with masculine images. This anti-war speaker frames the US as a "star-spangled bully clenching its imperial fist and threatening other countries" (*USA Today* 2/11/03).

In this section we investigate the degree to which the use of gendered images relates to impoverished discourse through encouraging a reliance on other binaries. A pro-war actor states bluntly, "the president describes those who disagree with his strategy on terrorism as not belonging to the civilized world" (*NPR* 9/3/02). The pro-war argument relies at times on extreme dichotomies, such as "when you're confronted with evil dictators who are totally uncivilized and barbaric, sometimes war is the only answer" (*Fox News* 1/23/03). We predicted binary thinking would relate to the use of gender metaphors, since these symbolically dichotomize the political field. We see the use of these metaphors as tools for unifying the oppositional sides, rather than as either the cause or result of the policy disagreement.

We found that gender images are more likely to be used in articles that present primarily one side of the argument. Gendered discourse is less likely in articles containing debate between both pro-war and anti-war actors. Seventy-four percent of one-sided pro-war and anti-war articles contain gendered language, while only 22% of balanced articles contain gendered language. Just as anti-war speakers are the most likely to evoke cowboy masculinity, utterances that employed gender images are more likely to be critical of the invasion. Of the 402 incidents of gendered discourse, 44% (177) are pro-war, 50% (201) are anti-war, and 6% (24) are unclear in their slant, compared to the 6,420 non-gendered utterances, of which 46% (2,953) are pro-war, 35% (2,247) anti-war, and 25% (1,605) unclear. Contrary to our expectation, the use of gendered images does not reduce speakers' ability to contest the move toward war.

However, both sides actively reduce the complexity of war debate when they draw on gendered meanings to argue for or against war. We measure quality by the ratio of the number of reasons to the number of assertions for each article. Overall, the quality of debate for all 370 articles (reasons per assertion) averaged 0.52. There are notable differences in quality from source to source. While *Fox News* not surprisingly earned the lowest quality score (0.45), the *New York Times* was not much better (0.48), and NPR only a little better than that (0.54). *USA Today*, surprisingly, had the highest overall quality (0.74), perhaps because many of its opinion pieces were organized schematically with the reasoning for each position explicitly laid out.

The presence of *ad hominem* remarks is associated with overall debate quality. *Ad hominem* attacks are rare in articles with reason ratios over 0.60. Articles with reason ratios over 0.60 had on average 0.64 *ad hominem* statements and articles with quality scores lower than 0.50 averaged 1.34 *ad hominem* statements per article. Furthermore, articles that use gendered language are far more likely to employ *ad hominem* attacks (58% of gendered and 32% of non-gendered articles). While *ad hominem* language may be attacking masculinity, it need not be (e.g. *Fox News* says of anti-war actors that "their

frame of reference is usually that of a shrimp" (3/10/03), and a speaker on *National Public Radio* calls them "those Yankees" (*NPR* 3/4/03). *Ad hominem* statements, whether gendered or not, tend to be made by pro-war actors (59%) and, unlike gendered images, typically come in articles containing debate between pro- and anti-war speakers (66%).

Articles with gendered language scored lower in terms of quality. While the overall ratio of reasons to assertions for all articles is 0.52, the quality is only 0.43 in articles where gendered language is present (0.58 for those without it). Compare a *New York Times* opinion piece (2/14/03) reporting "administration officials growled in deep, macho voices that they were keeping all options on the table," which has an overall quality score of 0.33 to a non-gendered discussion with a nuclear weapons expert on *National Public Radio* (1/20/03) with a quality score of 1.23.

Our 182 gendered utterances included 97 assertions, 23 reasons, and 62 *ad hominem* statements in total. While gendered assertions come from anti-war and pro-war speakers in roughly equal numbers (46 anti-war and 51 pro-war), gendered reasons primarily come from anti-war actors (15 of 23), often refer to Bush's cowboy masculinity, and tend to occur in lower quality articles. For instance, an anti-war actor gives as a gendered reason that Bush is "being too much of a cowboy. He hasn't demonstrated a clear danger, immediate threat" (*Fox News*, 9/15/02) in an article that has a fairly typical low quality score (0.41) for gendered articles (0.43 overall).

Articles where gender is mobilized are also more likely to contain dichotomies. Of the 149 articles that contain gendered language, 80% (119) also contain other kinds of binary language that is not gendered (such as with us/against us, new world/old world, and civilized/uncivilized). In sharp contrast, of the 305 articles that do not contain gendered discourse, only 46% (141) used any binary language to talk about war. The articles that contain either gendered language or other kinds of binaries tended to contain lower quality debate, that is, fewer reasons per assertion. For instance, while the average quality score for all articles was 0.52, the 119 articles with non-gendered binary language scored 0.45 compared to articles with any gendered language (0.43). The 164 articles that contained neither gendered language nor other binary language had the highest ratio of reasons to assertions (0.59). The presence of binary language seems to reflect a lower quality of debate, and gendered language is a readily available binary that can add emotional depth and visual imagery to other forms of binary thinking, thus creating firmer, more self-evident packages. These gendered forms of debate call for fewer actual justifications to make them appear credible to readers, listeners and perhaps to the participants themselves, allowing for less reasoned argument and a generally more *ad hominem* style of discourse.

Conclusion

Mobilizing gender ideology in metaphors such as marriage or the cowboy illustrates the power that gender has to organize policy discourse. While such images naturalize male power, they remain contested: cowboy language was used by both sides to garner support for their view of an appropriate way of dealing with Iraq. Drawing on the cowboy's association with America and with law both affirms the value of "country masculinity" and bolsters the case for war, while the "wild west" cowboy offers a critical lens on a rash and isolated man who fails to grasp the complexity of modern life and behave as a gentleman, a useful image for discrediting the case for war. Whether "cowboy" masculinity is viewed positively or negatively, however, it frames the "real" masculine position as the correct policy. A good man may know how to lead his partner in a dance without stepping on her toes, or may be the gunslinger of few words and quick action, but he is in either case a man.

The images of femininity that appear in pre-war debate are all negative. To be "Venus" is to be the weaker partner, the "sissy" or "biddy" who is afraid to fight and ungrateful for the protection of "Mars." To argue that it is better to be a "wimp" or "limp-wristed" is virtually impossible (one article attempts it with sarcasm), but arguing for a "better" form of masculinity is easy. Thus the debate focuses on men and manhood and leaves real women and femininity's virtues out of the picture. Gender ideology naturalizes the man as the "leading partner" and allows the subordinate/woman being "defended" only the options of being grateful or "whining." While it would be impossible to separate the chicken from the egg and say that political leanings gave speakers a reason to defend country masculinity or that those who believe in country masculinity were apt to embrace the war, our evidence suggests that each orientation reinforced the other and allowed each side to engage in *ad hominem* attacks.

It is also worth noting one absence in our sample. In the year before the attack on Iraq, we found no examples of the framing of this war as the liberation of women from Islamic oppression. While it is possible that our 20% sample missed incidents of this language, we believe that a fuller investigation would show that this argument was used nearly exclusively about the US invasion of Afghanistan, and was left implicit when the Bush Administration claimed that invading Iraq was a continuation of the "war on terror." Perhaps because women were relatively unveiled and educated in Iraq compared to most Middle Eastern states, we found general talk of the liberating all Iraqis from Saddam and bringing democracy into the region, but no references to women's rights specifically. Women's rights discourse does surround the women of Afghanistan leading up to that invasion in 2001 but does not emerge in relation to the women of Iraq until well after the war begins, in late 2004.[5] Thus we find masculinity, not women or their rights, was the gender ideology that was mobilized purposefully by both sides before the war.

Gender is a powerful binary, and it both guides speakers to choose other binary ways of seeing the world (such as civilized/uncivilized) and symbolically expresses the inclinations of speakers who see in binary terms already. The presence of all binaries, not only gendered ones, is associated with a less reasoned quality of debate, but gendered language is the most culturally available binary and is associated with the use of other binary terms as well. Thus our data suggest that gendered language both encourages and reflects a frame of mind in which the alternatives are narrowed to binary choices. Rather than giving reasons for assertions, speakers make character—readily exemplified by gender—part of the good/bad frame. The *ad hominem* mode of argument—calling other people names and ridiculing them—is also the way that gender is ordinarily policed. When a war debate becomes saturated with gendered images, policing masculinity becomes a matter of concern. But masculinity does not appear only in one hegemonic form behind military issues; pro- and anti-war speakers both argue in terms of their preferred alternative forms of masculinity. Framed in such terms, it becomes difficult to step back and ask whether masculinity is appropriate at all as a frame for political decision-making.

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[5] Searches in Lexis/Nexis for "Iraqi," "women," "women's rights," "oppress*," and "liberation" showed that framing the Iraq war in terms of liberating Iraqi women did not begin in our news sources until November of 2004.

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