Masculinity as Political Strategy: George W. Bush, the "War on Terrorism," and an Echoing Press

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ABSTRACT. Scholars have demonstrated the centrality of masculinity as an ideology in the American presidency, but have devoted insufficient attention to the manner in which political leaders can emphasize masculine themes to gain strategic advantage, and how media organizations can be encouraged to adopt such themes in news coverage. With this in mind, in this research we analyze (1) President George W. Bush's public communications prior to and immediately following the attacks of September 11, 2001, and (2) NBC network television news coverage and *New York Times* and *Washington Post* editorials during the latter dates to elucidate the nature of masculinity as a political strategy. Findings indicate that in the aftermath of September 11 Bush enacted a highly masculine ideology through his treatment of the press and emphasis upon two masculine themes–strength and dominance–and that this approach facilitated wide circulation of his masculine discourse in the press. doi:10.1300/J501v29n01_03 *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

Within hours of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush spoke to the national media at Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana, attempting to assure the American public that he was in control of the situation: "Make no mistake: The United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts" (Bush 2001a). Over the next nine days, the president spoke frequently in public, to the press, and to the nation as the administration developed and then announced plans for a far-reaching "war on terrorism." Throughout this period, Bush employed a discourse rich in highly masculinized language, emphasizing, among other themes, the metaphor of "the hunt" and the mythic notion of the "Old West." For example, after a September 17 tour of the damage at the Pentagon, a reporter asked Bush if he wanted Osama Bin Laden dead. The president responded, "I remember that they used to put out there in the Old West, a wanted poster. It said, 'Wanted: Dead or Alive' " (Bush 2001b). This rhetorical campaign in the days immediately following September 11 set the stage for subsequent military and legal campaigns, and culminated in the president's September 20 address to a joint session of Congress and an estimated national television audience of 82 million Americans–almost certainly the largest in US history for a political event (Huff 2001).

Bush's regular displays of masculinity since the attacks of September 11 have drawn notice–and often, but not always, criticism–from media commentators. For example, *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd opined that the president has been "stranded in his [19]50's world of hypermasculinity" (Dowd 2003); the *American Enterprise* devoted its September 2003 issue to American conceptions of masculinity (see, for example, Nordlinger 2003); and the *American Prospect*'s cover story in June 2006 declared that "Through conscious, concerted, disciplined, and relentless effort, Bush and his party have succeeded in cowing critics and defeating Democrats by advancing images of, and insinuations about, manliness in the public sphere" (Wilkinson 2006). Notably, scholars have devoted significant attention to the masculinization of the presidency and how presidents have perpetuated, benefited, or suffered from this masculine construction (e.g., Daughton 1995; Jamieson 1988; Jeffords 1989; Kimmel 1987; Lakoff 1990; Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles 1996). However, little research has systematically examined how a masculinized discourse might work in political terms. Particularly lacking is

an analysis of ways that political leaders can emphasize masculine themes to gain strategic advantage, and how media organizations can be encouraged to adopt such themes in news coverage. To gain insight into these processes, we examine presidential and news media discourse surrounding the transformative events of September 11.

MASCULINITY, POLITICAL STRATEGY, AND SEPTEMBER 11

Masculinity is, at its core, a social and historical construct (Clatterbaugh 1998; Connell 1995; Kimmel 1994). As such, different varieties of masculinity must be produced, extended, and circumscribed through discursive performances (Butler 1990). That is, people are constructed as masculine by positioning themselves, or by positioning others, as embodying a set of cultural practices and expressions that carry the currency of manhood. The unfixed nature of these constructions and performances allows for the cultural creation of differing, indeed even competing, forms of masculinity–what Connell (2002) calls "subordinated masculinities" and Kimmel (1994) refers to as "alternate masculinities." This multiplicity affords scholars the opportunity to identify the constructions of masculinity that are predominant at a given moment, to explore why, and how, these versions gained cultural prominence, and to consider the implications of such hierarchies. Indeed, a number of studies have documented the changing forms of masculinity over periods of history and the role that public discourse plays in reaffirming and reproducing masculine cultural norms (e.g., Connell 1995; Jeffords 1989; Mosse 1996; Wahl-Jorgensen 1999).

We build on this scholarship by examining the ways in which political leaders can use masculinity in a strategic manner within a mass media environment. Our focus is on American politics, for two reasons. First, the decisions made by US leaders have wide-ranging implications–particularly in the struggle against terrorism–for citizens worldwide (see Cloud 2004; Domke 2004). Second, Ducat (2004) has suggested that during recent decades "male anxiety has come to shape *political* discourse and behavior" (3, emphasis in original). The political arena, therefore, is both an important and useful context in which to study performances of masculinity. Our particular interest is the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, a transformative period during which issues of gender were especially salient. For example, the majority of those who made decisions about the United States' response were

men–as were those who were allowed an opportunity to comment on this response in the press–while women were depicted in relation to the attacks primarily as victims (Charlesworth and Chinkin 2002; Cloud 2004). Further, as the first large-scale attacks on the United States mainland by a foreign adversary, September 11 exposed a crack in the masculinized armor that the nation had constructed for the past century as it grew into an economic and military superpower (Nagel 1998; Petchesky 2001). It seemed probable, then, that the political response to the attacks would bear the trappings of masculinity.[1]

Within this context, we identify a two-pronged masculinity strategy that politicians might use to facilitate the dissemination of their message and accrue political capital. This strategy involves establishing *discursive control* and employing *masculinized themes*. In the first part of this strategy, politicians repeat words and phrases designed to make their message appear unequivocal and unchallengeable. Doing so enacts a certitude common in traditional masculine personae (e.g., Sexton 1969; Trujillo 1991) and helps politicians manage media treatment of their messages. For the Bush administration after September 11, enacting such certitude became crucial. As the president put it to his top advisors, "This is a defining moment. We have to get it right" (see Zarefsky 2004, 138). With this in mind, we posit that Bush adopted a masculinized persona that he particularly emphasized in his direct interactions with the press, with the goal of ensuring that his vision of an appropriate response to the attacks circulated widely and in the manner he desired. Bush's attempts at discursive control were made manifest in two ways. First, he used series of words and phrases that suggested his views were *bold and clear*, such as "send a clear message," "my message is this," or "let me be clear." Second, Bush used another cluster of words and phrases aimed at constructing his message as *certain and non-negotiable*, such as "there is no question in my mind," "no doubt at all," or "make no mistake." Notably, Bush was well positioned to use this strategy to pre-emptively deny press challenges because he had a reputation for being a "straight shooter." Indeed, he once told a reporter, "In Texas, we don't do nuance" (see Safire 2004).

Such attempts to control the press are most credible–and thus most likely to be effective–if accompanied by congruent message content. A strategy of political masculinity is, therefore, likely to pair discursive control techniques with the use of masculinized discursive themes. Various tropes suggestive of masculinity arise and circulate in political discourse; we focus here on two that are consistent with extant scholarship and seem particularly consequential in a war-time context. The first

theme we call *strength masculinity* because it taps into the traditional notion that, regardless of circumstances, leaders should be strong and resolute. An emphasis on strength is a common theme in conceptions of masculinity (e.g., Gerson 1993; Kaufman 1992; Philaretou and Allen 2001; Trujillo 1991). For example, Lakoff (1990) identified strength as one aspect of self-presentation that President George H. W. Bush added to his speaking style before the 1988 campaign. Further, it has long been a western cultural expectation that men should be resolute, showing consistent "internal direction" and patient fortitude (Sexton 1969). The second theme we call *dominance masculinity* because it emphasizes aggression and/or violence–characteristics also common to scholarly conceptions of masculinity (e.g., Gerson 1993; Kaufman 1992; Kimmel 1987; Mosse 1996; Philaretou and Allen 2001). An emphasis on physical power and supremacy is at the heart of this theme, and it is achieved in part by emasculation of others–that is, stripping foes of traditional heterosexual masculinized qualities, such as courage and nobility. These themes are deeply embedded in the political psyche of the United States and have materialized at various points throughout the nation's history, especially during Manifest Destiny-like campaigns of expansion and intervention (see Coles 2002; Winkler 2002).[2]

Both strength and dominance masculinities are often demonstrably public constructions that, like Connell's (1987) hegemonic masculinity, are "easily symbolized" in discourse–and, we expect, were so after September 11 in George W. Bush's portrayals, explanations, and justifications for the war on terror. A large body of scholarship has suggested that the presidency itself is a "bastion of masculinity" due to foundational social understandings about what constitutes an acceptable performance of leadership (Anderson 2002, 107; see also Daughton 1995; Panagopoulos 2004; Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles 1996; Whicker and Areson 1996). Thus, when the nation–and, by extension, the presidency– is challenged, performing familiar varieties of masculine identity is one way a president might seek to assert control. Our general expectation, therefore, was that Bush emphasized themes of strength and dominance following September 11. We had two additional expectations regarding dominance masculinity in particular: that Bush would especially emphasize this theme (i.e., more than strength) and that he would do so most often in his direct interactions with the press. Bush has worked to construct a "tough Texan" persona, and as a president facing a nation-challenging crisis in which gendered constructions were highly salient, an aggressive form of masculinized discourse would be crucial to Bush's public persona. Indeed, a special emphasis on

dominance masculinity would enable Bush–and by extension the nation (see McBride 1995; Nagel 1998; Roy 2004)–to assert a masculine leadership norm stifled by the divisive 2000 election outcome and severely challenged by September 11.[3] In attempting to invoke this form of masculinity, therefore, Bush would be likely to most emphasize it when talking with the press, in order to encourage wide circulation of this conception. Further, Bush's own seeming comfort with such discourse might have led him to rely on it during unscripted (or less scripted) interactions with the press, especially in immediate aftermath of the attacks when he likely had, in the eyes of many journalists and citizens, a broader rhetorical license to employ themes of violence and aggression.

STRATEGIC MASCULINITY AND THE MEDIA

The two-pronged Bush administration strategy of masculinity that we propose here is an example of what Manheim (1991; 1994) has termed "strategic political communications," in which leaders craft their public language with the goal of creating, controlling, distributing, and using mediated messages as a political resource. Scholarship suggests that political elites excel at controlling political and media environments, particularly in times of national crisis such as terrorist attacks (e.g., Coe et al. 2004; Domke et al. 1999; Entman 1989; 1991; Herman 1993; Hutcheson et al. 2004; Livingston 1994; Scheckels 1997; Zaller 1992). This body of work focuses largely on the news media tendency to echo the substance of political messages. We extend this scholarship by examining how the news media respond to stylistic elements of leaders' rhetoric, such as specific word choice and structure. This approach is valuable because masculinity is continuously reconstructed in media discourse via such sophisticated and nuanced mechanisms (Cooper 2002; Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles 1996; Vavrus 2002). Further, news media messages are a primary way that citizens learn about and understand the broader political environment. Indeed, the "news interest" of US adults was markedly high in the days after the terrorist attacks. For example, in the week afterward fully 96 percent of randomly sampled US adults indicated they were following news related to the attacks "closely" or "very closely," equaling the highest level of public interest in a news event in the 15-year history of the Pew Research Center's measurements (Pew 2001).

In such a context, any presidential discourse was likely to receive considerable attention in the press because of the general news media

tendency to rely upon government leaders to "index" the range of view-points in news coverage (Althaus et al. 1996; Bennett 1990), especially in national security contexts (Hallin, Manoff, and Weddle 1993). This particularly occurs when vocal mainstream political opposition is absent, as it was following September 11. As a result, the press was likely to function during this time as it often does in times of national crisis–as "government's little helper" (Zaller and Chiu 1996; see also Hutcheson et al. 2004). Further, the press may have viewed the national crisis context as the first real opportunity for the president to assert himself as a leader, thereby providing Bush with the kind of "honeymoon period" common when presidents assume power (Graber 1997; Hughes 1995). Just as important, a masculinity strategy, in particular, was especially well positioned to capitalize upon the post-September 11 media environment, for two reasons. For one, dominance masculinity's emphasis on aggression and emasculation establishes conflict and drama–key elements sought by journalists when crafting stories (Bennett 2003; Price and Tewksbury 1997)–while also supplying the pithy sound bites upon which journalists rely. In addition, discursive control techniques exhibit a certitude that many citizens, including many journalists, would likely have welcomed during a period of so much uncertainty and fear. With all of this in mind, we expected news coverage of the attacks and governmental response to emphasize Bush's masculinized discourse, particularly his themes of dominance.

Two important and complementary arenas of media discourse to examine for potential alignment with the president are network television news and newspaper editorials. At least half of Americans rely on television for their news (Callaghan and Schnell 2001) and the three major broadcast networks' evening newscasts combine to reach approximately 50 percent of the viewing public (Pew 2000). Further, this medium has been found to be a crucial mechanism in presidential attempts to dominate public discussion on a topic (Bennett 1994). At the same time, scholars contend that editorial boards have a central role in interpreting events (Huckin 2002; Vermeer 2002), often serving as a source of "opinion leadership" for both citizens and national political leaders (Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt 1998; Powlick 1995; Schaefer 1997). Situated between political leaders and citizens as key sites of articulation (see Hall 1996), then, television journalists and editorial boards were crucial public forums for the dissemination of presidential ideological constructions that were enacted following the terrorist attacks.

METHOD

This study proceeded in two steps. First, we content analyzed President Bush's public communications from August 29 (two weeks prior to September 11) through his address to Congress and the nation on September 20, 2001. Second, we content analyzed the evening newscasts of the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) and editorials in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* between September 11 and September 22, 2001.

The president's communications were retrieved from the National Archives and Records Administration's *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, a comprehensive collection of presidential public communications. We identified all of Bush's communications between August 29 and September 20, 2001. Because we were interested only in the president's attempts to engender a certain outlook among the public, communications which were not directed to a public audience (e.g., memos to Congress) were discarded. This procedure yielded 48 texts.

News texts were retrieved from the Nexis database. Newscasts of NBC, which were the highest-rated among the networks during these months (Saunders 2001), were chosen to provide insight into news coverage, since research has shown news content to be similar across major mainstream outlets (e.g., Entman 1991; Gans 1979; Reese, Grant, and Danielian 1994). The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* were selected because they are the leading mainstream newspapers with considerable readership among the public, political elites, and other media outlets. Further, the *Times* and *Post* were located in the cities that were targeted on September 11, thereby increasing the likelihood that they would devote significant attention to the attacks and the nation's response. All NBC daily evening newscast transcripts were retrieved between September 11 and September 21, 2001, and all *Times* and *Post* editorials were retrieved between September 12 and September 22, 2001. Television stories and newspaper editorials that focused primarily on the terrorist attacks or aftermath were included in analysis. This procedure yielded 139 television stories (of 153 retrieved) and 44 editorials (of 59 retrieved).

For both presidential communications and news discourse, the *instance* was the unit of analysis. The instance was conceived of as the smallest grouping of words that could sustain the meaning of the coding category. The public communications of President Bush were coded for the categories of *discursive control*, *strength masculinity*, and *dominance*

masculinity. News texts were coded only for the latter two categories. Codings were derived from these definitions:

Discursive control: This category was coded as present when Bush utilized language attempting to express a bold clarity or non-negotiable certainty about his perspective. Examples included "let me be clear," "make no mistake," "there is no question in my mind," and "there is no doubt about it."

Strength masculinity: This category was coded as present when language indicating strength or resolve was used to characterize the current state of the president, the Bush administration, the federal government, or the nation. Examples included strength, firm, great, might, resolve, steadfast, and determined.

Dominance masculinity: This category was coded as present when language indicated (1) dominance was being sought by Bush, the Bush administration, or the federal government, or (2) courage, honor, nobility, or other masculinized traits were lacking in the "enemy" (the attackers, other potentially complicit nations or individuals). Examples included kill, destroy, conquer, hunt, triumph, prevail, "wanted: dead or alive," war (if used to describe US actions, not events that others brought upon the nation), cowards, faceless, and those who "prey on the innocent."

Finally, we coded whether or not the themes of strength masculinity or dominance masculinity were criticized in television coverage or newspaper editorials because it was possible that news media would both (1) use the language of the president and (2) include criticism of such discourse, either from sources or from journalists themselves. Any criticism of the president's language was identified.

Two people coded all Bush texts for strength masculinity and dominance masculinity. The inter-coder reliability coefficient for the former was .95, .90 after controlling for agreement by chance (see Scott 1955); and for the latter it was .94, .88 after controlling for agreement by chance. For discursive control, one person coded all Bush texts and a second person coded roughly 40 percent of them, with an inter-coder reliability coefficient of .93, .86 after controlling for agreement by chance. Television newscasts and newspaper editorials were coded by two people, with overlap of roughly 60 percent of the texts. The inter-coder reliability coefficient for strength masculinity was .92, .84 after controlling for agreement by chance; for dominance masculinity it was .94, .88 after controlling for agreement by chance; and for criticism of the president's discourse it was .99, .98 after controlling for agreement by chance. For the unitizing task itself, instances were included in the data only if they had been identified by both coders.

RESULTS

The analysis proceeded in three stages. The first stage examined the presence of discursive control techniques in the president's communications before and after the September 11 attacks. The second stage focused on the presence of masculinized themes in the president's public communications from the attacks through his address to Congress and the nation on September 20, 2001. The final stage analyzed whether the president's discourses were amplified in television news coverage and newspaper editorials.

Presidential Discursive Control

We posited that after the terrorist attacks the president sought to construct a masculine persona through discursive control techniques, and that he particularly employed this strategy when interacting with news media. Our results provide strong support for this perspective: noticeably present in Bush's communications after the attacks, but far less beforehand, were clusters of common terms that indicated attempts to represent his views as bold and clear and to suggest there was a non-negotiable certainty about his perspectives. As a specific test of our expectations, we compared the presence of these techniques in two weeks of presidential communications before September 11 to their presence in Bush's communications from the attacks to his September 20 national address.

As expected, the president's attempts to shape press treatment of his perspective were far more present after the terrorist attacks. Several trends are apparent in Table 1. First, across all texts the techniques of discursive control in the days after the attacks had a mean presence of 4.5 instances per 1,000 words, more than seven times greater than the 0.6 ratio in the two weeks beforehand ($t = 2.51$, df $= 46$, $p < .05$). Second, after the attacks, this strategy was employed by the president primarily in his interactions with the press. Specifically, during these dates these forms of discursive control had a per 1,000 words mean presence of 7.5 in the president's press interactions, eight times greater than the 0.9 ratio in the president's remarks to public audiences ($t = 2.27$, df $= 12$, $p < .05$) and ninety times greater the 0.08 ratio in the president's national addresses ($t = 2.63$, df $= 11$, $p < .05$). Indeed, it was only in the president's interactions with the press that this strategy significantly increased following the attacks ($t = 2.32$, df $= 21$, $p < .05$). These results seem to suggest a strategy by the White House, manifested in the president's

TABLE 1. Presence of Discursive Control Techniques in the Public Communications of President George W. Bush, in the Weeks Before and After September 11, 2001

	All Texts	Public Remarks	National Addresses	Press Statements
Before September 11	$0.6^{\ddagger}$ ($n = 27$)	0.6 ($n = 13$)	0.00 ($n = 3$)	$0.6^{\ddagger}$ ($n = 11$)
After Sptember 11	$4.5^{\S}$ ($n = 21$)	0.9^{a} ($n = 5$)	0.08^{a} ($n = 4$)	$7.5^{\S,b}$ ($n = 12$)

Entries in this table indicate presence of words/statements that explicitly exhibited high clarity or certainty, calculated in a ratio per 1,000 words. Column means with differing symbol superscripts are significantly different ($p < .05$) using independent-samples *t*-tests, such that:

[‡]Indicates the mean is significantly different from the mean marked [§] in the same column.

[§]Indicates the mean is significantly different from the mean marked [‡] in the same column.

Row means with differing alphabetic superscripts are significantly different ($p < .05$) using independent-samples *t*-tests, such that:

[a]Indicates the mean is significantly different from the mean marked [b] in the same row.

[b]Indicates the mean is significantly different from the mean marked [a] in the same row.

public communications, to construct a masculine presidential persona predicated upon extreme levels of clarity and certainty.

Some excerpts illustrate this strategy. In remarks to White House press on September 16, Bush used six phrases to express certainty: "No question about it," "no question," "no question about that," "there is no question," "there is no doubt," and "make no mistake about it." Similarly, when meeting with news media prior to a September 18 meeting with French President Jacques Chirac, Bush worked to reduce doubt by saying "make no mistake about it" three times, including this statement: "We will find them in their hiding places, and we'll get them moving, and we'll bring them to justice. Make no mistake about it." The president also sought to present his viewpoints as directive and having the utmost clarity. In a September 19 press conference with the president of Indonesia, Bush's language included these phrases: "I've made it clear," "the message to every country is," "the message to all nations is," "look, the mission is," and "that's about as plainly as I can put it." Similarly, in a press conference at Camp David on September 15, Bush said: "The message is for everybody who wears the uniform: get ready." Finally, in two instances the president explicitly laid bare his strategy of seeking to shape the press's response to him and the administration's ideas, including a September 13 response to a journalist's question–which he began

with these words: "Let me condition the press this way." Indeed, to "condition" journalists to see him as highly masculine and a not-to-be-challenged leader is exactly what Bush sought to do through his strategic language choices.

Presidential Discursive Themes

We had three additional expectations about Bush's communications after the attacks. First, we expected that he would emphasize masculine themes of strength. Second, we expected that he would more commonly emphasize masculine themes of dominance. Finally, because the dominance discourse was particularly crucial for the administration's accrual of masculinity capital, and because the president appeared comfortable using this language off the cuff, we expected Bush would emphasize this discourse most often in his interactions with the press. Results lend considerable support to our expectations (see Table 2).

Several patterns are apparent. First, across all texts dominance masculinity discourse had a mean presence of 11.9 instances per 1,000 words, significantly greater than the 7.5 ratio for strength masculinity discourse ($t = 2.47$, df $= 20$, $p < .05$). Second, President Bush employed both types

TABLE 2. Themes of Strength Masculinity and Dominance Masculinity in the Public Communications of President George W. Bush, September 11, 2001-September 20, 2001

	All Texts	Public Remarks	National Addresses	Press Statements
Strength Masculinity	7.5[‡]	2.8[‡]	10.4	8.5[‡]
Dominance Masculinity	11.9[§]	0.6[§,a]	8.5[b]	17.7[§,c]
	($n = 21$)	($n = 5$)	($n = 4$)	($n = 12$)

Entries in this table indicate presence of words/statements that exhibited themes, calculated in ratios per 1,000 words. Column means with differing symbol superscripts are significantly different ($p < .05$) using paired-samples *t*-tests, such that:

[‡]Indicates the mean is significantly different from the mean marked [§] in the same column.

[§]Indicates the mean is significantly different from the mean marked [‡] in the same column.

Row means with differing alphabetic superscripts are significantly different ($p < .05$) using independent-samples *t*-tests, such that:

[a]Indicates the mean is significantly different from those means marked [b] or [c] in the same row.

[b]Indicates the mean is significantly different from those means marked [a] or [c] in the same row.

[c]Indicates the mean is significantly different from those means marked [a] or [b] in the same row.

of masculinized discourse more often when speaking directly to the nation or through the nation's news media. This was most notable for the dominance language: he had a 17.7 ratio per 1,000 words of dominance language in his press interactions, significantly greater than his 8.5 ratio in national addresses ($t = 2.43$, df = 14, $p < .05$), and both of these were significantly greater than his 0.6 ratio in public remarks ($t = 5.25$, df = 11, $p < .05$ for former comparison; $t = 4.56$, df = 7, $p < .05$ for latter comparison). Indeed, in his communications with the press, the president used the dominance discourse more than twice as often as strength language ($t = 4.59$, df = 11, $p < .05$), whereas the pattern was reversed for national addresses (mean differences not significant) and public remarks ($t = 2.17$, df = 4, $p < .05$). These patterns, then, suggest that the administration wished to disseminate among the public and press a general masculinized response, and that it employed a particularly dominance-oriented ideology when interacting with leading members of the mainstream press.

Some excerpts provide insight into these masculinized themes. When speaking with reporters at Camp David on September 15, for instance, the president used domination language in this way: "We will find those who did it; we will smoke them out of their holes; we will get them running; and we'll bring them to justice." Later in the same interaction with the press, Bush intermingled domination with language aimed at emasculating the enemy: "They run to the hills. They find holes to get in, and we will do whatever it takes to smoke them out and get them running, and we'll get them." Bush had used similar emasculation language following a national security meeting on September 14: "[W]e're facing a different enemy than we have ever faced. This enemy hides in shadows and has no regard for human life. This is an enemy who preys on innocent and unsuspecting people, then runs for cover." And in his speech to the nation on September 20, Bush used a variety of terms and phrases to emphasize domination, once calling the United States' response to terrorism a "battle," six times calling it a "fight," 11 times calling it a "war," and saying, "The only way to defeat terrorism as a threat to our way of life is to stop it, eliminate it, and destroy it where it grows." These results, then, suggest that after the terrorist attacks President Bush employed a strategy aimed at controlling media discourse by constructing a highly masculinized ideology. By responding to the September 11 attacks, and adding tools of discursive control, the Bush administration's ideology of masculinization sought to (re)establish the president's authority and perhaps created a new norm of masculine leadership. We turn now to examine how the news media responded.

News Media Discourse

Given (1) the president's apparent attempts to shape news organizations' treatment of his perspectives through the construction of a masculinized ideology, (2) the nationalism spurred by the September 11 attacks, and (3) the general tendency of mainstream media to rely upon government officials as sources, we expected news discourse in NBC newscasts and *New York Times* and *Washington Post* editorials to closely follow the president's emphases. Results provide strong support for this expectation (see Table 3).

Remarkably similar patterns emerged in the NBC newscasts and *Times* and *Post* editorials. Most notably, as in the president's communications, dominance masculinity discourse was emphasized significantly more than strength masculinity language–with per-1,000-words ratio differentials of 7.8-2.4 in television news and 6.5-3.5 in editorials (both differences

TABLE 3. Themes of Strength Masculinity and Dominance Masculinity in NBC Evening Newscasts and *Washington Post* and *New York Times* Editorials, September 11, 2001-September 22, 2001

	All TV Stories	TV Stories w/o Bush Mention	TV Stories with Bush Reference	TV Stories with Bush Quotes
Strength Masculinity	$2.4^{\ddagger}$	$1.2^{\ddagger,a}$	$2.8^{\ddagger,b}$	$5.8^{\ddagger,c}$
Dominance Masculinity	$7.8^{\S}$	$4.5^{\S,a}$	$9.3^{\S,b}$	$17.4^{\S,c}$
	($n = 139$)	($n = 88$)	($n = 25$)	($n = 26$)
	All Editorials	Editorials w/o Bush Mention	Editorials with Bush Reference	Editorials with Bush Quotes
Strength Masculinity	$3.5^{\ddagger}$	2.3^{a}	$2.9^{\ddagger,a}$	$6.2^{\ddagger,b}$
Dominance Masculinity	$6.5^{\S}$	1.1^{a}	$6.1^{\S,a}$	$15.0^{\S,c}$
	($n = 44$)	($n = 16$)	($n = 17$)	($n = 11$)

Entries in this table indicate presence of words/statements that exhibited themes, calculated in ratios per 1000 words. Column means with differing symbol superscripts are significantly different ($p < .05$) using paired-samples t-tests, such that:

[‡]Indicates the mean is significantly different from the mean marked [§] in the same column.

[§]Indicates the mean is significantly different from the mean marked [‡] in the same column.

Row means with differing alphabetic superscripts are significantly different ($p < .05$) using independent-samples t-tests, such that:

[a]Indicates the mean is significantly different from those means marked [b] or [c] in the same row.

[b]Indicates the mean is significantly different from those means marked [a] or [c] in the same row.

[c]Indicates the mean is significantly different from those means marked [a] or [b] in the same row.

significant in *t*-tests at $p < .05$). The table's three right-hand columns provide further insight, indicating that Bush was echoed in direct correspondence with his position in the news discourse: television coverage and editorials that quoted the president had much more masculine language than news discourse that only referenced the president (all differences significant in *t*-tests at $p < .05$), which in turn had more masculine language than news discourse containing no mention of the president (three of four differences significant in *t*-tests at $p < .05$). Finally, there was significantly more dominance masculinity than strength masculinity discourse in both (1) Bush-referencing television news (ratio differential of 9.3-2.8) and editorials (ratio differential of 6.1-2.9), and (2) Bush-quoting television news (ratio differential of 17.4-5.8) and editorials (ratio differential of 15.0-6.2). On top of all this, only two television stories and one editorial (2 percent of news texts) contained *any* criticism of the president's discourse. In sum, the president's masculinized perspectives received considerable voice in NBC news stories and *Times* and *Post* editorials, especially when he was accorded a place in the news discourse.

Some excerpts provide insight into how the president's themes became manifest in the television coverage and editorials. For example, NBC used the language of dominance, describing the potential for an "all-out invasion" and the need to "whip terrorism" and "rip the [terrorist] network up." The *Times*, meanwhile, echoed the president's claim that Bin Laden was "wanted dead or alive," and also noted the need to "hunt down" and "punish" terrorists. Similarly, the *Post* stated that the United States should "move aggressively" and focus on "destroying" whomever the government established as the enemy. Along with this language of domination, each of the outlets also used language aimed at emasculating the enemy. NBC, for instance, reported that the terrorists were an "elusive" group that "hide[s] in caves," also calling them the "lowest of mankind" and the "worst in mankind." Likewise, the *Times* described the terrorists as "irrational" and as exhibiting an "excess of emotion" in carrying out the attacks of September 11, while the *Post* indicated that the terrorists' willingness to execute such large-scale attacks was nothing less than a display of "monstrous flamboyance."

DISCUSSION

The patterns show that in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, President Bush employed a two-pronged set of communications that

facilitated wide circulation of masculine discourse in mainstream news media. The strategy unfolded in a series of simultaneous discursive emphases. First, the president worked to (re)construct a highly masculinized identity by presenting his views as having crystalline clarity and being definitively decided. The benefits of this discursive control strategy were that Bush, by representing himself as bold, focused, and certain, recaptured the "tough Texan" identity that had previously served his political fortunes so well and also likely went some distance toward gaining control over media reception of his message. Strictly speaking, these data cannot definitively document that Bush's actions were intentional, but two patterns seem to suggest that, at minimum, there were guiding principles at work: Bush's discursive exhibitions of extreme clarity and certainty (1) occurred almost exclusively in his interactions with the press rather than in his public addresses and (2) were nearly non-existent prior to the attacks. Further, given the tendency for political elites to act strategically and Bush's talent for staying "on message" (Domke 2004; Manheim 1991; Suskind 2003), we suspect that the president's post-September 11 performance, far from the irrational form of masculinity that Kimmel (1987) has termed "compulsive masculinity," was a carefully controlled, highly calculated campaign designed to present himself to the press and public as powerful, in control, and not to be challenged. That journalists did not reject or sufficiently question such a notion speaks to the power of the national crisis context–and to the president's ability to capitalize upon that context.

Second, Bush complemented these techniques of discursive control by employing a series of masculine themes in his discourse. Strength masculinity–with its emphasis on strength, resolve, firmness, and fortitude–was utilized as a foundational discourse by the president when the nation was his immediate audience (i.e., when speaking directly to public audiences or to the nation through the conduits of live broadcasting). Importantly, however, the administration apparently viewed these familiar tropes of presidential masculinity to be insufficient to meet the political imperatives of the moment. Consequently, the president in his communications more commonly employed dominance masculinity, with its emphasis on the language of domination and emasculation; indeed, he drew upon dominance masculinity half again as often as he employed strength masculinity. This emphasis is consistent with the tendency of war rhetoric to emphasize an aggressive "other" that needs to be dealt with (Campbell and Jamieson 1990; Ivie 1980); in this case, Bush constructed and confronted that other via dominance and emasculation. Bush also was far more likely to use dominance masculinity when interacting

with the press than when speaking to the nation or to distinct public audiences. Again, although we cannot make definitive claims about the strategic decisions at work, the pattern of findings suggests that administration officials may have been wary of having Bush present a more aggressive masculinity than some in the nation might have expected or desired of their president. In putting forward a masculinity of dominance primarily in his interactions with the press–a discursive context with different norms for formality, statesmanship, and so-called off-the-cuff remarks–Bush avoided the close scrutiny that inevitably accompanies national addresses, allowing him to limit his political risk.

Not only did the president put forward a highly masculinized ideology, the evidence suggests that this worldview disseminated widely. Results indicate that Bush's language of dominance masculinity–the president's primary discourse when addressing the press–became a substantial emphasis of NBC television news and the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* editorial pages. This pattern is consistent with prior work documenting elite influence on news discourse (e.g., Bennett 1990; Domke et al. 1999; Hutcheson et al. 2004; Livingston 1994; Zaller 1992), but also extends this work by demonstrating that specific stylistic elements of the president's discourse, such as word choice and structure, were echoed in the press as well. Particularly interesting is how this echoing occurred; the press positioned themselves in relation to the president in a manner that ensured his perspective would dominate. Specifically, these three news outlets made Bush a centerpiece of their coverage and, at the same time, echoed the president's themes in direct correspondence with the position they granted him. Given journalistic norms and routines, any emphases by Bush during such a crisis context likely would have received significant attention by the press. It is the case, though, that Bush's themes of dominance had special strategic value; indeed, this discourse was echoed to a far greater extent than were themes of strength. Taken together, these practices ensured that in the aftermath of September 11, the voices of these elite news outlets sounded strikingly similar to the highly masculinized voice of the president. Further, television news coverage and editorial content were remarkably parallel (as were the two different editorial sources to one another) despite the fact that editorial boards operate with much greater freedom than do other journalists. Even with this greater freedom at their disposal, editorials in the *Times* and *Post*–like NBC newscasts–offered almost no criticism of the president's masculinized discourse. Bush's strategic masculinity operated with impunity.

In the aftermath of September 11, then, the president staked out a clear rhetorical position as the "Commander-in-Chief"–itself a highly masculinized title and position. That network news broadcasts and editorials in the *Times* and *Post*–news outlets in a leadership role among the news media–echoed the president's public communications ensured his ideology would resound across other media outlets. Indeed, polls and pundit commentary during the period suggest that the president's public communications circulated broadly and with significant impact. In July 2001, when randomly sampled US adults were asked "Is President Bush a stronger leader than you expected, a weaker leader, or is he about what you expected?," 14 percent said stronger and 13 percent said weaker; in late September in response to the same question, a full 45 percent said stronger and only 4 percent said weaker. In a similar manner, the percentage of adult Americans who considered Bush to be "a strong and decisive leader" surged from 55 percent in August 2001 to 79 percent in December 2001 (for all polls see Roper 2001). And consider the words of *liberal* columnist Richard Cohen (2001) in the *Washington Post* on September 22, 2001, at the end of our analytical period and two days after the president addressed the nation: "He was always the president. Now he is the commander in chief." Although we must be cautious not to generalize too hastily from a single case, it does seem that an overt presidential performance of masculinity has the ability to accrue political capital.

That said, there are some potentially significant limitations to such a political strategy. Perhaps the most important of these is that American political leaders–and particularly presidents–operate within the global political environment. Norms of leadership and masculinity, along with interpretations of social problems, vary among international actors. For example, there was widespread sympathy for the United States after the September 11 attacks, but even in this environment some other world leaders chose to interpret the attacks differently. Consider that when President Bush and French President Jacques Chirac addressed the US news media together on September 18, 2001, the two offered divergent characterizations of the situation: Bush declared several times that he had "no doubt" that "President Chirac understands that we have entered a new type of war," to which Chirac nonetheless responded, "I don't know whether we should use the word 'war,' but what I can say is that now we are faced with a conflict of a completely new nature." Chirac's hesitance to embrace Bush's approach of discursive control–non-negotiable certainty in this case–and dominance masculinity suggests the difficulty of attempting to transfer American (or at least some Americans')

constructions of political masculinity into the international arena. Indeed, Bush's rhetoric would seem to have contributed to the increasing alienation the United States faces in the diplomatic community. In the words of Zarefsky (2004), the use of war metaphors "is the rhetoric not of the open hand but of the closed fist" (153). When such words are paired with military action, as they were in Afghanistan and Iraq for the Bush administration, gaining close global cooperation can become a difficult task.

Further, political and cultural contexts change, events sometimes spiral out of control, and public opinion shifts. The most adept political actors–President Ronald Reagan and President Bill Clinton are recent examples who come to mind–are those who can connect with the public across a range of contextual dynamics. Bush's mix of strength and dominance, which played so well in leading US press outlets and among the public in the weeks and months following September 11, did not fare as well when applied to the Iraq War. In May 2006, as his approval ratings dropped, Bush was asked what "missteps and mistakes in Iraq" he most regretted. In reply, he said, "Saying 'Bring it on.' Kind of tough talk, you know, that sent the wrong signal to people. . . . 'Wanted dead or alive,' that kind of talk. . . . I learned from that" (Bush 2006). Further, in crises such as Hurricane Katrina, when domestic government actions become a focus of public discourse, a masculinized presidential response of strength and aggression offered little to address tragic on-the-ground realities in an American city. In such a context, a political construction built primarily upon masculinized claims can implode if voters come to believe "that the strong, silent sheriff in the jailhouse window is a department store mannequin" (Wilkinson 2006; see also Gutterman and Regan no date). An emphasis upon conceptions of masculinity as a political strategy, then, would seem to be like any and all strategies–it can be useful if it is implemented wisely and adapted when needed.

Ultimately, though, even winning political constructions of masculinity have deep and dangerous implications for gender, politics, and democracy. There is a widespread perception that Americans live in a post-feminist era in which equality among the sexes is no longer a problem. Our analysis suggests that this is far from a reality in the world of American political discourse. In this environment, particularly in a time of national crisis, anyone who can be associated with constructions of femininity–or even simply non-hegemonic conceptions of masculinity– is suggested to be unfit for public office. Further, it is common for gendered discourse to be presented in a "coded" form that allows the speaker to avoid public critique or condemnation (see Gilens 1999; Jamieson

1992; Mendelberg 2001 for work on racially coded discourse). For example, in the 2004 presidential campaign, Vice President Dick Cheney claimed that Democratic Party presidential nominee John Kerry wanted to fight a "more sensitive war on terror, as though Al Qaeda will be impressed with our softer side" (in Knickerbocker 2004), a phrase that emasculated Kerry without overtly being sexist. Such gender-coded discourse works almost invisibly and with minimal political risk within the heavily masculinized space of American politics. As a result, gender functions as a powerful subtext that is clearly present but not manifestly so–and thereby is a difficult ideology to directly address. Indeed, even as the public grows increasingly displeased with the post-September 11 environment of military aggression and war, it is an open question whether US political leaders–male or female–will be willing to challenge such barriers.

AUTHOR NOTE

NOTES

1. This is certainly not to say that a masculinized response to the attacks was the only option, nor is it to say it was the appropriate option. Our point here is only that under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the United States response to the attacks enacted a masculine ideology.

2. Because the concept of masculinity itself is a contested notion, it is difficult and can be counterproductive to parse various components and claim they are distinct (see Young 2003). We do so here, however, because although strength and dominance masculinities are conceptually related, they are operationally distinct in discourse. And, most importantly, for our purposes, they are often *used differently* by political actors. We would also speculate that the outcomes of their use are distinct, with the latter more likely to naturalize untoward behavior than the former.

3. It is important to note that even though Bush had worked to construct a macho persona, his initial time in office was marked by a very different tone. After losing the popular vote and attaining the presidency by court decision in 2000, Bush was compromised in his ability to play the role of a tough president. Building upon a campaign theme of being "a uniter, not a divider," Bush came into office advocating civility in Washington DC. His initial months in office were highlighted by a compromise on federal funding for stem-cell research that some suggested would be the most important issue of his term (see Bruni and Sanger 2001; Seelye 2001). And, even in the immediate aftermath of September 11, some commentators criticized Bush for seeming uncertain and timid in the first hours following the attacks (see Apple 2001).

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