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Gender performance and political identity at the January 6 Capitol insurrection

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GENDER PERFORMANCE AND POLITICAL
IDENTITY AT THE JANUARY 6
CAPITOL INSURRECTION

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Emma Elise Newton
University of Northern Iowa
May 2022

ABSTRACT

The January 6 Capitol insurrection was heavily documented with recorded videos and photos, across legacy and social media. Despite engaging in criminal acts, many participants recorded themselves participating in the attack and posted their videos to Parler, a right-wing alternative to Facebook and Twitter that gained traction among the far-right, QAnon conspiracy theorists, and white supremacy groups. These social media videos detail an interesting rhetorical dynamic at play, one that is not so recognizable in legacy media: performances of sex/gender. Analyzing videos uploaded to a conservative social media landscape provides a lens into performances of gender as it intersects with political identity, revealing new ways that communication studies scholars can understand how conservative arguments are constructed within gender performance.

By utilizing R.W. Connell's concepts of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, I rhetorically analyze over 2,500 videos uploaded by the January 6 insurrectionists to Parler. I argue that both masculine and feminine insurrectionists perform alternative politically conservative gendered performances which grant them new rhetorical affordances. This thesis identifies four performances: two masculine, which I term *delinquent masculinity* and *militarized muscular Christianity*, and two feminine, which I term *den mother femininity* and *matriarchal warriors*. All these gender performances exist in a dialectic with each other, and ultimately showcase the way that the insurrectionists envision, construct, and perform their intertwining political and gender roles.

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This Study by: Emma Elise Newton

Entitled: Gender Performance and Political Identity at the January 6 Capitol Insurrection

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

On a cold, overcast January morning in Washington D.C., an angry crowd of thousands gathered on the Ellipse, a 52-acre park directly south of the White House. Every available space was full, the crowd stretching almost a mile from the Ellipse to the Washington monument. The gathered crowd chanted “Stop the steal,” as former President Donald Trump gave a speech filled with false claims about how the 2021 election was filled with rampant voter fraud and his presidential re-election was stolen. The speech culminated with an exhortation and a promise. The exhortation: “We fight. We fight like hell. And if you don’t fight like hell, you’re not going to have a country anymore.”¹ The promise: “We’re going to try and give [Congress] the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country. So let’s walk down Pennsylvania Avenue.”²

This day, January 6, 2021, was the day that electoral votes were to be verified by the U.S. Congress in the Capitol Building, typically an unremarkable and routine event. Within the next hour the crowd from the Ellipse would join with a crowd that had formed at the Capitol and violently attack the U.S. Capitol Building and, in the process, shake the core of U.S. democracy. The attack would last for 10 hours.

Images of insurrectionists shocked many in the nation as the Confederate flag was paraded down the hallowed halls of the Capitol and tear gas filled the plaza. Photos

¹ Donald J. Trump, “Transcript of Trump’s Speech at Rally Before US Capitol Riot,” *Associated Press News*, January 6, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-joe-biden-donald-trump-capitol-siege-media-e79eb5164613d6718e9f4502eb471f27>.

² Trump, “Transcript of Speech.”

rapidly circulated across legacy and social media of insurrectionists attacking Capitol Police, ransacking offices, and holding an armed standoff on the House floor. The January 6 attack was the most violent attack on the United States Capitol Building since it was burned to the ground in the War of 1812.³

Despite engaging in criminal acts, the insurrectionists did not desire to remain anonymous or hide their involvement. In fact, many participants photographed or recorded themselves participating in the attack and posted their videos and photos on a variety of social media platforms. The most used of these platforms was Parler, a right-wing alternative to Facebook and Twitter that gained traction among the far-right, QAnon conspiracy theorists, and white supremacy groups. These videos have been crucial evidence to identify the insurrection participants, their arguments, and their motives. As of this writing, over 732 participants have been charged with federal crimes.⁴ These social media videos, especially those uploaded to predominantly conservative websites, also detail an interesting rhetorical dynamic at play, one that is not so recognizable in legacy media: performances of sex/gender.

³ John Haltiwanger, "The Attempted Coup by A Pro-Trump Mob was the Most Significant Breach of the Capitol Since the War of 1812," *Business Insider*, January 6, 2021,

<https://www.businessinsider.com/armed-trump-supporters-breached-capitol-war-of-1812-2021-1>.

⁴ Bill Chappell, "Architect of the Capitol Outlines \$30 Million in Damages from Pro-Trump Riot," *National Public Radio*, February 24, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/sections/insurrection-at-the-capitol/2021/02/24/970977612/architect-of-the-capitol-outlines-30-million-in-damages-from-pro-trump-riot>; George Washington University Program on Extremism, "*This is our house!*" *A preliminary assessment of the Capitol Hill siege participants* (Washington DC: George Washington University, 2021), <https://extremism.gwu.edu/Capitol-Hill-Cases>.

From viral photographs of insurrectionist Richard Barnett putting his feet on Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's desk,⁵ to Adam Johnson smiling and waving to the camera as he steals the speaker's podium,⁶ the most circulated images in commercial legacy media put men at the front and center. However, women played an essential role in organizing and leading the mob,⁷ though most of the documentation proving this can only be found through the videos women took of themselves. One woman was recorded using a battering ram and a bullhorn to coordinate other insurrectionists at the Capitol doors.⁸ Other videos and photos showed Air Force veteran Ashli Babbitt being shot by Capitol Police as she was the first to climb through a smashed window leading to the House Chamber. Eric Munchel, who widely became known as the "zip-tie guy," was in attendance with his mother, Lisa Eisenhart, who also was carrying plastic zip-ties with the intention to use them on congressmembers.⁹

The images produced by the insurrection participants showcase how gendered bodies in protest can bolster right-wing and conservative arguments. These performances of gender can best be understood by studying videos, as rhetorician Dana Cloud argued,

⁵ Saul Loeb, *Richard Barnett, a Supporter of US President Donald Trump Sits Inside the Office of US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi*, January 6, 2021, photograph, Getty Images, <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/richard-barnett-a-supporter-of-us-president-donald-trump-news-photo/1230454190>.

⁶ Win McNamee, *A Pro-Trump Protester Carries the Lectern of U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi Through the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol Building*, January 6, 2021, photograph, Getty Images. <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/pro-trump-protester-carries-the-lectern-of-u-s-speaker-of-news-photo/1294949346>.

⁷ Devorah Margolin and Chelsea Daymon, "Selfie And Siege: Women's Social Media Footprint and the US Capitol Hill Siege," *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, March 3, 2021, <https://gnet-research.org/2021/03/03/selfie-and-siege-womens-social-media-footprint-and-the-us-capitol-hill-siege/>

⁸ Wilson Wong, "Feds Arrest Woman Accused of Using Bullhorn to Direct Rioters During Capitol Siege," *NBC News*, February 15, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/feds-arrest-woman-accused-using-bullhorn-direct-rioters-during-capitol-n1256861>.

⁹ Ko Bragg, "'Can't Wait to Tell my Grandkids I was Here': The Women Arrested for Storming the Capitol," *The 19th*, February 26, 2021, <https://19thnews.org/2021/02/women-arrested-storming-the-capitol/>.

“photographs and other images can enact ideographs visually and index, or point to, the verbal slogans capturing society’s guiding abstractions.”¹⁰ Gender is one of those abstractions made concrete in body and actions. The videos taken during the Capitol insurrection are snapshots that visually index understandings of conservative femininity in dialogue with conservative masculinity. Therefore, to understand how conservative gendered arguments are formed and replicated, it is critical to examine photos and videos of the insurrection through a rhetorical lens.

The insurrection on the Capitol may have lasted only 10 hours, but it was constructed by months and even years of disinformation campaigns, incendiary rhetoric, and shifting political arguments and attitudes. In order to understand the Parler videos, it is necessary to understand the political and societal context that created a ticking time-bomb towards January 6, all of which took place in plain sight. To do this, this chapter details the electoral certification process and the importance of language choice when referring to the events on January 6. Then I detail the timeline of January 6, beginning with the contextual events and rhetoric leading up to the day, continuing with a timeline of the insurrectionists’ actions the day of, and then a review of the insurrectionists as a demographic found in the following months. Next, I outline the artifacts of my analysis: the Parler videos themselves, and how they were collected and organized. With this background in place, I provide a preview of the thesis chapters, chapters that articulate

¹⁰ Dana Cloud, “‘To Veil the Threat of Terror’: Afghan Women and the <Clash of Civilizations> in the Imagery of the U.S. War on Terrorism,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 3 (2012): 288, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0033563042000270726>.

the necessity of, and execute, a rhetorical analysis of the gender performances captured in the Parler videos taken on January 6.

Legitimization of Democratic Process and the Importance of Language

The commitment to and enactment of a peaceful transfer of power is essential to a functioning democracy. Processes that guarantee the smooth transition from one presidency to another cements that law and governance are connected to the will of the people, not the whims of a single individual. Laws in the United States, such as the Presidential Transition Act of 1963, specifically outline all the processes governing the actions of the outgoing and incoming president.¹¹ Such a process was even upheld during the country's most tense political moments, such as following the first time a sitting president was not reelected with John Adams in 1800 or the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, which resulted in assassination attempts against Lincoln's life on his way to DC and the secession of seven states.¹² Even then, political leaders, outgoing and incoming presidents, and political parties always were committed to the peaceful transfer of power even if it is not in their favor. It was only until Trump's presidency that this staple of U.S. democracy had been challenged in such a drastic way.

Typically, the certification of presidential electoral results is mundane and uneventful. It is constitutionally mandated that, following a presidential election, January 6 is the day when the electoral college votes are counted and certified. Both chambers of

¹¹ Daniel I. Weiner and Tim Lau, "Why the Presidential Transition Process Matters," *Brennan Center for Justice*, November 13, 2020, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/why-presidential-transition-process-matters>.

¹² Hannah McCarthy, "Ask Civics 101: Why is the Peaceful Transition of Power Important?" New Hampshire Public Radio, *National Public Radio*, January 11, 2021, <https://www.nhpr.org/politics/2021-01-11/ask-civics-101-why-is-the-peaceful-transition-of-power-important>.

Congress meet in a joint session, with the President of the Senate (the Vice President) presiding over the process.¹³ This is a routine procedure in the democratic process; no individual state's electoral votes have ever been challenged in either chamber of Congress, nor have both chambers ever voted to invalidate a state's electoral votes or the presidential election results. That is, until the 2020 election.

The events that took place on January 6, 2021, are more than just another moment in U.S. history. Researchers at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab emphasize "the 2020 presidential election marked the first time in living history that the United States did not experience a peaceful transition of power."¹⁴ Debates over the scope and danger of January 6 persist over a year later and reverberations from the day are still being felt.

What to call the events that transpired on January 6 matters. A normally peaceful transition of power was disrupted, shaking confidence in the stability of the country's democracy. The name used to describe the actions taken on January 6 influence how the day is perceived and made sense of. It is essential, then, to refer to the events of January 6 for what was: a riot that turned in to an insurrection.

What to Call January 6 and its Participants

Language matters when referring to the events that unfolded at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. Politicians, scholars, journalists, and observers disagree over how to

¹³ The Office of the Federal Register, "The 2020 Presidential Election Provisions of the Constitution and U.S. Code," *The National Archives and Records Administration*, July 2020, <https://www.archives.gov/files/electoral-college/state-officials/presidential-election-brochure.pdf>.

¹⁴ Atlantic Council's DFRLab, "#StopTheSteal: Timeline of Social Media and Extremist Activities Leading to 1/6 Insurrection," *Just Security*, February 10, 2021, <https://www.justsecurity.org/74622/stopthesteal-timeline-of-social-media-and-extremist-activities-leading-to-1-6-insurrection/>.

refer to the events of that day. In order to fully encapsulate the violence that took place without glorifying or minimizing participants' actions, I do not refer to the subjects featured in the videos I analyze as "protestors." Doing so legitimizes their belief that a great injustice has taken place, which is a belief rooted in falsehoods and misinformation. "Protest" also minimizes the organized violence that occurred. The insurrectionists' goal was not to induce the government to enact change, but it was to change the government – which more accurately is described as insurrection. Terms such as "rebellion," "revolt," or "uprising" also frame the violence as a "noble and heroic cause."¹⁵ Throughout this thesis, I also do not refer to participants' actions as a "storm" or describe their actions as "storming the building." As Dr. Jill Lepore explains, far-right neo-Nazis and QAnon conspiracy theorists routinely use such language as a dog whistle and call to action and referring to their actions in such a way only legitimizes their mission.¹⁶ So, what language will I use?

The term most generally accepted by scholars and journalists to describe January 6th is that it was a *riot*, and this was the term I initially adopted as well. However, I have decided to move away from this term for a variety of reasons. Most notably, there is a long history of media and law enforcement utilizing the term *riot* to divert attention away from White violence and justify state and white supremacist violence against Black and

¹⁵ David Bauder, "Riot? Insurrection? Words Matter in Describing Capitol Siege," *Associated Press News*, January 14, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-capitol-siege-riots-media-8000ce7db2b176c1be386d945be5fd6a>.

¹⁶ Jill Lepore, "What Should We Call the Sixth of January?" *The New Yorker*, January 8, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/what-should-we-call-the-sixth-of-january>.

Brown bodies.¹⁷ For example, the Tulsa Race Riots and the Zoot Suit Riots were massacres and blatant violence against Black and Brown communities, meanwhile the gathering of white supremacists in Charlottesville, VA is referred to as the Unite the Right *Rally*. Not only this, but the term *riot* implies unorganized chaos, when in reality there is clear evidence that many of the participants on January 6 had planned for such violence, and further attempted to coordinate a complete overthrow of legally elected presidential results.

For this thesis, I refer to the actions and violence that took place at the U.S. Capitol Building as an *insurrection*, and the actors in attendance as *insurrectionists*. The definition of an insurrection is straightforward, being “an act or instance of revolting against civil authority or an established government.”¹⁸ Of all the terms previously mentioned, *insurrection* does not minimize the actions of the participants and it makes clear their goal was the overthrow of a legitimately elected government. Lepore explains, “calling a political action an insurrection is a way of denouncing what its participants mean to be a revolution.”¹⁹ I do acknowledge that, much like the term *riot*, *insurrection* has a fraught racial history in its usage to villainize slave uprisings. Despite this, I agree with *Time* writer Hawa Allan that continuing to use *insurrection* to refer to the events on January 6 “represents a major narrative shift—expanding the traditional

¹⁷ Bauder, “Riot? Insurrection?”; Renée Graham, “Jan. 6 Was Not a Riot. It Was an Insurrection,” *The Boston Globe*, January 4, 2022, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/01/04/opinion/jan-6-was-not-riot-it-was-an-insurrection/>.

¹⁸ Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, s.v. “Insurrection,” accessed January 25, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/insurrection>.

¹⁹ Lepore, “What should we call?”

role of the insurrectionist beyond the Black actor to the white one.”²⁰ The term *insurrection* is the best at recognizing the white supremacist violence conducted without glorification, as it recognizes the motives not just of the masses of people on the Capitol steps, but also the 147 Republican legislators who voted to overturn the 2020 election results.

What Happened on January 6, 2021

In the year following the insurrection, there has been ample debate over the severity of the actions of the insurrectionists and just how violent things became. With figures such as Wisconsin Senator Ron Johnson arguing January 6 was not an insurrection but a “largely peaceful protest” and Georgia Representative Andrew Clyde calling the event a “normal tourist visit,” the Capitol insurrection has become a battleground over public memory.²¹ It was consummatory for not just for the individuals participating on Capitol grounds, but also for the over 23 million people who engaged with the insurrection by watching it on legacy and social media.²² In order to understand the insurrectionists’ performances at the Capitol on January 6, it is necessary to locate it within the broader rhetorical context. January 6 did not exist in a vacuum.

²⁰ Hawa Allan, “What the History of the Word “Insurrection” Says About Jan. 6,” *Time*, January 7, 2022, <https://time.com/6137604/history-insurrection-jan-6/>.

²¹ Dominick Mastrangelo, “Ron Johnson: Jan. 6 Capitol Riot was a Largely ‘Peaceful Protest,’” *The Hill*, May 20, 2021, <https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/554548-ron-johnson-jan-6-capitol-riot-was-largely-peaceful-not-an-insurrection/>; Mychael Schnell, “GOP Rep. Clyde Defends ‘Normal Tourist Visit’ Comparison for Jan. 6,” *The Hill*, July 28, 2021, <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/565223-gop-rep-defends-description-of-normal-tourist-visit-on-jan-6/>.

²² Rebecca Heilweil and Shirin Ghaffary, “How Trump’s Internet Built and Broadcast the Capitol Insurrection,” *Recode, Vox*, January 8, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/recode/22221285/trump-online-capitol-riot-far-right-Parler-twitter-facebook>.

Before the Insurrection

The rhetoric that fueled the Capitol insurrection began long before the 2020 election. As Michael Edison Hayden of the Southern Poverty Law Center notes, the widely used slogan “Stop the Steal” was first used by Trump advisor Rodger Stone during the 2016 presidential campaign.²³ The phrase was initially created to contest a potential loss to Hillary Clinton, and Trump initially refused to commit to accept a Clinton win. When Trump won that election, the phrase was not needed. The phrase was used again in 2018 by both Trump, Stone, and right-wing political leaders to defend Republican nominees in Florida after close gubernatorial and Senate races.²⁴ Far-right online chat rooms brought the slogan back into circulation in 2020, and it gained prominence as a phrase repeated by Trump to preemptively delegitimize the results of the 2020 election prior to election day.

While Trump’s campaign seemed to preemptively refuse the possibility of a loss before the election, the broader complications brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic made it easier to challenge the electoral results before the first ballots were even cast. According to post-election research conducted by the Pew Research Center, 46 percent of all 2020 voters reported voting absentee or by mail in ballots.²⁵ Further, due to

²³ Michael Edison Hayden, “Far Right Resurrects Roger Stone’s #StopTheSteal During Vote Count,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, November 6, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/11/06/far-right-resurrects-roger-stones-stopthesteal-during-vote-count>.

²⁴ Skyler Swisher et al., “Nation Watches as Vote Counting Drags on Amid Protests and Politicking,” *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, November 9, 2018, <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/tews/politics/fl-ne-recount-chaos-2018-story.html>.

²⁵ Pew Research Center, “Sharp Divisions on Vote Counts, as Biden Gets High Marks for His Post-Election Conduct,” Pew Research Center, November 20, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/11/20/sharp-divisions-on-vote-counts-as-biden-gets-high-marks-for-his-post-election-conduct/>.

politicization of the mail-in process, mailing in person or absentee was split along party lines with 67 percent of Trump voters reporting they voted in person, compared with 42 percent of Biden voters.²⁶ Because of this party split, it would appear that Trump initially won the election on election night, but Biden would overtake him as mail-in and absentee ballots were counted. That Trump was “winning” on election night would later become a key argument used by Trump to “stop the count” and delegitimize the electoral process.

Trump first questioned the validity of the 2020 election on September 23, 2020, when he declined to directly commit to a peaceful transfer of power during a press conference.²⁷ Just a few days later on September 29, 2020, at the first televised presidential debate for the 2020 election, Trump sowed doubt in the validity of the election by claiming mail-in ballots would be illegitimate, saying “This is going to be a fraud like you’ve never seen.”²⁸ Further, Trump skirted around a question prompted by moderator Chris Wallace, asking him to denounce white supremacy groups. Instead, Trump called on the far-right neo-fascist group, the Proud Boys, to “stand back and stand by.” Later investigations found that this direct order from the sitting President resulted in a surge in membership for the Proud Boys,²⁹ who understood Trump’s comment to be a tacit endorsement that was celebrated through social media websites such as Parler.³⁰

²⁶ Pew Research Center, “Sharp Divisions.”

²⁷ Jeff Mason, “Trump Hedges on Transferring Power, Says Election Will End Up at Supreme Court,” *Reuters*, September 23, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-court-election-idUSKCN26F06C>.

²⁸ Kevin Breuninger and Christina Wilkie, “Vicious First Debate Between Trump and Biden Offered Little on Policy, Lots of Conflict,” *CNBC News*, September 29, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/09/29/first-presidential-debate-highlights-trump-vs-biden-.html>.

²⁹ Jane Lytvynenko and Christopher Miller, “The Proud Boys Got a Bunch of New Followers After Trump Said to ‘Stand By,’” *Buzzfeed News*, September 30, 2020, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/janelytvynenko/proud-boys-new-followers-after-trump>.

³⁰ Atlantic Council’s DFRLab, “#StopTheSteal: Timeline.”

In the time between this debate and election day, there was a notable increase in political threats and violence conducted by far-right groups, extremist organizations, and Trump supporters. On October 7, 2020, the FBI revealed a well-coordinated plan by thirteen far-right individuals to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer.³¹ On October 27, 2020, Oath Keepers leader Stewart Rhodes announced on the far-right conspiracy program InfoWars that “members of his militia will be at polling locations on Election Day to ‘protect’ Trump voters,” claiming that the United States had already begun a new civil war.³² In Texas, on October 31, 2020, a “Trump Train” cavalcade of cars surrounded and threatened collisions with a Biden campaign bus.³³

After election day on November 3, 2020, Trump refused to concede his loss, and in turn more violence occurred at marches and rallies. Motivated by this refusal to acknowledge Biden’s victory, large pro-Trump groups gathered outside of elections offices and government buildings to demand that the counting of ballots stop, with several of the insurrectionists openly carrying arms. One such incident included over 200 people in Detroit, MI on November 6, 2021; Detroit had been the focus for many claims

³¹ David Eggert and Ed White, “13 Charged in Plots Against Michigan Governor, Police,” *Associated Press News*, October 8, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/virus-outbreak-us-news-state-courts-courts-ap-travel-da09ca66cd8d5f36722021d3593425ff>. At trial, however, two of the accused were acquitted and the trial of two others resulted in a hung jury.

³² Timothy Johnson, “Militia Leader Stewart Rhodes Says That His Group Will be at Polling Locations and is Ready to Kill Democrats,” *Media Matters*, October 28, 2020, <https://www.mediamatters.org/infowars/militia-leader-stewart-rhodes-says-his-group-will-be-polling-locations-and-ready-kill>.

³³ Kate McGee, Jeremy Schwartz, and Abby Livingston, “Biden Camp Cancels Multiple Texas Events After a ‘Trump Train’ Surrounded a Campaign Bus,” *The Texas Tribune*, October 31, 2020, <https://www.texastribune.org/2020/10/31/biden-trump-texas-bus/>.

of election irregularities and voting fraud, despite there being no evidence verifying or acknowledging such claims.³⁴

Misinformation and violence did not slow down in the weeks that followed. While the Million MAGA March on November 15, 2020, in Washington D.C. was peaceful during the day, encounters with left-wing counter-protesters resulted in “four people stabbed and 33 people arrested.”³⁵ In Iowa on December 6, 2020, a Trump and Proud Boy supporter shot into a car of four Black teenage girls following a March for Trump rally hosted by Women for America First.³⁶

The refusal to accept the election results came to a head on December 19, 2020, when Trump tweeted a call to his supporters to challenge the electoral college certification process in Washington D.C. on January 6, saying that it “will be wild.” Almost immediately, multiple organizations began orchestrating their own events and plans to bring people to the nation’s capital. The Atlantic Council’s Digital Forensic Research Lab found the Oath Keepers, the Proud Boys, Trump-aligned political groups such as Stop the Steal and Women for America First, and multiple Republican elected officials all “committed to attending an event in Washington, D.C. on Jan. 6 [and] each group was actively engaged in promoting the event to their various members or audiences

³⁴ Sarah Cwiek, “Once Again, Trump Supporters Swarm TCF Center in Protest,” Michigan Radio, *National Public Radio*, November 6, 2020, <https://www.michiganradio.org/politics-government/2020-11-06/once-again-trump-supporters-swarm-tcf-center-in-protest>.

³⁵ Jason Slotkin, Suzanne Nuyen, and James Doubek, “4 Stabbed, 33 Arrested After Trump Supporters, Counterprotesters Clash in D.C.,” *National Public Radio*, December 12, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/12/945825924/trump-supporters-arrive-in-washington-once-again-for-a-million-maga-march>.

³⁶ Ryan J. Foley, “Man Charged With 5 New Felonies in Iowa Trump Rally Shooting,” *Associated Press News*, January 19, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-race-and-ethnicity-shootings-des-moines-iowa-city-5840b6505c0b3538fa398cf2ae9aa3a2>.

online.”³⁷ Infowars host Alex Jones, Turning Point USA, and Women for America First provided caravans and buses to bring supporters to the capital.³⁸

On January 3, 2021, Trump announced that he would speak at the March to Save America Rally, one of three different Stop the Steal events granted permits in Washington D.C. The rally was organized by Women for America First, a conservative women’s nonprofit organization founded by former Tea Party Republican Amy Kremer.³⁹ Kremer’s daughter, Kylie Jane Kremer, is also a prominent leader in the organization and was listed as the primary organizer for the event. While the original permit only expected 5,000 people to attend, spokespeople from Women for America First anticipated up to 30,000 people. Leading up to the rally, Women for America First had spent weeks on a bus tour stopping at twenty different cities across the United States in “one of the biggest and best-funded efforts to bring people to Washington, D.C.”⁴⁰ At their rallies, speakers repeated incendiary rhetoric, misinformation, and propaganda, and on the group’s social media pages there were repeated calls to rally a “caravan” of followers to join them on January 6.⁴¹

³⁷ Atlantic Council's DFRLab, “#StopTheSteal: Timeline.”

³⁸ Atlantic Council's DFRLab, “#StopTheSteal: Timeline”; Joseph Tanfani, Michael Berens, and Ned Parker, “How Trump’s Pied Pipers Rallied a Faithful Mob to the Capitol,” *Reuters*, January 11, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-protest-organizers-insight/how-trumps-pied-pipers-rallied-a-faithful-mob-to-the-capitol-idUSKBN29G2UP>.

³⁹ Stephanie Mencimer, “‘Heels On, Gloves Off!’ Women March Against Trump’s Impeachment in Washington. But Really Not Many,” *Mother Jones*, October 18, 2019, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2019/10/heels-on-gloves-off-women-march-against-trumps-impeachment-in-washington-but-really-not-many/>.

⁴⁰ Craig Silverman, Jane Lytvynenko, and Pranav Dixit, “How ‘The Women for America First’ Bus Tour Led to the Capitol Coup Attempt,” *Buzzfeed News*, January 26, 2021, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/maga-bus-tour-coup>.

⁴¹ Brian Schwartz, “Pro-Trump Dark Money Groups Organized the Rally That Led to Deadly Capitol Hill Riot,” *CNBC News*, January 9, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/01/09/pro-trump-dark-money-groups-organized-the-rally-that-led-to-deadly-capitol-hill-riot.html>.

Incited by years of rhetoric that claimed the system of governing is corrupt, the American way of life was under attack, and they had the power and ability to stop the election from being stolen, individuals from all over the nation came to the Capitol. The communication leading up to this event was not secret, nor was it hidden behind firewalls or in private forums. The January 6 Capitol Insurrection was planned and coordinated in public and openly, particularly on social media. The crowd that showed up to the March to Save America Rally was estimated to be at least 10,000 people, and that does not include the other rallies, protests, and riots that took place at the same time around D.C.⁴²

Timeline of the Insurrection

Before the sun even rose on the morning of January 6, a crowd of a few hundred people had already begun to form on the Capitol Building lawn. Many individuals were recognizable as Proud Boys due to their matching orange hats and military gear.⁴³ At the same time, thousands more Trump supporters began to arrive on the Ellipse for the March to Save America Rally, organized by Women for America First. Before Trump took the podium, many incendiary speeches occurred, including Alabama Representative Mo Brooks yelling, “Today is the day American patriots start taking down names and kicking ass!” and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani calling for a “trial by combat.”⁴⁴ While this rally was taking place, approximately two miles away the crowd

⁴² Jie Jenny Zou and Erin B. Logan, “Jan. 6: By the Numbers,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 5, 2022, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2022-01-05/by-the-numbers-jan-6-anniversary>.

⁴³ Lauren Leatherby et al., “How a Presidential Rally Turned into a Capitol Rampage,” *The New York Times*, January 12, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/01/12/us/capitol-mob-timeline.html>

⁴⁴ Aaron Rugar, “How Trump’s Speech Led to the Capitol Riot,” *Vox*, January 8, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/22220746/trump-speech-incite-capitol-riot>.

already at the Capitol had grown to approximately 300 people who begun pushing against police lines.⁴⁵

Trump's speech to the March to Save America rally began at noon and lasted 71 minutes. While he repeated falsehoods about the election, the mob already at the Capitol building broke through rings of barriers and began clashing with Capitol police at the base of the Capitol steps.⁴⁶ Trump concluded his rally speech at 1:10 PM by urging the crowd to march to the Capitol Building and claiming that he would join them there.⁴⁷ Almost immediately, the mass of people at the Ellipse marched down Pennsylvania Avenue and merged with the already violent Capitol crowd. By 1:30 the overwhelmed Capitol Police began to retreat up the stairs on the west side of the building.⁴⁸ At this time, the Capitol Police Chief called for immediate assistance from the District of Columbia National Guard, but Guard did not respond until 5:08 PM.⁴⁹ Around 2 PM, the east side police line retreated, letting the insurrectionists past the last barrier that kept

⁴⁵ Martha Mendoza and Juliet Linderman, "Officers Maced, Trampled: Docs Expose Depth of Jan. 6 Chaos," *Associated Press News*, March 10, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/docs-expose-depth-january-6-capitol-siege-chaos-fd3204574c11e453be8fb4e3c81258c3>.

⁴⁶ Leatherby et al., "Presidential Rally."

⁴⁷ Anne Gearan and Josh Dawsey, "Trump Issued a Call to Arms. Then He Urged His Followers to 'Remember This Day Forever!'" *The Washington Post*, January 7, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-election-capitol-building/2021/01/06/3e9af194-5031-11eb-bda4-615aaefd0555_story.html.

⁴⁸ Shelly Tan, Youjin Shin, and Danielle Rindler, "How One of America's Ugliest Days Unraveled Inside and Outside the Capitol," *The Washington Post*, January 9, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/interactive/2021/capitol-insurrection-visual-timeline/>.

⁴⁹ As of this writing there is a discrepancy in accounts over when exactly the Guard was given permission by the U.S. Army Secretary to deploy; Dan Lamothe and Paul Sonne, "Pentagon Inspector General Raises Questions About Former D.C. Guard Commander's Jan. 6 Account," *The Washington Post*, November 17, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2021/11/17/january-6-william-walker-national-guard/>.

mobs from surrounding the building. At 2:11 PM, insurrectionists on the west side broke through doors and windows and officially breached the Capitol's walls.⁵⁰

Inside the building at approximately 2:20 PM, as insurrectionists made their way towards the Senate Chamber, House and Senate sessions were called to recess and legislators and staff were ordered to evacuate, only given enough time to escape because Capitol officer Eugene Goodman diverted the insurrectionists attention.⁵¹ At 2:44 PM, another group of the mob attempted to break into the rear of the House Chamber as lawmakers were still being evacuated. Insurrectionist Ashli Babbitt was the first to attempt climbing through a smashed window but was shot in the chest by an officer on the other side; Babbitt died later that day.⁵² Breaches of offices and Capitol areas continued until the first wave of National Guard members arrived to clear the building around 5:20 PM, nearly four hours after they were first requested.⁵³ The building was declared secure by the National Guard at 8 PM.⁵⁴

Investigations after the event provide details of the damage done and a picture of who was involved. Data journalist and professor Stephen Doig explains, it is difficult, if not entirely impossible, to accurately count the total number of insurrectionists present on

⁵⁰ Ashley Parker et al., "How the Rioters Who Stormed the Capitol Came Dangerously Close to Pence," *The Washington Post*, January 15, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/pence-rioters-capitol-attack/2021/01/15/ab62e434-567c-11eb-a08b-f1381ef3d207_story.html.

⁵¹ Leatherby et al., "Presidential Rally."

⁵² Dmitriy Khavin et al., "Day of Rage: An In-Depth Look at How a Mob Stormed the Capitol," *The New York Times*, June 30, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/30/us/jan-6-capitol-attack-takeaways.html>.

⁵³ Lisa Mascaro, Ben Fox, and Lolita C. Baldor, "'Clear the Capitol,' Pence Pleaded, Timeline of Riot Shows," *Associated Press News*, April 10, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/capitol-siege-army-racial-injustice-riots-only-on-ap-480e95d9d075a0a946e837c3156cdcb9>.

⁵⁴ Mascaro, Fox, and Baldor, "Clear the Capitol."

the grounds.⁵⁵ However, it is easier to count the number of insurrectionists who broke into the building, and the Justice Department estimates that number ranges between 2,000 and 2,500 people.⁵⁶ An estimated \$1.5 million of damage was done to the building, including broken windows, graffiti, and chemical agent residue.⁵⁷ However, the cost could be as high as \$30 million in order to restore historic artwork and architecture.⁵⁸

Five people died in connection with the insurrection, including Capitol Police officer Brian Sicknick and insurrectionists Ashli Babbitt, Rosanne Boyland, Kevin Greeson, and Benjamin Philips.⁵⁹ In the months following, over 732 people have been charged with federal crimes for their role in the Capitol attack, with over 77 percent of them charged on the basis of evidence from their social media accounts.⁶⁰

The Insurrectionists and Online Communities

Of the people in attendance at the rally, it is important to note the demographics. Investigations conducted by the Chicago Project on Security and Threats found interesting demographic trends by reviewing court documents of all the Capital insurrectionists arrested or charged. Only one-tenth of the arrestees were classified as

⁵⁵ Stephen Doig, “It is Difficult, if not Impossible, to Estimate the Size of the Crowd that Stormed Capitol Hill,” *The Conversation*, January 8, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/it-is-difficult-if-not-impossible-to-estimate-the-size-of-the-crowd-that-stormed-capitol-hill-152889>.

⁵⁶ Ryan Lucas, “Where the Jan. 6 Insurrection Investigation Stands, One Year Later,” *National Public Radio*, January 6, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/01/06/1070736018/jan-6-anniversary-investigation-cases-defendants-justice>.

⁵⁷ Lexi Lonas, “Capitol Riot Caused Nearly \$1.5 Million in Damage, Federal Prosecutors Say,” *The Hill*, June 3, 2021, <https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/556768-capitol-riot-caused-nearly-15-million-in-damage-federal>.

⁵⁸ Jie and Logan, “Jan. 6: By the Numbers.”

⁵⁹ Jack Healy, “These Are the 5 People Who Died in the Capitol Riot,” *The New York Times*, January 11, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/11/us/who-died-in-capitol-building-attack.html>.

⁶⁰ “Capitol Hill Siege,” *George Washington University Program on Extremism*, last updated October 31, 2021, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/Capitol-Hill-Cases>.

members of “gangs, militias, or militia-like groups such as the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, and Three Percenters.”⁶¹ Unlike other far-right extremists who tend to be younger and unemployed, over two-thirds of the Capital insurrectionists were over the age of 35, with the average age of arrestees being 40 years old. Further, only 9 percent of insurrectionists were unemployed and over 40 percent were business owners or held white-collar jobs.⁶²

Many of the conversations taking place among the insurrectionists occurred online. Social media sites, and Parler in particular, also worked as areas of planning and coordination among insurrectionists before, during, and after they breached the Capitol walls. For example, prior to January 6, insurrectionists communicated with comments on Parler and posted “directions on which streets to take to avoid the police and which tools to bring to help pry open doors.”⁶³ Instructions on how to bring guns into the building were also common, as well as celebratory posts after the event about carrying guns explicitly violating Washington D.C.’s law against open carry.⁶⁴ During the violence, insurrectionists stayed online to engage with other supporters. For example, Tim Gionet, who is more broadly known by his streaming handle Baked Alaska, broadcast himself

⁶¹ Robert A. Pape and Keven Ruby, “The Capitol Rioters Aren’t Like Other Extremists,” *The Atlantic*, February 2, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/02/the-capitol-rioters-arent-like-other-extremists/617895/>.

⁶² Pape and Ruby, “Capitol Rioters.”

⁶³ Sheera Frenkel, “The Storming of Capitol Hill was Organized on Social Media,” *The New York Times*, January 6, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/06/us/politics/protesters-storm-capitol-hill-building.html>.

⁶⁴ Jane Lytvynenko and Molly Hensley-Clancy, “The Rioters who Took Over the Capitol Have Been Planning Online in the Open for Weeks,” *Buzzfeed News*, January 6, 2021, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/janelytvynenko/trump-rioters-planned-online?scrolla=5eb6d68b7fedc32c19ef33b4>.

and the insurrection to over 16,000 followers who engaged and talked with Gionet directly.⁶⁵

Participants engaging with each other before and during the event elevates social media activities from simply marking “they were there” to a bigger act of identity and community formation. As media studies scholar Luke Munn argues, the Capitol insurrection solidified social media sites, particularly Parler, as a form of “preparatory media.” In this digital space and in real time, “even mundane posts documenting the journey towards this event . . . knit participants together” from the insurrectionists in Washington D.C. to supporters across the world.⁶⁶ To understand how these identities are constituted, as well as how these events reflect a conservative gendered identity, it is necessary to look at how participants engaged on conservative social media sites. To do so requires a background in what Parler is and its contextual influence before, during, and after the insurrection.

The Artifacts of Analysis: The Parler Videos

After years of criticism of leniency towards hate speech and misinformation going completely unchecked on their platform, executives at Facebook and Twitter began increasing regulations on user accounts in 2018. Such moves involved banning individual

⁶⁵ Heilweil and Ghaffary, “Trump’s Internet.”

⁶⁶ Luke Munn, “More than a Mob: Parler as Preparatory Media for the Capitol Storming,” *First Monday* 26, no. 3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v26i3.11574>.

and group pages for the Proud Boys,⁶⁷ Alex Jones and InfoWars,⁶⁸ and hundreds of accounts suspected to be operated by Russian state actors.⁶⁹ Figures who had lost their following on mainstream platforms, such as Republican politicians Jim Jordan, Elise Stefanik, Rand Paul, and Nikki Haley,⁷⁰ claimed that Big Tech was biased against conservatives, and quickly shifted their to the “alt-platform” to Twitter, known as Parler.

Parler was founded in 2018 by John Matze and Jared Thompson and was financed by Rebekah Mercer, whose family also majorly contributed funds to Trump’s campaign, Cambridge Analytica, and Breitbart.⁷¹ The website quickly grew popular among right-wing conservatives, conspiracy theorists, and extremists for its laissez-faire approach towards moderating content. Perceiving Facebook and Twitter content rules as biased against conservatives, the number of active users grew rapidly but appeared to plateau at approximately 2.9 million by December 2020.⁷² However, membership rapidly increased

⁶⁷ Nick Statt, “Facebook Bans Accounts Affiliated with Far-Right Group the Proud Boys and Founder Gavin McInnes,” *The Verge*, October 30, 2018, <https://www.theverge.com/2018/10/30/18045410/facebook-bans-proud-boys-far-right-extremist-group-gavin-mcinnnes>.

⁶⁸ Sara Salinas, “Twitter Permanently Bans Alex Jones and Infowars Accounts,” *CNBC News*, September 7, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/09/06/twitter-permanently-bans-alex-jones-and-infowars-accounts.html>.

⁶⁹ Devin Coldewey, “Facebook and Twitter Remove Hundreds of Accounts Linked to Iranian and Russian Political Meddling,” *TechCrunch*, August 21, 2018, <https://techcrunch.com/2018/08/21/facebook-and-twitter-remove-hundreds-of-accounts-linked-to-iranian-and-russian-political-meddling/>.

⁷⁰ Ari Levy, “Trump Fans are Flocking to the Social Media App Parler — Its CEO is Begging Liberals to Join Them,” *CNBC News*, June 27, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/27/Parler-ceo-wants-liberal-to-join-the-pro-trump-crowd-on-the-app.html>.

⁷¹ Kelsey Vlamis, “Rebekah Mercer is Funding Parler, the Social-Media App Touted by Republican Politicians and Pundits that Conservatives are Flocking to,” *Business Insider*, November 15, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/rebekah-mercer-funds-Parler-social-media-app-touted-by-right-2020-11>; Bobby Allyn, “Former Parler CEO Matze Stripped of All Company Shares Upon Firing, Sources Say,” *National Public Radio*, March 2, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/03/02/973083119/former-Parler-ceo-matze-stripped-of-all-company-shares-upon-firing-sources-say>.

⁷² Kaya Yurieff, “Conservatives Flocked to Parler After the Election. But its Explosive Growth is Over,” *CNN*, December 10, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/10/tech/Parler-downloads/index.html>.

in the days leading up to the insurrection, skyrocketing to 13.3 million users by January 2021.⁷³ On January 11, due to Parler's failure to moderate calls to violence and its role organizing insurrectionists leading up to the insurrection, Amazon Web Services announced they would no longer host Parler's domain, effectively shutting down the site.

Amazon's action would result in all the data uploaded to Parler being lost, including mountains of video and text evidence from Capitol insurrectionists about what happened on January 6. To save this data, an anonymous hacker who goes by the handle @donk_enby exploited Parler's weak security system to download 412 million files and its associated metadata, featuring 150 million photos and over 1 million videos.⁷⁴ This makes up almost the entirety of all content that was ever contributed to Parler since its inception. The collected data has since been made public for anyone to download, host, or archive, and the collection has been critical for investigators and researchers.

Programmers collaborated with researchers and journalists, creating multiple archives housing the collected data. Investigative journalists at ProPublica organized an interactive archive of over 500 Parler videos from the insurrection that they deemed most newsworthy, based on the clarity of the videos, the location where they were filmed, and actions taken by filmed insurrectionists.⁷⁵ Other anonymously run websites housed metadata and details about posts, replies, and users, such as the (sadly now defunct)

⁷³ David Thiel et al., "Contours and Controversies of Parler," *Stanford Internet Observatory Cyber Policy Center*, January 28, 2021, <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/sio-Parler-contours>.

⁷⁴ Leland Nally, "The Hacker Who Archived Parler Explains How She Did It (And What Comes Next)," *Vice*, January 12, 2021, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/n7vqew/the-hacker-who-archived-Parler-explains-how-she-did-it-and-what-comes-next>.

⁷⁵ Lena V. Groeger et al., "What Parler Saw During the Attack on the Capitol," *ProPublica*, January 17, 2021, <https://projects.propublica.org/Parler-capitol-videos/>.

Parler Archive.⁷⁶ For my research, I utilized the archive jan6attack.com, which is a stable archive that hosts every video ever uploaded to Parler, as well as an estimated 32.1 terabytes of videos, posts, and metadata.

Compared to the most circulated images from January 6 in legacy media, the Parler videos are dynamic and are more reflective of the demographics in attendance. Most importantly, the videos allow for a glimpse into the discourse taking place in a right-wing digital space. Parler was a site of intense discourse leading up to the insurrection, so much so that in a letter to Congress following the attack, Parler executives admitted they reported to the FBI at least 50 legitimate threats of violence towards the Capitol circulating on the site.⁷⁷ Right-wing insurrectionists used Parler to express arguments and frame themselves the way they desired to be seen, presented to an audience they believed would be unequivocally supportive of them.

The photos shared to Parler, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media websites reflect the insurrectionists the way they desire to be framed. They constitute the insurrectionists' presentation of their first persona. Unlike photojournalists taking pictures of them, insurrectionists determined the positions of their bodies, their message, and which photos were circulated. Analysis of both professionally taken photos and self-documentation allows for a greater understanding of masculine and feminine bodily performance in protest and provides a clearer picture rather than looking at only

⁷⁶ A Data Scientist, "About the Parler Archive," *Parler Archive*, accessed September 14, 2021, <https://Parler.adatascienti.st/about>.

⁷⁷ Yelena Dzhanova, "Parler Allegedly Warned the FBI of 'Specific Threats of Violence' More Than 50 Times Ahead of the Capitol Riot," *Business Insider*, March 28, 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/Parler-says-it-warned-fbi-of-threats-capitol-riot-2021-3>.

professional photos. This makes the Parler videos the ideal artifact to understand how the insurrectionists constitute their gendered and political identities.

Conclusion

This thesis begins with an introductory chapter describing the context and artifacts I studied. As I continue into Chapter 2, I describe rhetorical criticism as a method and the rhetoricity of gender. I also outline a heuristic vocabulary to study gender performance through a review of R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt's concepts of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. I begin my analysis in Chapter 3, which covers two alternative performances of conservative masculinity at the Capitol insurrection: a delinquent masculinity and militarized muscular Christianity. Chapter 4 then explores the dialectic of conservative feminine performance, analyzing den mother femininity and militant feminine leadership. I conclude with Chapter 5 by exploring the interrelations between the insurrectionists' masculine and feminine performances and provide implications for future research.

CHAPTER TWO:

CRITICAL RHETORIC OF GENDER PERFORMANCE

The Parler videos constitute a massive dataset of over 32.1 terabytes of saved data. This includes digital copies of over 13 million Parler accounts, 98 million public posts, and 84 million public comments.⁷⁸ Videos taken and uploaded to Parler of events that took place on January 6 were broad in their scope, and the insurrectionists who took them captured a variety of different performances depending on what they were motivated to document.

In a social media landscape with an overabundance of visuals, scholar Adam Schrag argues that sharing visuals from events has become over-privileged to the point where they have “become prerequisites for paying attention,” regardless of the platform they are shared on.⁷⁹ Many of the videos were simply a recording of the event as it was happening, panning over the mobs of people to answer social media’s demand for “pics or it didn’t happen.” Others shone a light on the actions and motivations of the insurrectionists, allowing them to make meaning out of their violence towards legislators, Capitol Police, or even towards their fellow insurrectionists. Some videos made legible the coordination of the insurrectionists, documenting them speaking over radios or creating a battering ram out of their bodies to smash through the doors. Some were more personal, with insurrectionists giving their personal testimony in a selfie video or through discourse formatted like a news interview with another insurrectionist.

⁷⁸ Max Aliapoulios et al., “An Early Look at the Parler Online Social Network,” ARXIV, *Cornell University*, February 18, 2021, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2101.03820.pdf>.

⁷⁹ Adam Schrag, “Pics, or It Didn’t Happen’: On Visual Evidence in the Age of Ubiquitous Photography,” *Pacific Journal* 10, (2015): 3, <http://hdl.handle.net/11418/560>.

The abundance of data provided from a single day could be approached in a variety of ways. Scholars could track the frequency of terms or symbols being used, the chants being shouted, or the circulation of images. For me, the performances of the insurrectionists provide a deeper insight to the constitution of their own realities and identities.

To analyze these constitutive performances requires utilizing rhetorical criticism. As rhetorical scholar Barry Brummett explains, to be a rhetorical critic necessitates an understanding that reality is constituted through people and their discourse; in the creation of their realities, “truth which is rhetorically made encourages choice and awareness of alternative realities.”⁸⁰ Because I am most interested in the gender performances and variations thereof, rhetorical criticism is the best approach I can take to analyze these rich texts.

A rhetorical analysis involves, as scholars Blair, Dickinson, and Ott explain, “the study of discourses, events, objects, and practices that attends to their character as meaningful, legible, partisan, and consequential.”⁸¹ More than a description of discourse taking place, rhetorical criticism develops an argument informed by the broader situation in which rhetoric is performed.⁸² Rhetorical criticism does not aspire to the formulaic

⁸⁰ Barry Brummett, “Some Implications of ‘Process’ or ‘Intersubjectivity’: Postmodern Rhetoric,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 9, no. 1 (1976): 40. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/40236963>.

⁸¹ Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian Ott, “Introduction,” in *Places of Public Memory* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 2.

⁸² John W. Jordan, Kathryn M. Olson, and Steven R. Goldzwig, “Continuing the Conversation on “What Constitutes Publishable Rhetorical Criticism?”: A Response,” *Communication Studies* 54, no. 3 (2003): 392–402, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510970309363297>; Jennifer deWinter, “A Bibliographic Synthesis of Rhetorical Criticism,” *Rhetoric Review* 25, no. 4 (2006): 388–407. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327981rr2504_2.

nature nor the requirement for replicability of quantitative or most qualitative methods.

Instead, as rhetoricians Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland argue:

Most of these [rhetorical] approaches do not really qualify as “methods,” in any meaningful sense, to begin with. They are more properly conceptual heuristics or vocabularies; they may invite a critic to interesting ways of reading a text, but they do not have the procedural rigor or systematicity that typically characterizes method. In fact, it is arguable that they are at their best, critically, when they are the least rigorous ‘methodologically.’⁸³

Because of this, rhetorical criticism is not so much a series of rigid steps as it is a practice of analysis. Through utilizing a heuristic vocabulary, a researcher can critique the way a text not only interacts with the world, but also how it reflects, shapes, and constitutes reality.

The questions that I ask concerning gender performance and identity require that I approach these textual fragments through a critical lens. Beyond explaining what is taking place in these videos, as a critic I need to extend my analysis to identify what the insurrectionists are *doing* to contribute to systems of power and domination. This is what rhetorician Raymie McKerrow refers to as a *critical rhetoric*, which “examines the dimensions of dominion and freedom [and] seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power.”⁸⁴ Criticism has both an emancipatory function to challenge oppression, but also an enlightening one to identify where oppression exists. This is crucial, because as rhetorical theorist Michael McGee elaborates, most often systems of power and ideology remain “definitive of the society we have inherited, they are conditions of the society into

⁸³ William L. Nothstine, Carole Blair, and Gary A. Copeland, “Invention in Media and Rhetorical Criticism: A General Orientation,” in *Critical Questions: Invention, Creativity, and the Criticism of Discourse and Media* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 40.

⁸⁴ Raymie E. McKerrow, “Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis,” *Communication Monographs* 56, no. 2 (1989): 91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637758909390253>.

which each of us is born.”⁸⁵ Consequentially, this makes dimensions of domination difficult to recognize, as they are just seen as quotidian and “normal.” Rhetorical criticism is one way to explore how what is considered normal has been, well, normalized and, hence, made normative.

Gender, through its performance and disciplining along with sex and sexuality, is one of these dimensions where the normative is rhetorically constructed. As foundational gender theorist Judith Butler argues, “institutional heterosexuality both requires and produces the univocity of each of the gendered terms that constitute the limit of gendered possibilities within an oppositional, binary gender system.”⁸⁶ This becomes reinforced and reproduced through compulsory heterosexuality, normative gender norms, prescribed sex roles, intelligible forms of expression, and social discipline. Rather than recognized as a cultural construction, gender is reduced to biological impulses. At the same time, it is treated the same way as a person’s sex and sexuality, conflating all three to be directly influenced and correlated with each other. A person’s biological sex is assumed to be the same as their gender, which in turn reflects an assumed sexual orientation. As scholar Lana Rakow argues, “in communication, gender research should mean being engaged in questions about the role of communication in the construction and accomplishment of a gender system.”⁸⁷ Therefore, to analyze performances of gender inherently requires a critical rhetoric to interrogate these systems of power, hierarchy, and normativity.

⁸⁵ Michael Calvin McGee, “The ‘Ideograph’: A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66, no. 1 (1980): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335638009383499>.

⁸⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), 22.

⁸⁷ Lana F. Rakow, “Rethinking Gender Research in Communication,” *Journal of Communication* 36, no. 4 (1986): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1986.tb01447.x>.

Although I analyze insurrectionists' gender performances through a binary analysis of masculinity and femininity, my critique also seeks to demystify a singular dominant performance of one conservative masculinity or one conservative femininity. Because I want to critically approach performances of gender among the Capitol insurrectionists, I begin this chapter by detailing my methodology for narrowing my data and how I chose which videos I analyzed. Next, I review the literature on gender as a rhetorical construction and previous scholarship on analyses of gender performance in virtual spaces. Finally, I develop a heuristic vocabulary through an in-depth review of scholarship about hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity.

Narrowing and Selecting the Dataset

Initial estimates of the salvaged Parler data predicted that there were around 2,500 videos uploaded on January 6 alone. However, upon closer inspection, this number ranges between 3,516 to 4,707 videos. Watching this number of videos by myself would be a gargantuan task and would be impossible to do in a timely manner, so in this next section, I outline the process used to narrow down my dataset. I do this by narrowing videos based on location and time of the videos, followed by a narrowing based on the actual content within the videos.

Initially, I narrowed the dataset based on where and when the videos were recorded. Because of a loophole in Parler's privacy agreement, almost all of the videos' metadata (such as time a video was taken, the person who took it, where it was taken, and

even what phone model recorded it) was simultaneously legally scraped and preserved.⁸⁸ With this information, I eliminated all of the videos that took place before 7:40 AM, which was the moment that the first wave of insurrectionists broke through a barrier of bike racks at the Capitol Building. I also removed videos taken after 8:00 PM, when the Senate was officially reopened to finish confirming the Electoral College votes.⁸⁹ Further, I only considered videos that were taken in the Ellipse (where the March to Save America Rally was hosted and Trump gave his speech), Pennsylvania Avenue, and the Capitol Building and its surrounding grounds. Hotels, airports, and other nondescript streets around DC are not considered as there was no certainty that the subjects participated in the insurrection or actually were present at the Capitol. With these considerations, the number of videos for analysis dropped to approximately 964 videos.

I then narrowed the dataset based on the content and style of the video. A vast majority of the videos taken by the insurrectionists do not focus on any particular actors, not even themselves. Instead, cameras pan over the mobs of people or the surrounding crowd seemingly just to show what is taking place. This would be in line with scholars Jessa Lingel and Mor Naaman's research on concert recorders, where they found that people recording a mass event typically do so in order to use the video as a "memory aid" or to share with a broader fan community.⁹⁰ These videos normally do not include a focus

⁸⁸ Grayson Clary, "Parler Wasn't Hacked, and Scraping Is Not a Crime," *Lawfare*, February 1, 2021, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/Parler-wasnt-hacked-and-scraping-not-crime>.

⁸⁹ Kat Lonsdorf et al., "A Timeline of How the Jan. 6 Attack Unfolded – Including Who Said What and When," *National Public Radio*, January 5, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/01/05/1069977469/a-timeline-of-how-the-jan-6-attack-unfolded-including-who-said-what-and-when>.

⁹⁰ Jessa Lingel and Mor Naaman, "You Should Have Been There, Man: Live Music, DIY Content, and Online Communities," *New Media and Society* 14, no. 2 (2011): 340, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811417284>.

on a particular individual or documented dialogue, and therefore they do not contribute to my analysis.

The videos that did gain my attention utilize, even for a short period of time, a focus on an individual who engages in a dialogue with either themselves, another insurrectionist, or an online following through their camera. With this focus, I identified 135 videos, each having a significant performance of gender documented either through auditory or visual components. I go into more detail about my reasoning for selecting the specific videos I closely analyze in Chapter 3 on masculinity performances and Chapter 4 on femininity performances. All 135 videos are rhetorically rich in the testimonies the insurrectionists provide and clear imagery. While the videos contain rhetoric that could be analyzed for its performative functions, constitutive functions, or practicality, my interest is in gender. As a rhetorical construction, gender not only influences how the insurrectionists view their own role during January 6, but is also reflective of a broader culture that is shaped by masculine and feminine roles and expectations.

Gender as a Rhetorical Construction

In order to understand the human condition, we need to understand the influence of language. Foundational scholar Kenneth Burke posed the question, “do we simply use words, or do they not also use us?”⁹¹ As much as we use language to shape reality, language in turn shapes us to view and act in certain ways rather than others. The influence language has in shaping individuals’ ideologies is what Burke referred to as a

⁹¹ Kenneth Burke, “The Definition of Man,” *The Hudson Review* 16, no. 4 (1963-1964): 495, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3848123>.

terministic screen, which describes how screens made of certain terminologies, symbols, and words direct “the attention of one field rather than another.”⁹² At any given time, the words we use are a *reflection* of reality, but also a *selection* and *deflection* of reality.⁹³ Terministic screens may reflect how we see the world, but they also deflect our attention to fit the language that we already use. For example, scholar Suzanne Kessler analyzes the history of surgical intervention on babies born intersex, or with subtle sex anatomy variations that are neither solely male nor female. Before the term *intersex* was more widely embraced, the English only had binary language to describe the *sexes*: *male* and *female*. Consequentially, bodies that did not fit that terministic screen were then forcibly altered through surgical intervention in order to fit a linguistic binary.⁹⁴ If a word does not exist to explain some thing, or normalizes certain understandings of reality, then audiences can be deflected away from recognizing a concept or make any other understanding of it completely unintelligible.

Terministic screens extend to understandings of gender as well, in their construction and when they direct attention to certain normative performances over others. As philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler explains, gender is constructed through a dialectic and “there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body.”⁹⁵ A body’s gender is assigned into being, through

⁹² Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966), 50.

⁹³ Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action*, 45.

⁹⁴ Suzanne J. Kessler, “The Medical Construction of Gender: Case Management of Intersexed Infants,” *Signs* 16, no. 1 (1990): 3-26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174605>; see also: Catherine H. Palczewski, Richard Ice, and John Fritch, *Rhetoric in Civic Life*, 2nd ed. (State College, PA: Strata Publishing, 2016).

⁹⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 10.

interactions, discourse, and repeated actions that normalize certain gender expressions over others.⁹⁶ Through the language we use, and how it in turn uses us, terministic screens shape what is a normalized performance of gender and disciplines or renders invisible alternative performances. Gender does not exist in a vacuum but is shaped through human interaction and discourse. Norms, attitudes, and gendered behaviors are constructed through communication. This makes gender, and the study thereof, an inherently rhetorical act worthy of critique.

Biology does not determine how gender presents in the body. Rather, gender is a social construction of performances assigned to sexed bodies that is communicatively created, maintained, resisted, and challenged. As scholar Mary Crawford argues, gender is a pervasive and inescapable social construct in that it is “a system of meaning that organizes interactions and governs access to power and resources.”⁹⁷

As part of a complex system of meanings and power dynamics, gender is constructed and played out on societal, interpersonal, and individual levels.⁹⁸ Butler explains that individual actions that maintain or challenge gender cannot be understood in isolation; gender performance is “not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names.”⁹⁹ In their foundational article, sociologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman argue that “the enterprise [of gender] is fundamentally interactional and institutional in

⁹⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), 45.

⁹⁷ Mary Crawford, *Talking Difference: On Gender and Language* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1995), 12.

⁹⁸ Crawford, *Talking Difference*, 13.

⁹⁹ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 2.

character, for accountability is a feature of social relationships and its idiom is drawn from the institutional arena in which those relationships are enacted.”¹⁰⁰ The choices that people make in performances of gender are shaped by the discourses they interact with on interpersonal and institutional levels, regardless of whether they follow prescribed gender norms or choose to resist, challenge, or reframe them.

Claimed differences in masculinity and femininity, like gender itself, are also socially constructed. As Butler explains, the conflation of sex and gender is what makes masculinity and femininity intelligible, “such that the matter of bodies will be indissociable from the regulatory norms that govern their materialization and the signification of those material effects.”¹⁰¹ However, communicatively no such differences biologically exist, and all can be traced back to societal influence. As rhetorical scholar Catherine Palczewski explains, “the conflict over gender roles is always simultaneously about femininity and masculinity.”¹⁰² Masculinity and femininity exist within a discursive relationship, where what is perceived to be an appropriate performance of masculinity is shaped in turn by what is an appropriate performance of femininity, and vice versa. Changes within one can drastically influence the other.

Masculinity and femininity can be performed in a variety of ways, and there is no intrinsically right or wrong way to perform gender. But some performances are normalized, casting those who do not neatly fit these normalized performances as wrong

¹⁰⁰ Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, “Doing Gender,” *Gender and Society* 1, no. 2 (1987): 136-137, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243287001002002>.

¹⁰¹ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 2.

¹⁰² Catherine Palczewski, “The Male Madonna and the Feminine Uncle Sam: Visual Argument, Icons, and Ideographs in 1909 Anti-Woman Suffrage Postcards,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91, no. 4 (2005): 379, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630500488325>.

or deviant. Communication and queer studies scholar Gust Yep defines normativity as “the process of constructing, establishing, producing, and reproducing a taken-for-granted and all-encompassing standard used to measure goodness, desirability, morality, rationality, superiority, and a host of other dominant cultural values.”¹⁰³ With certain performances of gender becoming normative comes hierarchy and power structures, where those outside of the norm are disciplined and those that fit the norm are idealized.

Certain performances of gender have become so normative that they have become quotidian, or casual performances of the everyday. As they go unquestioned and uninterrogated, differences in power, strategic changes in gendered communication, or even critiques of gender discipline may not exist within an individual’s terministic screen. Therefore, to critique and analyze gender performances requires identifying and at times creating new language. Methodologically, this thesis builds on previous scholarship and develops a heuristic vocabulary that studies interactions between people, more than just a single expression of gender. Further, expressions of gender need to be understood as participating in broader cultural systems that continue to shape how masculinity and femininity is made intelligible. As critical media scholar Sut Jhally explains, hegemonic cultural forces flatten gender performances so that there is only one acceptable form of masculinity and one of femininity.¹⁰⁴ These singular concepts have been named by scholars as *hegemonic masculinity* and *emphasized femininity*.

¹⁰³ Gust Yep, “The Violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies: Notes on Injury, Healing, and Queer World-Making,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 45, no. 2-4 (2003): 18, https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v45n02_02.

¹⁰⁴ Sut Jhally, *The Codes of Gender: Identity & Performance in Pop Culture* (Northampton: Media Education Foundation Collection, 2010) video file: <https://thoughtmaybe.com/the-codes-of-gender/>.

Hegemonic Masculinity

First defined by R. W. Connell, *hegemonic masculinity* is a culturally idealized and normative form of masculine performance where “the configuration of gender practice . . . guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.”¹⁰⁵ While each configuration of masculinity is influenced by culture, in Western societies, scholar Cliff Cheng explains that hegemonic masculinity tends to emphasize a performance of men that adheres to “domination, aggressiveness, competitiveness, athletic prowess, stoicism, and control.”¹⁰⁶ Specific to U.S. culture, rhetoric scholar Nick Trujillo outlines five tenets that construct hegemonic masculinity: “(1) physical force and control, (2) occupational achievement, (3) familial patriarchy, (4) frontiersmanship, and (5) heterosexuality.”¹⁰⁷ To summarize, hegemonic masculinity is an idealized masculine performance that demands men show strength through physical force, occupational and familial leadership, a lack of emotion, and control over others.

Connell borrowed from Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony and social control,¹⁰⁸ which is further defined by sociologist Stuart Hall as “the process by which a historical bloc of social forces is constructed and the ascendancy of that bloc secured.”¹⁰⁹ Essentially, hegemony is a form of cultural power, built into existing

¹⁰⁵ Raewyn W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd edition (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 77.

¹⁰⁶ Cliff Cheng, “Marginalized Masculinities and Hegemonic Masculinity: An Introduction,” *Journal of Men’s Studies* 7, no. 3 (2007): 298, <https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.0703.295>.

¹⁰⁷ Nick Trujillo, “Hegemonic Masculinity on the Mound: Media Representations of Nolan Ryan and American Sports Culture,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8, no. 3 (1991): 291, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039109366799>.

¹⁰⁸ Connell, *Gender and Power*, 184.

¹⁰⁹ Stuart Hall, “The Problem of Ideology-Marxism without Guarantees,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1986): 42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/019685998601000203>.

structures and institutions and so seamlessly woven into everyday life that power and domination is instead viewed as normal and not worthy of critique.

Through Connell's theory, one performance of masculinity is the dominant ideal that all men are encouraged to strive towards, as well as measured against. Through its hegemonic power, this performance ensures masculine dominance and feminine submission.

This dominant performance of masculinity is hegemonic in two ways. First, it acts as the normative standard for all masculinities, against which all men are judged and disciplined. Second, hegemonic masculinity is defined by its relational dialectic with other subordinate masculinities and femininities; it is a dominant masculinity that upholds its legitimacy through its marginalization of other gender performances. As Connell argues, "'hegemony' does not mean total cultural dominance, the obliteration of alternatives. It means ascendancy achieved within a balance of forces, that is, a state of play. Other patterns and groups are subordinated rather than eliminated."¹¹⁰ Masculinities scholar James Messerschmidt stresses even further that without taking into account this relational dialectic, hegemonic masculinity has no scholarly meaning.¹¹¹ It is a rather fragile concept in that this dominant masculinity cannot stand on its own; it is always defined by its relationship with other masculinities and femininities.

Regardless of whether or not a person "opts-in" to this performance of masculinity in their personal gender expression, the dominating power of hegemonic

¹¹⁰ Raewyn W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 184.

¹¹¹ James W. Messerschmidt, "The Salience of 'Hegemonic Masculinity,'" *Men and Masculinities* 22, no. 1 (2019): 86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X18805555>.

masculinity is inescapable. As Connell and Messerschmidt explain, while only a minority of men can fully embody the tenets of hegemonic masculinity, every man is “expected to position themselves in relation to it” and are complicit in receiving its benefits.¹¹²

Messerschmidt elaborates further on four non-hegemonic performances of masculinity; first, there are complicit masculinities, that “do not actually embody hegemonic masculinity yet through practice realize some of the benefits of unequal gender relations.”¹¹³ Second are subordinate masculinities, which are masculine performances that are deemed lesser than hegemonic masculinity, such as effeminate men. Third are marginalized masculinities, which are masculinities that face discrimination because of held identities that are intersectional with gender, such as race, class, etc. Finally, there are protest masculinities, which are reactionary hypermasculine performances created often when a person lacks political power. None of these performances are fully distinct from hegemonic masculinity, as based on the individual’s needs and social position, certain aspects are replicated or hyper-performed where others are lacked. However, all of these non-hegemonic performances still benefit by being dominant over femininities and other masculinities, resulting in their complacency in the existing power structures.

In the United States, the political sphere has always been influenced and interwoven with gender and masculinity. As communication studies scholar Janis

¹¹² Raewyn W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 832, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>; See also: Mike Donaldson, “What is Hegemonic Masculinity?” *Theory and Society* 22, no. 5 (1993): 643-657, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/657988>.

¹¹³ James W. Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity: Formulation, Reformation, and Amplification* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 29.

Edwards argues, from the very founding of the country, “expectations of manhood were woven into the national fabric of assumptions about political leadership and citizenship.”¹¹⁴ One example is seen through scholars Kherstin Khan and Diane M. Blair’s analysis of former president Bill Clinton’s campaign framings, which emphasized his popularity, charm and “seduction,” role as a defender or hero, and occupational authority.¹¹⁵ Broadly across the political sphere, masculine attributes have been solidified as strong political attributes, such as athletic ability, wartime experience, and robust physicality.¹¹⁶ These masculine ideals are pervasive in political performance, and are expected of political figures regardless of their gender identity.¹¹⁷

However, there are multiple dimensions to hegemonic masculinity that can influence how it is enacted within in the political sphere. As Michael Messner argues, one of those ways is to appropriate from feminine rhetorics. For example, hypermasculine political figures such as former California governor and movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger appropriate and recontextualize a feminine rhetoric of “care” into hegemonically masculine “protectionism,” which fulfills expectations of familial patriarchy.¹¹⁸ Political rhetoric scholars Shawn Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles argue men across the political spectrum utilize a “feminine style” in campaigns that is typically

¹¹⁴ Janis L. Edwards, *Gender and Political Communication in America: Rhetoric, Representation, and Display* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), xi.

¹¹⁵ Kherstin Khan and Diane M. Blair, “Writing Bill Clinton: Mediated Discourses on Hegemonic Masculinity and the 2008 Presidential Primary,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 36, no. 1 (2013): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2012.754387>.

¹¹⁶ Edwards, *Gender and Political Communication*, 234.

¹¹⁷ Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles, *Constructing Clinton: Hyperreality and Presidential Image-making in Postmodern Politics* (Austria: Peter Lang Inc., 2002).

¹¹⁸ Michael A. Messner, “The Masculinity of the Governor: Muscle and Compassion in American Politics,” *Gender and Society* 21, no. 4 (2007): 468, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243207303166>.

“personal, organized in inductive or non-linear patterns, stylized and ornamental, reliant on anecdotes and examples, and likely to encourage identification.”¹¹⁹ However, this style still perpetuates masculine values of heroic and tough leadership, military prowess, and patriarchal father figures.¹²⁰ While the style is originally understood to be feminine, the dominant force of patriarchal attitudes and masculine expectations further calcifies the political sphere as a masculine space.

Such political performances of masculinity have certain expectations, but recognizing patterns across these performances can vary based on other intersectional identities. As scholars Karen Ashcraft and Lisa Flores remind, a performance of hegemonic masculinity “depends on discourses of race, class, sexuality, and labor,” and the role of whiteness in understanding political performances of masculinity are incredibly influential.¹²¹ Because hegemonic masculinity is so dependent on relational dialectics, understanding emphasized femininity is required to articulate how masculinity maintains dominance and social control.

Emphasized Femininity

Connell argues that because gender performances are maintained through a dialectic, one form of femininity is most complimentary to a performance of hegemonic masculinity: *emphasized femininity* – a normative form of femininity that upholds a set of

¹¹⁹ Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Trever Parry-Giles, “Gendered Politics and Presidential Image Construction: A Reassessment of the ‘Feminine Style,’” *Communication Monographs* 63, no. 4 (1996): 339, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759609376398>.

¹²⁰ Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, “Gendered Politics,” 343-345.

¹²¹ Karen Lee Ashcraft and Lisa A. Flores, “‘Slaves with White Collars: Persistent Performances of Masculinity in Crisis,’” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2003): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930310001602020>.

cultural practices, characteristics, and performances of idyllic “womanly” behavior.¹²² While an abundance of femininities exist and variety of different ways that femininity can be performed, emphasized femininity is the form most directly “complementary to hegemonic masculinity and that . . . guarantee[s] the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.”¹²³ Through gender performance, women act in compliance with masculine dominance through “the display of sociability rather than technical competence, fragility in mating scenes, compliance with men’s desire for titillation and ego-stroking in office relationships, acceptance of marriage and childcare as a response to labour-market discrimination against women.”¹²⁴

Emphasized femininity is most often recognized as “traditional” femininity, where women are expected to be heterosexually attractive and visually appealing, relational and caring, and subordinate to male needs and desires.¹²⁵ Despite this, Connell argues that there is no dominant or hegemonic form of femininity because hegemonic masculinity ensures that all forms of femininity maintain the subordination of women to men. So, there might be a normative form of femininity, this does not mean it has social power over men. As a result, “there is no femininity that holds among women the position held by hegemonic masculinity among men.”¹²⁶ That said, emphasized femininity is the most normative performance, since it is the most recognizable through

¹²² Raewyn W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829–859, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>.

¹²³ Mimi Schippers, “Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony,” *Theory and Society* 36, no. 1 (2007): 94, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-007-9022-4>.

¹²⁴ Connell, *Gender and Power*, 187.

¹²⁵ Dawn Heineken, “So Tight in the Thighs, So Loose in the Waist,” *Feminist Media Studies* 15, no. 6 (2015): 1035-1052, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2015.1033638>

¹²⁶ Connell, *Gender and Power*, 186-187.

media, traditions, and discourse. It is also an idealized feminine performance, as emphasized femininity insists that women remain in the domestic sphere and become mothers. Emphasized femininity is “is defined around compliance with this subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men.”¹²⁷

Despite not being the most normative, there are performances of femininity other than emphasized femininity that Connell identifies: *femininities of resistance* or non-compliance, which overtly challenge emphasized feminine performances, and a *strategically compliant* femininity “defined by complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance and co-operation.”¹²⁸ Each of these performances has their own particular function, but emphasized femininity is the primary performance that is the most complicit with masculine dominance. It also actively works to uphold hegemonic masculinity as the norm.

In regard to previous scholarship on femininity, most has been about the resistance and strategic compliance forms, typically through analyses of women and girls in sports. For example, scholars Deirdre M. Kelly, Shauna Pomerantz, and Dawn Currie identify an “alternative girlhood” performed by girls who participate in skateboard culture, which is a feminine performance in direct defiance of emphasized femininity. However, scholar Karen Lumsden also argues that these subversive femininities within masculine spaces can simultaneously uphold emphasized femininity. In their rhetorical analysis of hyper-masculine racer culture, Lumsden found that women could become

¹²⁷ Connell, *Gender and Power*, 183.

¹²⁸ Connell, *Gender and Power*, 184.

actors in this space so long as they both “embrace[d] the culture’s masculine norms” and over-emphasize femininity in their clothing, car designs, and language. Despite being able to have a foothold in a masculine space, emphasized femininity was still expected for women to be taken seriously in such a space.

This is especially the case in a hegemonically masculine political sphere. For feminine performances to be welcome in a public and political space, a commitment to at least some tenets of emphasized femininity has been upheld through political institutions. For example, the most longstanding visible role women held in politics was the position of the First Lady, a role that to this day strongly holds assumptions of emphasized femininity. As Campbell explains, the First Lady has acted as a moral and domestic counterpart to the masculine president, with expectations of “welcome[ing] heads of state, presid[ing] at state dinners, mak[ing] public appearances, attend[ing] local and national celebrations, and becom[ing] the patron saint of selected charities or projects.”¹²⁹ But as rhetoric and media scholar Roseann Mandzuik reminds, these expectations repeat a cultural script where women are (often silent) supporters of their presidential husbands.¹³⁰ This is best exemplified through Elizabeth Dole’s speech at the 1996 Republican National Convention in support of her husband Bob Dole’s candidacy for president. By lowering herself from the podium and giving her speech among the crowd, Elizabeth Dole reaffirmed her husband’s fitness for office while maintaining a domestic

¹²⁹ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “The Rhetorical Presidency: A Two-Person Career,” in *Beyond the Rhetorical Presidency*, ed. Martin J. Medhurst (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1996), 180-181.

¹³⁰ Roseann M. Mandzuik, “Whither the Good Wife? 2016 Presidential Candidate Spouses in the Gendered Spaces of Contemporary Politics,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 103, no. 1-2 (2017): 138, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2016.1233350>.

and feminine image. Scholars Kristina Horn Sheeler and Karrin Vasby Anderson summarize it bluntly: “women’s political agency is most readily accepted when it is appropriately subordinated to men.”¹³¹ Emphasized femininity sustains hegemonic masculinity.

Outside of a culturally designated-feminine role, women seeking political office break from the cultural script of emphasized femininity and, in turn, face backlash. As political leadership is so intertwined with masculine attributes like ambition and power, political and public women are placed in a double-bind: they are expected to maintain a subordinate emphasized femininity, but what is considered to be an effective leader is intertwined with hegemonic masculinity. As foundational rhetoric scholar Karlyn Kohrs Campbell explains, “women speakers were expected to reaffirm their womanliness discursively at the same time that they demonstrated the ordinary rhetorical competencies—cogent argument, clarity of position, offering compelling evidence, and responding to competing views—that were gender-coded as masculine.”¹³² In order to be visible in a political arena, women had to prove to the audience that they maintain normative femininity yet lead with masculinity, and ultimately rarely fully satisfy either. As a consequence, women face ridicule and harassment, and as Karrin Vasby Anderson argues, regardless of party are framed as sexual objects, co-opted, and pornified.¹³³ Such

¹³¹ Kristina Horn Sheeler and Karrin Vasby Anderson, *Woman President: Confronting Postfeminist Political Culture* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2013), 104.

¹³² Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “The Discursive Performance of Femininity: Hating Hillary,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 1, no. 1 (1998): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1353/rap.2010.0172>.

¹³³ Karrin Vasby Anderson, “‘Rhymes with Blunt’: Pornification and U.S. Political Culture,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 14, no. 2 (2011): 336-337.

impossible expectations have resulted in a variety of feminine political performances, each utilizing emphasized femininity to some degree.

In order to challenge the double-bind, conservative feminine political figures often commit to emphasized femininity, yet they take on certain masculine attributes. Different from femininities of resistance, these performances do not seek to challenge or subvert hegemonic masculine power, but instead utilize it for their own political needs while maintaining a feminine image and style. For example, scholars Katie Gibson and Amy Heyse rhetorically analyzed Alaska Governor and Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin's speech at the 2008 Republican National Convention. They argued that Palin's adoption of hegemonically masculine rhetoric was balanced by an over-performance of emphasized femininity through a commitment to her relationships with her husband and children, similar to Lumsden's findings.¹³⁴ Such a hybrid performance illustrates Connell's claim on the paradox of antifeminist women's organizations that most rigidly uphold emphasized femininity: "they can only become politically active by subverting their own prescriptions."¹³⁵

Those who advocate for emphasized femininity the most, such as conservative women, cannot participate in advocating for traditional femininity without breaking from the norms they are working so hard to maintain. Consequentially, breaks in their traditional feminine performances require justification from societal institutions or

¹³⁴ Katie L. Gibson and Amy L. Heyse, "The Difference Between a Hockey Mom and a Pit Bull": Sarah Palin's Faux Maternal Persona and Performance of Hegemonic Masculinity at the 2008 Republican National Convention," *Communication Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (2010): 235-256, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2010.503151>.

¹³⁵ Connell, *Gender and Power*, 188.

hegemonically masculine men. In the case of conservative women at the Capitol insurrection, their presence immediately broke their commitment to emphasized femininity and traditional gender roles, yet they could still participate due to the acceptance of other men in attendance. How these performances were identified in the Parler videos, as well as how they interacted with masculine performances, can provide new ways to understand conservative womanhood and how emphasized femininity persists in argumentation.

Conclusion

To have the clearest understanding possible, studying political rhetoric requires consideration of the rhetor's intersectional identities. Gender is one of these influences, due to the fact that the political sphere is so heavily gendered masculine. Scholars have identified the many different ways both men and women have utilized masculine and feminine performances to participate in the political sphere. Previous scholars have analyzed gender through a context of studying the gendered rhetoric of significant political figures,¹³⁶ or the way conservative organizations or arguments have been framed by media organizations.¹³⁷ However, there has not been significant attention towards how conservative voters, and not just political figures, constitute their own gendered political identities. Researching the Parler videos provides an opportunity for research into a primary source of conservatives: the insurrectionists themselves.

¹³⁶ See: Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, "Gendered Politics;" Gibson and Heyse, "The Difference Between a Hockey Mom and a Pit Bull."

¹³⁷ See: Ronnee Schreiber, "Who Speaks for Women? Print Media Portrayals of Feminist and Conservative Women's Advocacy," *Political Communication* 27, no. 4 (2010): 432-452, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2010.516800>.

Utilizing a heuristic vocabulary of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, my research analyzes videos uploaded to Parler in order to identify how the insurrectionists construct or reconstitute conservative gender performances. In adhering to traditional and dominant binary understandings of masculinity and femininity, the insurrectionists uphold many of the tenets previously outlined. However, it is also worthy of analysis to see if, and when, the insurrectionists break from these established normative gender performances and what affordances that grants them rhetorically. As Burke reminds, “much that we take in as observations about ‘reality’ may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of terms.”¹³⁸ Choices in gender performance, or changes in the language used to constitute gender identities and arguments, are important to analyze how they change due to their role in shaping and changing realities.

The Parler videos are a unique artifact in that circulation of the videos took place within an insular political sphere. What matters is not what videos gained the most traction, or which saw the most uptake in mainstream media, but rather the ways that gender was performed and bolstered argument among a group of insurrectionists mostly in agreeance with each other. Rhetorically, the videos are a reflection of how the Capitol insurrectionists constitute their own roles in the public sphere. The videos then serve as a guide to better understand conservative argumentation and rhetoric across politics and conservative social movements. By focusing on these primary documents, my research can identify a relational dialectic of alternative hegemonic masculine and emphasized

¹³⁸ Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action*, 46.

feminine performances, in order to see how each is adopted, reconstructed, and replicated to fit with a conservative gendered political identity.

CHAPTER THREE:
DELINQUENT MASCULINITY AND
MILITARIZED MUSCULAR CHRISTIANITY

The insurrection was a chaotic scene of violence, aggression, anger, but also apparent frivolity. The actions men took, documented by themselves and others, contributed to this chaos by engaging in seemingly contradictory actions. Men climbed scaffolding, even though they were told it was unstable by police and their fellow insurrectionists, only for more swarms of bodies to follow them. Men took bike racks and turned them into ladders to climb over ledges, just feet away from inclined paved walkways or small stairs. Men recorded themselves walking down police lines telling the police that they loved them, and in a matter of minutes would shift their tone and throw chemical gas back at them screaming “fuck you.” Men laughed about sneaking alcohol onto the Capitol lawn with their “bros,” and then fall to their knees in tears when they made it to the rotunda. Men harassed and chased a police officer, banged on doors demanding Nancy Pelosi’s head, yet as they were escorted from the building they promised, “Next time we come back, we won’t be peaceful...let’s go get a beer.”¹³⁹

Analysis of the multitude of masculine performances at the January 6 Capitol insurrection can contribute to rhetorical understandings of masculinity and argumentation. Although hegemonic masculinity certainly was performed, breaks in these performances evidence changes in conservative masculinity. In this chapter, I

¹³⁹ @REALMichaelMoore, “Yeah, we stopped the vote. If we come back, then it's not going to be like this,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 02:48:39, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/s/sxEMZkg4t8ef/>.

analyze the videos that focus on men at the Capitol insurrection. To do this, I begin with outlining conservative masculinity and its connections to hegemonic masculinity, and then detail the ways that insurrectionists uphold those tenets. I then explore two variations on hegemonic masculine performances in the insurrectionists' videos: a delinquent masculinity and a militarized muscular Christianity. Through these analyses, I argue that these variations of conservative masculinities provide insurrectionist men new rhetorical affordances: an aged-down perception of manhood that solidifies citizenship and religious justification for extensive masculine violence. Both, though, reassert men's power and refuse any sense of government control: delinquent masculinity by declaring men are not controlled by social norms or government agents and militarized muscular Christianity by declaring the only power higher than a man is God.

Conservative Masculinities

The political sphere is widely recognized as a masculinist space, in that “masculine” traits of leadership, such as physical strength, aggression, and ruggedness, are idealized among political representatives and candidates. Consequentially, “feminine” traits such as compassion or relational discourses are chastised as weakness or relegated to supportive roles rather than active ones in politics.¹⁴⁰ Because of this, political figures across both political parties, regardless of sex, utilize masculine rhetoric in order to

¹⁴⁰ Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, “Gendered Politics,” 342.

participate and gain credibility in the political sphere.¹⁴¹ In an examination of gendered rhetoric across Republican and Democratic national convention speeches in 2004, Sheryl Cunningham et al. refer to this performance of masculinity for power in the political arena as *masculinity capital*.¹⁴² Stronger performances of masculinity affords political figures of all sexes more political power. However, they also found that Republicans and conservatives routinely bolstered their actions as masculinist and discursively feminized their opponents, while Democrats and liberals rarely did the same.¹⁴³

The conservative rhetorical canon heavily relies on codes of hegemonic masculinity, exemplified by adhering to leadership as a masculine trait, traditionalism, and a denigration of the feminine to maintain supremacy. In a study of NASCAR fans, which typically tend to lean conservative, Mary Douglas Vavrus explains that conservatives, and the Republican party as a whole, promote a gendered identity that enforces a masculinist spectacle.¹⁴⁴ This includes enforcing patriotism, patriarchal family roles, individual strength, and religious values – all of which fit into Trujillo’s tenets of hegemonic masculinity. Rhetorical scholar Anna Cornelia Fahey elaborates on this further, explaining that conservatives not only center gendered identities, but they also

¹⁴¹ See: Parry-Giles and Parry Giles, “Gendered Politics”; Steven A. Klien, and Margaret E. Farrar, “The Diatribe of Ann Coulter: Gendered Style, Conservative Ideology, and the Public Sphere,” in *Gender and Political Communication in America: Rhetoric, Representation, and Display*, ed. Janis L Edwards (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 78; Katie L. Gibson, and Amy L. Heyse, “Depoliticizing Feminism: Frontier Mythology and Sarah Palin’s “The Rise of The Mama Grizzlies,”” *Western Journal of Communication* 78, no. 1 (2014): 103, <http://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2013.812744>.

¹⁴² Sheryl Cunningham et al., “Accruing Masculinity Capital: Dominant and Hegemonic Masculinities in the 2004 Political Conventions,” *Men and Masculinities* 16, no. 5 (2013): 502-503, <http://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X13501678>.

¹⁴³ Cunningham et al., “Accruing Masculinity Capital,” 507.

¹⁴⁴ Mary Douglas Vavrus, “The Politics of NASCAR Dads: Branded Media Paternity,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 42, no. 3 (2007): 247, <http://doi.org/10.1080/07393180701520942>.

code their opposition as feminine, and therefore as weakness. For example, Republican party leaders are portrayed by conservatives as “distinctively masculine . . . decisive, tough, aggressive, strong, and domineering,” while Democrats were framed as weak, out of touch, effeminate, and ineffective.¹⁴⁵

Elements of these hegemonic performances can clearly be seen in videos uploaded to Parler. One of these is a denigration of the feminine, which the insurrectionists do in spades to the Capitol police officers by reducing their opponents to their bodies. For example, one video shows a group of insurrectionists harassing a line of fluorescent yellow-clad police officers as they approach the crowd. As some officers struggle to get through fencing or over ledges, insurrectionists chant at them “Fucking pussies!” and “1-800 Jenny Craig!”¹⁴⁶

Hegemonic masculinity is pervasive among the performances of the insurrectionists. However, their breaks with idealized gender performances showcase different reconstructions and reassertions of masculine power. I explore these variations in performances by focusing on two masculine performances, starting with what I term *delinquent masculinity*.

Delinquent Masculinity

Performances of delinquent masculinity were characterized by men engaging in physical play, glorifying physical risk, participating in recreational drink and drugs, and

¹⁴⁵ Anna Cornelia Fahey, “French and Feminine: Hegemonic Masculinity and the Emasculation of John Kerry in the 2004 Presidential Race,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24, no. 2 (2007): 135, <http://doi.org/10.1080/07393180701262743>.

¹⁴⁶ “Fucking Cops!” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 15:40:44, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/k/KQ0TpQnsiuCS/>.

violating social conventions and norms. Through a hyperperformance of masculine power and control, delinquent masculinity is a variation of hegemonic masculinity insofar as it challenges and refuses any form of societal control on men. The insurrectionists embody this masculinity through embracing bodily harm, showcasing “delinquent behavior,” and centering the self over authority.

Embracing Bodily Harm

The unruly behavior of men at the insurrection celebrates bodily injury, where pain is proof of manhood. Previous scholarship has outlined men turning to physical pain for pleasure or comfort, which typically has aligned during times of masculinity in crisis. As Ashcraft and Flores argue, in a corporate modern era where controlled and responsible mundanity emasculates men, film depictions such as *Fight Club* embrace a turn to violence, rebellion, and physicality to heal masculinity through wounds.¹⁴⁷ This same sentiment is performed in reality at the insurrection, where bloody bodies are evidence that “real men” never show vulnerability; injuries do not matter to them

At least six videos showcase men with visible body injuries, such as exposed bloody wounds. One insurrectionist in particular, Martin Glover,¹⁴⁸ diligently documented his actions and subsequent injuries as he physically fought with police and pushed his way up the Capitol steps across nine different videos. Glover gives a selfie-style testimony in three of the nine, giving details about being teargassed but cheering,

¹⁴⁷ Ashcraft and Flores, “Slaves with White Collars,” 14.

¹⁴⁸ Glover has not yet been identified or charged, so it is possible that this is a false name. However, he refers to himself through his Parler handle “Martin Glover” or @TheBammer, so that I how will be refer to him.

“We will not stop!” in laughter.¹⁴⁹ The last video Glover uploads is only five seconds long, but it is also the most visually descriptive of the injuries he sustained.¹⁵⁰ With the camera centered on his face, Glover is seen wearing a black hat and Trump flag as a cape, though now he is missing the sunglasses he wore in all of his other videos. He smiles at the camera, showing that one of his front teeth is missing. There is also a large cut on his second chin, reaching from his cheek to his neck. His lower neck is smeared with blood, with a bright red staining his hoodie and flag-cape. The blood does not appear to be coming from his mouth, so it is possible that the missing tooth was a prosthetic and the blood is only coming from the cut on the neck. He says to the camera, “Yeah, it’s alright. They took my teeth out, and I put my fucking glasses on my [inaudible].” Behind him, a different man can be seen scaling scaffolding, and an unseen masculine voice shouts “It’s a fucking war wound!”

While Glover was clearly injured from his actions, the injury is not used to justify retaliation in this particular instance nor was it ignored by Glover as if he was trying to “tough it out.” Rather, the injury is celebrated. Similarly seen in other videos of insurrectionists with visible injuries, men express intense pride in showing off their “war wounds.” For example, a video formatted like an interview between insurrectionist Tyler Ethridge and an unnamed insurrectionist shows the interviewee with a deep wound cutting all the way through his cheek. Despite speaking through gouge in his mouth, the

¹⁴⁹ @TheBammer, “They’re teargassing us,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 13:36:54, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/k/Km2S7d92uPH8/>.

¹⁵⁰ @TheBammer, “#SaltyArmy,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 13:55:26, retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/https://parler.com/post/c30be4fda1c94fba95034054f26b7ab1>.

man is smiling and only said, “I took a shot to the face. That’s about it.”¹⁵¹ The specifics of how the man got wounded, or what he did because of it, are omitted. It is the image that is enough. Similarly, regardless of whether or not Glover’s tooth was a prosthetic that could be easily removed, what matters most to Glover is the image of his injured body. The visual of being injured is more than just smiling through the pain; the injury itself is proof of their manhood.

Men showing invulnerability in the face of pain is a hallmark of hegemonic masculinity. As masculinities and gender scholar Michael Kimmel notes, masculinity in the United States especially praises violence as restorative and proof of manhood.¹⁵² Further, acknowledging pain is viewed as emasculating, as men are conditioned not to show any vulnerability.¹⁵³ However, the delinquent masculinity on display at the insurrection takes this staple and hyper-performs it, to the point where being a man is equated with finding fun in shedding your own blood.

Taking hits and bloody blows with a smile is more than a refusal to not acknowledge their own pain. Rather, celebrating bodily harm is treated like showing off their scars, proof of their challenge of authority that they successfully pulled off. Capitol police might have tried to stop them, but they got away with it and got a missing tooth as proof.

¹⁵¹ @TylerEthridge13, “A true patriot,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20210110195118/https://video.parler.com/hU/ca/hUcaNns5lkEB_small.mp4

¹⁵² Michael Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 57.

¹⁵³ Kimmel, *Guyland*, 53.

Showcasing “Delinquent Behavior”

Scholar Vicki Mayer identifies delinquent behavior as a pattern within what they term *mook masculinity*, which is a masculinity that is a “crude, loud, obnoxious, and in-your-face caricature who lives in a perpetual state of arrested development.”¹⁵⁴ Much like mook masculinity, and its popular culture cousin *Jackass* masculinity, delinquent masculinity laughs in the face of bodily risk and scoffs at any form of social control. Men prove their manhood by men directly and visually challenging rules and expectations instead of conforming to them. Delinquent behavior marks a complete refusal of social and legal control. Neither legal rules nor social norms control men, and personal past-times are those usually associated with high school and college.

Legal rules were violated by fighting with Capitol police and breaking into a government building. Social norms, as well as legal prohibitions, were violated as men filmed themselves smoking and drinking on Capitol grounds. Three videos feature men filming themselves smoking a cigarette or a joint. Why would men video themselves doing this, and then circulate the image? It does not prove their point the election was stolen, nor does it advance the cause of “stopping the steal.” But it does enact their position that the government holds no authority over them. Delinquent masculinity asserts an individual man is sovereign.

Another video showcases a group of four men posing for a selfie-style video. The man holding the camera, wearing a red Houston Texans football beanie, narrates:

¹⁵⁴ Vicki Mayer, “Soft-Core in TV Time: The Political Economy of a ‘Cultural Trend,’” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22, no. 4 (2005): 314, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393180500288428>

We're here, post-freedom run. Just a little shot of whiskey. [drinks] Whoo, that tastes like freedom! That tastes like freedom. It washes down the teargas, for sure. To Trump baby, to Trump. The cops are up there, they kicked off everybody up there, so now we [sic] down on the grass, and we're just gonna party. You know what I mean? It's our house, it's my front lawn, I pay the taxes. We're gon' finish our whiskey, you know what I mean? Fuck y'all cops and your teargas, I don't give a shit. [laughs] Cheers!¹⁵⁵

Instead of the Capitol being the "People's House," the U.S. Capitol Building becomes this one person's frat house, where the guys can drink what they want, smoke what they want, and do what they want. Not "giv[ing] a shit" is a mark of a man who is subservient to no one and no thing.

It is telling that all the men recording themselves doing elicited acts are white men, doing things for pleasure that have historically been criminalized to devastate the lives of people of color. What matters most is the fun and enjoyment of the insurrectionists, laws be damned. Nothing has stopped them before, why should anything get in the way of stopping them now?

Centering the Self Over Authority

While it might be easy to see delinquent masculinity merely as a loss of self-control, something else is at operation here. This is not so much a celebration of lack of self-control as it is a refusal of governmental and social control. The manhood of the insurrectionists cannot be controlled by any authority, and anyone who seeks to control the delinquent man is deserving of retaliation.

¹⁵⁵ @BrooksPearson, "Post-freedom run," Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 01:46:31, retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/https://parler.com/post/a180f5453434410fb52f22f7755a0ac0>.

There is an abundance of evidence that implicates insurrectionist men as the instigators of conflict between them and Capitol police, not the reverse.¹⁵⁶ This is clearly repeated throughout the Parler videos as well. Echoing the aggressive posturing seen when men challenge each other to fight, in a single video, a group of four men jump onto a stage and force their bodies against police officers, shouting close to their faces, and throw their arms out challenging officers to do something. When the officers push back, the mob of insurrectionists behind the original for amplify their harassment and even forcibly remove a shoe from one of the officers.¹⁵⁷ While the police are constrained by rules of engagement, the insurrectionists are controlled by nothing and seek to test the officers' control. The motive of their message is best captured in another selfie-style video from a different insurrectionist on the Capitol lawn describing the scene, saying "it's about to get spicy" and offers a challenge to those who may oppose them: "Fuck around and find out." Men are not to blame for their behavior; they were just having fun with their bros, as it was their right to do. Denying them what it is that they want is enough for them to retaliate. Blame is shifted the officers and defenders of the Capitol, as it was the officer's fault for telling them to stop.

Throughout these videos, governmental authority is denied, and the insurrectionists are answerable only to themselves. Anyone who attempts to get in their

¹⁵⁶ Luke Broadwater and Alan Feuer, "Jan. 6 Panel Seeks to Debunk Unfounded Theory About F.B.I. Role in Riot," *New York Times*, January 11, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/11/us/politics/ray-epps-january-6-committee.html>; David Klepper, "Conspiracy Theories Paint Fraudulent Reality of Jan. 6 Riot," *PBS News*, January 1, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/conspiracy-theories-paint-fraudulent-reality-of-jan-6-riot>

¹⁵⁷ "Pull him down!" Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 16:38:45, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/n/NZOP8ssAGysd/>.

way is wrong. While previous performances provided masculinity the right to cause pain, delinquent masculinity grants the right to determine the meaning of *what* causes pain, shifting focus towards the *intent* of their actions rather than the *effect* it has on others.

Upon first glance, these individual masculine performances seem chaotic and uncoordinated. However, delinquent masculinity finds control by being uncontrollable. Nothing can harm them, so much that they laugh as their own blood runs down their face. No societal rules or expectations apply to them. What matters most is what they want, and as men it is their right to do what they want, so anyone who dares says otherwise is in the wrong. Hyperperforming aspects of hegemonic masculinity solidifies men's hegemonic position and citizenship through physical force and control, requiring none of the responsibility in return. This, however, was not the only performance of masculinity at the January 6 Capitol insurrection. While delinquent masculinity refuses control by the state, an intersection of militarized masculinity and muscular Christianity further demands that there is no human power of this earth that can control men.

Militarized Muscular Christianity

By combining tenets of militarized masculinity and muscular Christianity, a militarized muscular Christianity justifies masculine dominance, violence, and control in the name of God. This interweaving of militarism and muscular Christianity are evidenced through identification of being brothers in arms for Christ, physical and spiritual strength, and Godly patriotism. However, in order to understand the ways that these performances intersect, I need to review how militarized masculinity and muscular Christianity are performed.

Militarized Masculinity

Much like the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, militarized masculinity is a masculine gender performance that upholds standards of “dominance, assertiveness, aggressiveness, independence, self-sufficiency, and willingness to take risks” by emphasizing a militarized style, attitude, and competence.¹⁵⁸ Concomitantly, it is also a way that the military as an institution proves its validity through its masculine ideals, upholding many of the tenets of American manhood that Trujillo outlines. Much like the political sphere, the military is heavily viewed as a masculinist institution where that develops masculinity capital. As geopolitical scholar Frederica Caso argues, a nation’s military is perceived as a training ground for masculinity, “mould[ing] the male subject, forging his muscular body and disciplining his emotions.”¹⁵⁹ Conversely, political science scholar Cynthia Enloe argues militarism is dependent on the gender dynamics of hegemonic masculinity in order to legitimize its own power.¹⁶⁰ This power is maintained not just through global military might, but an effective and continuous Hollywood media campaign to connect images of strong and dominant masculine figures as militaristic.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Madeline Morris, “By Force of Arms: Rape, War, and Military Culture,” *Duke Law Journal* 45, no. 4 (1996): 701, <https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/dlj/vol45/iss4/1>; see also: Maya Eichler, “Militarized Masculinities in International Relations,” *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 21, no. 1 (2014): 81-93. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24591032>.

¹⁵⁹ Federica Caso, “Sexing the Disabled Veteran: The Homoerotic Aesthetics of Militarism,” *Critical Military Studies* 3, no. 3 (2017): 220, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2016.1184420>.

¹⁶⁰ Cynthia Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), p. 73.

¹⁶¹ Greg Dvorak, “Masculinities and Militarization,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118924396.wbiea1769>; Casey Ryan Kelly, *Apocalypse Man: The Death Drive and the Rhetoric of White Masculine Victimhood* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2020), 35.

Militarism and masculinity are connected, where performances of one are utilized to uphold and legitimize the power of the other.

Using the example of doomsday preppers, Casey Ryan Kelly explains that right-wing political commentators (e.g., Alex Jones, Glen Beck, and Sean Hannity) all advocate for a paramilitaristic masculinity expressed through “development of masculine-coded abilities, including mechanical labor, wilderness training, and weapons proficiency.”¹⁶² During the insurrection, militaristic masculinity can be seen through use of musical instruments associated with calls to war, costuming, the use of tactical gear, the brandishing of weapons, and the organization of bodies into military formations.

It cannot be understated how many rioters projected a militaristic aesthetic, regardless of their background (or lack thereof) in paramilitary groups or military service. But this militarized gender performance of the masculine rioters is interweaved with their religious gender performances; I cannot critically analyze one without addressing the other. Thus, specific analysis of the videos must wait until I have described Muscular Christianity.

Muscular Christianity

Muscular Christianity is a particular performance of gender that is infused and influenced by religion. It originated at the turn of the last century as a Protestant response to fears of Christianity becoming feminized because of the numerical dominance of women leaders and participation in the church as well as a portrayal of Jesus that is

¹⁶² Kelly, “The Man-pocalypse,” 98.

loving and intimately relational.¹⁶³ In contrast, muscular Christianity emphasized that a healthy spiritual relationship with God is tied to a healthy physical body. As Roxanne Mountford argues, to be a good man was to be a good Christian, and to be a good Christian meant a man had to be “bold, gallant, natural, earnest, physically fit . . . conquering whole cultures for Christ, yet full of sympathy for those around him.”¹⁶⁴ Though originating as a response to a “crisis in masculinity,” muscular Christianity was an effective method of reinstalling hegemonic masculine control in a space that was becoming viewed as feminized.

Recently, muscular Christianity has made a resurgence within fundamentalist Protestant Christian congregations, with a much more militaristic approach to its interpretation.¹⁶⁵ The original label of “muscular Christianity” was used by scholars to describe a particular phenomenon in religious constructions of gender. However, many congregations advertise themselves as “Muscular Christians” and have taken on a more hegemonically masculine approach.¹⁶⁶ For example, some Protestant congregations in the United States host seasonal hunting clubs, incorporating a masculine Christianity and gun culture.¹⁶⁷ Appeals to a gentle Jesus are reduced in favor of a strong and chiseled Christ,

¹⁶³ Kristy Maddux, “The Feminized Gospel: Aimee Semple McPherson and the Gendered Performance of Christianity,” *Women's Studies in Communication* 35, no. 1 (2012): 45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2012.667520>

¹⁶⁴ Roxanne Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 54.

¹⁶⁵ Tom Gjelten, “Militant Christian Nationalists Remain a Potent Force, Even After the Capitol Riot,” *National Public Radio*, January 19, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/19/958159202/militant-christian-nationalists-remain-a-potent-force>

¹⁶⁶ Lisa Miller, “Manliness is Next to Godliness,” *New York Magazine*, August 31, 2012, <https://nymag.com/news/sports/tebow-sanchez/tim-tebow-christianity-2012-9/>

¹⁶⁷ Joseph Gelfer, “Meat and Masculinity in Men’s Ministries,” *The Journal of Men’s Studies* 21, no. 1 (2013): 79, <https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.2101.78>

with some preachers going so far as to condemn “the sin of empathy.”¹⁶⁸ There is also a growing support among certain congregations for Mixed Martial Arts and cage fighting, Research by religious scholar Justine Greve found that this is justified by congregations that argue “ultimate fighting teaches Christian values [and] can be a means of spreading the gospel and remasculinizing a faith some perceive as feminine.”¹⁶⁹

Although historically Muscular Christianity was performed through athleticism, recent iterations of it have leaned more toward militarism and sought to justify the use of physical violence. Spirituality and masculinity become intertwined through men’s bodies and physical strength, solidifying dominance and violence as a Christian virtue so long as it is done in the name of God. On January 6, the insurrectionists performed a militarized Muscular Christianity characterized by positioning themselves as brothers in arms for Christ whose patriotism was tied to God, not country.

Brothers in Arms for Christ

The call to war was a common refrain among the insurrectionists as they claimed that this was the start of a civil war, or this was the new revolution. Rhetoric that calls to arms (whether metaphorically or literally) to fight a war for the country is not new, and these comments do not have any inherent religious meaning at face value. However, the connections between a militarized masculinity and muscular Christianity become even

¹⁶⁸ Crawford Gribben, “In Moscow, Idaho, Conservative 'Christian Reconstructionists' are Thriving Amid Evangelical Turmoil,” *The Conversation*, August 9, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/in-moscow-idaho-conservative-christian-reconstructionists-are-thriving-amid-evangelical-turmoil-162652>

¹⁶⁹ Justine Greve, “Jesus Didn’t Tap: Masculinity, Theology, and Ideology in Christian Mixed Martial Arts,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 24, no. 2 (2014): 141, <https://doi.org/10.1525/rac.2014.24.2.141>

clearer when interrogating how insurrectionists frame themselves within a scene of war, creating a shared identity and mission as being religious soldiers of God.

In a video of a man praying in the rotunda, the man recording the video starts with a focus on his face as he sings the Battle Hymn of the Republic with other insurrectionists.¹⁷⁰ He then falls to his knees and sobs with his head bowed. A hand seems to firmly grasp his shoulder and another masculine voice is heard asking if he's alright, or if he's praying. When the man recording responds that he's doing great, the other man is revealed to be in full paramilitary regalia and asks him to join him in prayer. A group of six insurrectionists come together in a circle to pray, pointing the camera upwards toward them and framing them in the circle of the Capitol dome. In their prayer, they refer to each other as their "brothers," as both in Christ as well in arms.¹⁷¹ The prayer goes: "Dear God, thank you. Thank you for each other. Thank you for letting us stand up for our country and what we believe in. Guide us, so we may do your will. I pray for them; I pray for these brothers that stand beside me. In the name of Jesus, amen."¹⁷² The goal is to do God's will, not the people's and God is thanked for "letting" them violently assault the Capitol. The prayer positions the violent insurrection as sanctioned by, and committed for, God.

In another video, Pastor Tyler Ethridge is even more militaristic in describing the ultimate goals of the insurrectionists.

I'm officially a pastor, this is what pastor's need to do. The body of Christ needs to stand up. The body of Christ is the one that's gonna make America great again,

¹⁷⁰ "Battle Hymn of the Republic," Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 14:42:50, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/0/0TvSz1KFvR0g/>

¹⁷¹ "Battle Hymn," Parler.

¹⁷² "Battle Hymn," Parler.

not Donald Trump, it's the body of Christ. The body of Christ, Christians, we need to infiltrate every area of society like this...peacefully. But if it takes a little bit of aggression to barge through the walls that Satan separates us from the culture, it's time for the body of Christ to infiltrate the culture. America's primed and ready.¹⁷³

Christ is not the Prince of Peace but is someone who blesses “a little bit of aggression.” Further, Satan’s walls that were “barge[d] through” are the walls of the Capitol. Thus, the government is linked to Satan while the insurrectionists were doing God’s work. To be Christian is to “infiltrate,” a militarized description; the goal is not to evangelize (or persuade), but to infiltrate and strategically enforce God’s will.

Ultimately, soldiers follow orders. But, here, it is not the government who orders soldiers, but God. Christian soldiers follow only God’s orders. Thus, the insurrectionists are not fighting a war to defend the country as it is. Instead, they are fighting a war defend Christ, even if that means attacking the seat of government – the Capitol. To do this requires physical and spiritual strength.

Physical and Spiritual Strength

Militarized muscular Christianity interweaves militaristic masculinity’s emphasis on physical dominance and power with muscular Christianity’s equation of physical strength with spiritual strength. In doing so, it solidifies dominance and violence as Christian virtues so long as they are done in the name of God.

Insurrectionists videos declare God-given strength was literally given to them on January 6, as seen visually and verbally in Pastor Ren Schuffman’s interview with

¹⁷³ @TylerEtridge13, “The church must storm every building of culture,” *Parler*, Video File, January 6, 2021, 14:37:07, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/b/b2nq0qf2wKWY>.

insurrectionist Phillip Bromley.¹⁷⁴ Bromley himself is very militaristic in presentation and language; he wears an army green coat and baseball hat, as well as a camouflage-pattern scarf, yellow work gloves, and a tactical backpack. The interview primarily focuses on Bromley's first-hand experience witnessing the death of Ashli Babbitt, and his description of the scene is primarily militaristic with terms such as "breaching" the sides and describing Babbitt's wounds as not "survivable." Throughout the interview, it is clear that Bromley is experiencing some form of trauma. He rarely looks another person in the eye, he takes about five different fifteen-second pauses to compose himself, and he reacts quickly to the sound of teargas canisters exploding around him. At the end of the interview, Schuffman offers to pray for him and says:

Father Lord, I just declare right now, this lionheart, that the angels of God be protecting over him. Father Lord, any trauma, any trauma from this event, Father, I just declare and decree right now it's all broken. That this man is secure and safe and held in your [sic] hallow of your hand.¹⁷⁵

While addressing mental health concerns in men has gained more attention, as noted in the earlier chapter hegemonic masculinity and conservative performances of masculinity still adheres to a femininization of emotion and pressures against men's expression of emotion. However, in this video, Bromley (despite his emotional distress) is referred to by Schuffman as a "soldier" and "lionheart," which still recognizes the militant masculinity Bromley is performing. Yet even more so, this militant masculinity is not reduced by Bromley's trauma, but rather the trauma he is experiencing is a sign of his

¹⁷⁴ @Renschuffman, "Exclusive interview with man who was standing next to the unarmed teenage girl that was shot at the protest by police. He was traumatized and I was able to pray for him," Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 21:26:10, retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/https://parler.com/post/12b04bcb251946e0a4bad33837299823>

¹⁷⁵ @Renschuffman, "Exclusive interview."

bravery and worthiness in the eyes of God. Strength is both performed by Bromley, but also a reward; with a single prayer God is called to heal him of what he is experiencing. Men need not fear injury or trauma because God will cure them of it.

Militant muscular Christianity frames Jesus as worthy of adoration because he does not need defense. Jesus is strong, but not protective or defensive of those who are “weak.” Contrary to Christian doctrine that asks the strong to protect the weak, “weakness” is codified as “feminized,” and therefore must be eliminated. This elimination of feminine weakness is in line with Kelly’s argument that anti-government right-wing paramilitary groups utilize the “menacing aesthetics of assault rifles and paramilitary uniforms to embarrass and humiliate the state, suggesting that it is incapable of adequately protecting its own citizens.”¹⁷⁶ In turn, the paramilitaristic groups construct themselves as heroes of the people in the face of the state’s weakness. The “weak” and “feminized” State does not need to be protected; it is symbolic of feminine weakness which must be destroyed.

Ultimately, God is all powerful and men’s spiritual commitment to that God makes them physically, emotionally, and spiritually strong. Men’s religiosity is not proof that they are weak. Instead, it illustrates that the only power to which men submit is an all-powerful God. Their allegiance is to that God, not to the nation.

Godly Patriotism

What is particularly noteworthy in the videos is the transformation that occurs to the meaning of *patriotism*. The insurrectionists insist that they are patriots even as they

¹⁷⁶ Kelly, *Apocalypse Man*, 115.

are attacking the foundation of the nation. What allows this? To be a good Christian man, a man has a duty to become a good Christian soldier. Their patriotism is not for the United States, but for the entity they call a “Christian nation.” They fight for God, and not necessarily for country.

In every video, men that are praying or engage with prayer are referred to as “soldiers” or “patriots.” Further, every one of these videos showcase pastors directly blessing men who are acting violently against the state, such as attacking police or breaking into the building, as “patriots.” Ren Schuffman praises and blesses Philip Bromley for “serv[ing] his country and be[ing] a patriot.”¹⁷⁷ Tyler Ethridge also referred to everyone that broke into the Rotunda as “peaceful patriots.”¹⁷⁸ More subtly, Pastor Robby Dawkins in a sidewalk sermon in the Capitol plaza directly connected the health of the country with the country’s relationship with God, where breaking from that relationship is “what’s made us lose our nation.”¹⁷⁹

Within a terministic screen that interweaves Christianity, masculinity, and militarism, the meaning of “patriot” changes. This is what Burke refers to as terministic catharsis, where “a major term is found somehow to have moved on, and thus to have in effect changed its nature either by adding new meanings to its old nature, or by yielding place to some other term that henceforth takes over its functions.”¹⁸⁰ These videos illustrate how patriotism undergoes a catharsis so that it no longer refers to love of

¹⁷⁷ @Renschuffman, “Exclusive interview.”

¹⁷⁸ @TylerEthridge13, “The church.”

¹⁷⁹ @Robbydawkins, “Preaching the Gospel while others marched (not riots) on the Capitol,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 15:37:11, retrieved from

https://web.archive.org/web/20210110200122/https://video.parler.com/v6/3B/v63BKYYYkjiU_small.mp4

¹⁸⁰ Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action*, 367.

country, but instead refers to a love of God enacted by a militant muscular Christianity that reasserts and demands masculine control, subservient only to an all-powerful being and that rejects any government power. Such a performance addresses an assumed crisis of masculinity, faith, and of the nation, combining all into a refusal to allow for a loss of control.

Conclusion

Both of these performances of masculinity dictate that other *people* do not get to control a man. In delinquent masculinity, there is a refusal of control by the state. Through an embracement of bodily harm, showcasing delinquency, and prioritizing the self over any authority, responsibility is shifted away from the masculine insurrectionists, and back on anyone who attempts to get in their way. In militant muscular Christianity, men are still beyond human control. The *only* controlling force over them is God. Insurrectionists' identities are shaped as religious soldiers in a scene of war, strengthened by God, and assigned a mission that redefines patriotism to defending the will of God.

These performances do not drastically alter expectations of hegemonic masculinity, rather they hyperperform certain aspects of it to grant new rhetorical affordances. For delinquent masculinity, a hyperperformance of physical force and control affords them recklessness, as well as claims to citizenship and power without societal responsibilities. For militarized muscular Christianity, a hyperperformance of militarism and spiritual leadership provides men the reassertion and demand for masculine control against a weak feminine state. However, performances of gender are not constructed within a vacuum. As these performances of masculinity exist in a

dialectic, they are constructed and shaped alongside two performances of conservative femininity: the mother femininity and matriarchal warriors.

CHAPTER FOUR:
DEN MOTHER FEMININITY
AND MATRIARCHAL WARRIORS

Based on the first wave of images that were disseminated outside of conservative spaces like Parler, audiences assumed that the riot was predominantly made up of men. News reports described the scene as “predominantly male . . . an expression of white male rage” and a “clear photo of arrogant male entitlement.”¹⁸¹ However, this is not an accurate description given the role women played during the insurrection.

As Devorah Margolin and Chelsea Daymon argue, women played an essential during the insurrection, though most of the documentation proving this can only be found through the videos rioting women took of themselves.¹⁸² For example, one video went viral of a woman, who only identified herself as “Elizabeth from Knoxville,” crying into a towel claiming that she was sprayed with chemical irritants by Capitol Police and the attack was “a revolution.”¹⁸³ Other self-recorded videos and photos showed veteran Ashli Babbit being shot by Capitol Police as she was the first to climb through a smashed window. Two women, later identified as Dawn Bancroft and Diana Santos-Smith, were arrested after taking a selfie video where they claimed they “did their part” by entering

¹⁸¹ Christina Cauterucci, “The Capitol Riot Was an Expression of Violent Male Rage,” *Slate*, January 12, 2021, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2021/01/capitol-riot-male-rage.html>; Mona Lena Krook, “Misogyny in the Capitol: Among the Insurrectionists, a Lot of Angry Men Who Don’t Like Women,” *The Conversation*, January 13, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/misogyny-in-the-capitol-among-the-insurrectionists-a-lot-of-angry-men-who-dont-like-women-153068>.

¹⁸² Margolin and Daymon, “Selfie and Siege.”

¹⁸³ Hunter Walker (@hunterw), “This woman was maced inside the Capitol. She told me, ‘It’s a revolution!’” Twitter, January 6, 2021, 14:38:00, <https://twitter.com/hunterw/status/1346919171595137025>

the Capitol looking for Nancy Pelosi to “to shoot her in the friggin’ brain.”¹⁸⁴ Women were significant actors during the January 6 insurrection, but their presence is only identifiable through their self-documentation.

Critically analyzing performances of femininity at the January 6 Capitol insurrection provides insight to how a gendered identity and political identity intersect within conservative women. In this chapter, I analyze videos that center on women at the Capitol insurrection and how they break from tenets of emphasized femininity while still maintaining traditional gender expectations. I begin with detailing conservative feminine performances and outlining the rhetorical challenge conservative women face, as well as provide examples of insurrectionists who uphold these expectations on January 6. I then explore two variations of emphasized femininity at the insurrection: den mother femininity and matriarchal warriors. Den mother femininity grants women responsibilities over the care and coordination of men, so long as they do not speak over them. Matriarchal warriors provide women masculine leadership styles; however, they remain unintelligible to a broader audience and the insurrectionists themselves. Ultimately, I argue that both performances of femininity domesticize a scene of chaos, granting women at the insurrection roles and responsibilities that would otherwise be denied to them.

¹⁸⁴ Lauren Frias, “2 Women Charged in Capitol Riot Said They Were ‘Looking’ for Pelosi ‘to Shoot Her in the Friggin’ Brain,’” *Business Insider*, January 29, 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/women-charged-capitol-riot-shoot-nancy-pelosi-2021-1>

Conservative Femininities

Although conservative women are understudied by rhetorical scholars, they play a significant role in conservative politics. Conservative women have been some of the most active recruiters of women to conservative parties,¹⁸⁵ have been the most aggressive in passing restrictions on abortion access and funding,¹⁸⁶ and are more likely to participate in speeches from the House or Senate floor than their male counterparts.¹⁸⁷ Conservative women are some of the most tactical and strategic actors within the Republican Party and conservative politics, but they are often perceived as just mouthpieces for the party. Ronnee Schreiber argues that doing so is dangerous, strips these women of their agency, and ignores how they communicate as an activist group.¹⁸⁸

In scholar Michael Lee's explanation of the canon that constructs conservative rhetoric, only one piece of literature is authored by a woman: Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. However, Rand is still not wholly accepted into conservative canon as "Rand was never comfortable with conservatism and conservatives never fully embraced Rand."¹⁸⁹ As a result, conservative rhetoric has been shaped by hegemonically masculine figures such as Barry Goldwater, Frank Meyer, William F. Buckley Jr., and Ronald

¹⁸⁵ Catherine Wineinger and Mary K. Nugent, "Framing Identity Politics: Right-Wing Women as Strategic Party Actors in the UK and US," *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 41, no. 1 (2020): 91-118, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2020.1698214>

¹⁸⁶ Janell Ross, "It's Not Just Men: White Conservative Women Have Played Key Role in Abortion Policy Changes This Year," *NBC News*, August 13, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/it-s-not-just-men-white-conservative-women-have-played-n1038746>; Ronnee Schreiber, "Gender Roles, Motherhood, and Politics: Conservative Women's Organizations Frame Sarah Palin and Michele Bachmann," *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 37, no. 1 (2016): 1-23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2016.1115319>

¹⁸⁷ Wineinger and Nugent, "Framing Identity Politics."

¹⁸⁸ Ronnee Schreiber, *Righting Feminism: Conservative Women and American Politics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 28.

¹⁸⁹ Michael J. Lee, *Creating Conservatism: The Postwar Words that Made an American Movement* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 80.

Reagan. All these figures contributed to a conservative argumentative repertoire of having a “flashy, combative style whose ultimate aim is the creation of inflammatory drama” that values physical strength and a denigration of the feminine.¹⁹⁰ This is a rhetorical strategy that works for conservative men, but for women, rhetorically performing and advocating conservatism becomes more complicated.

The rhetorical challenge for conservative women is this: as conservatives, they are expected to uphold masculine hegemonic rhetoric that denigrates their femininity, while still performing femininity to maintain gender expectations. As a result, many prominent conservative women take on masculine rhetoric and styles, while their discourse focuses on feminine experiences like motherhood. On a national scale, Sarah Palin and Ann Coulter are two conservative figures where masculine rhetoric and feminine experiences clash. As Stephen Klein and Margaret Farrar argue, Ann Coulter’s bombastic rhetoric “manages to reify a gender-exclusionary public sphere by promoting masculine discourse norms and performing allegedly feminine violations of those norms at the same time.”¹⁹¹ Palin, on the other hand, created a pseudo-feminist logic, appropriating language of the feminist movement without questioning the politics behind it to uphold patriarchal ideals.¹⁹² But conservative women not only have to attend to the hegemonic elements of conservative rhetoric, but they also have to address the idea that progressive women claim to “speak for women.” This poses a seemingly “anti-women” label on conservative women, but they have a rhetorical strategy that addresses this as well.

¹⁹⁰ Lee, *Creating Conservatism*, 17; See also: Gibson and Heyse, “The Difference Between a Hockey Mom and a Pit Bull,” 237.

¹⁹¹ Klein and Farrar, “The Diatribe of Ann Coulter,” 76.

¹⁹² Gibson and Heyse, “Depoliticizing Feminism.”

As they lean more towards “traditional” performances of gender, conservative femininities often uphold tenets of emphasized femininity in order to strategically participate in the political sphere.¹⁹³ As scholar Michael Butterworth argues, in masculine spaces, like at the Capitol insurrection, women perform masculinity to be accepted (be “one of the boys”) but also need to prove their gender through strict adherence to white feminine beauty standards.¹⁹⁴ In these settings, where men’s hegemony is meant to remain unchallenged, women are welcome so long as the power dynamics are not threatened. This means that women can only be limited actors in these spaces, and ultimately remain objects to be observed.

This is most often showcased by women taking on poses and performances that prioritize visual appeal to men in order to participate in such a masculine space. Two women at the insurrection best exemplified this performance: one was a woman who was dressed up as the Statue of Liberty, with intricately detailed makeup, red lipstick, and stickers of the American flag on her face. Along with the costume, she wore large fake iron shackles around her wrists and her neck. While her name was never mentioned (she has only been identified by people in the videos as Lady Liberty), this woman appeared across five different Parler videos as a point of focus. The other figure was a woman who

¹⁹³ See: Gibson and Heyse, “Depoliticizing Feminism.”

¹⁹⁴ Michael L. Butterworth, “‘Katie was Not Only a Girl, She was Terrible’: Katie Hnida, ‘Body Rhetoric, and Football at the University of Colorado,” *Communication Studies* 59, no. 3 (2008): 259-273, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510970802257705>.

was later identified by *Politico* and *Bloomberg* as Lisa Hayes.¹⁹⁵ Documented in four different Parler videos, Hayes wore a white tulle ball gown covered with fake ballots stamped “STOLEN” on them. She also carried around a speaker on wheels, where she would play music and dance at various places on the Capitol grounds.

Despite the number of videos these two women were in and how much their image circulated, Lady Liberty and Lisa Hayes rarely interacted with videographers or even other insurrectionists other than to be watched or gazed at. Lisa Hayes was not recorded speaking at all, despite being surrounded by other shouting insurrectionists; she was only dancing to Twisted Sister’s “We’re Not Gonna Take It.”¹⁹⁶ Lady Liberty would stand on platforms or barriers and wave a “Trump 2020” flag, but she waved at the crowd smiling more like a pageant queen than an angry protestor.¹⁹⁷ Other insurrectionists who were documented interacting with her would typically mention her beauty and/or ask to take pictures with her.¹⁹⁸ In line with codes of gender that restrict women’s bodies, neither women had much range of mobility and needed assistance moving from one place to another or with climbing.

In order to participate in such a masculine spectacle, a strategic way women could engage would be a hyper-performance of a tenet of emphasized femininity: for women to

¹⁹⁵ @Quicktake, “Lisa Hayes, who traveled from Sacramento for the event, stood in front of the Capitol dome in a flowing white skirt adorned with paper ballots that had the word ‘stolen’ stamped on them in big red letters,” Twitter, January 6, 2021, 11:23, <https://twitter.com/Quicktake/status/1346870028524777474>; Tina Nguyen and Daniel Lippman, “How a Sparce Protest Became a Capitol Hill Riot,” *Politico*, January 6, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/01/06/how-capitol-hill-riots-started-455654>.

¹⁹⁶ “We’re Not Gonna Take It,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 14:14:26, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/c/CN67oIug5zAh/>.

¹⁹⁷ @Mak49684, “Shackled Lady Liberty,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 16:07:42, retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/https://parler.com/post/52ceead680664e0aa2292ddd021dd6f9>.

¹⁹⁸ “You have awakened a sleeping giant,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 14:14:15, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/g/gYlvAGR0BCpm/>.

become visual spectacles themselves. The femininity performed by Lady Liberty and Lisa Hayes, along with many other women at the Capitol insurrection, uphold beauty standards and reaffirm that women's bodies are to be looked at, admired, and passive agents.¹⁹⁹ While they were there to engage in the public, they adhered to heterosexual white appeals of womanhood to permit their presence: they were a visual spectacle for men or symbolized a political ideal rather than acting as political agents in public. The hyperfeminine body reminds others that, even as they are “one of the guys” in such a masculine environment, they are still viewed as feminine.

Adhering to emphasized femininity’s visual appeal while breaking from other tenets is just one way that women at the Capitol insurrection engage in participation without threatening their standards of traditional femininity. However, it is these breaks in feminine performance that shift how femininity engages with the public and how it is embodied. Doing so allows for a better understanding of how conservative femininities are performed and enacted by feminine insurrectionists. I identify and term two such performances: den mother femininity and matriarchal warriors.

In addition to videos depicting women, it is as important to analyze fragments of videos to see what is missing as much as what is documented. Performances of femininity that one might expect, but yet are lacking in the videos, provides a clue or silhouette of the forms of femininity that might not be intelligible within this conservative space.

¹⁹⁹ Anne Teresa Demo, “The Guerrilla Girls' Comic Politics of Subversion,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 23, no. 2 (2000): 140, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2000.10162566>.

Den Mother Femininity

Historically, the only position (until recently) that women could hold in the Boy Scouts of America was Den Mother. Referred to as “the backbone of the Cub Scout program,” women took on a maternal role as for boys’ troops aged five to ten.²⁰⁰ It is noteworthy this position was only for younger boys, those who still might have needed a maternal figure and who were likely more willing to take orders from a woman. The Den Mother position was officially created in 1948, but their role was restricted to be the assistant to a male Den Chief.²⁰¹ Women were still banned from the position of troop leaders until 1988, when a series of lawsuits against the BSA made evident that nearly half of all adult volunteers were women and that there had been a steady drop in men deferring leadership roles to women.²⁰²

Gendered language describing positions of adult leadership has changed, but expectations of women in the role have stayed the same. As Adele Trapp, the longest serving Den Mother in the Scouts program explains, “[the cubs] look at you as though you’re their parent. . . You have to really take care of them because they make themselves a part of you.”²⁰³ A mother would sacrifice everything for their children and defend them against all attacks. Den mother femininity domesticizes a highly masculine environment,

²⁰⁰ Craig Murray, “Den Mother,” *Sage Venture*, accessed April 6, 2022, <https://www.sageventure.com/history/cub/DM.html>

²⁰¹ Murray, “Den Mother;” Troop 97 BSA, “A Brief History of the Boy Scouts of America 1910 to Today,” *Adventure Troop 97 Boy Scouts of America*, last updated August 5, 2021, <https://www.troop97.net/bsahist2.htm>.

²⁰² Jay Mathews, “Boy Scouts Allow Women Troop Leaders,” *The Washington Post*, February 14, 1988, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1988/02/14/boy-scouts-allow-women-troop-leaders/726180cd-74ef-4c41-b74f-d3a1007ea7a6/>

²⁰³ Bryan Wendell, “At 53 Years, She’s Been a Den Mother Longer than Anyone Else,” *Bryan on Scouting: A Blog for the BSA’s Adult Leaders*, December 22, 2010, <https://blog.scoutingmagazine.org/2010/12/22/den-mother/>.

subtly permitting women to have agency when under the supervision of men, while still adhering to expectations of traditional femininity. This specific feminine performance can be identified through performances of care, cheerleaders and sports moms, and deferring men's responsibility.

Performances of Care

Maternal figures throughout time are depicted as providing care, particularly of wounded men; from Michelangelo's Pietà, to nurses in World War I and II, to contemporary images of mothers as the soother of wounds. A traditionally understood and accepted form of femininity in a masculine sphere is through the role of the caretaker of injured men. As men put their bodies at risk, women are expected to provide succor. This theme is prevalent in the insurrection videos.

An unseen insurrectionist who is recording the video walks up to a group of people on the Capitol lawn.²⁰⁴ At the center of the group is a man sitting with his back turned to the camera. He is wearing a brown undergarment shirt, a brown camouflage bulletproof vest, and camouflage pants. He is surrounded by women, both standing and sitting next to him. Kneeling next to the man is a woman with a brown jacket, jeans, and a red knit hat offering him a water bottle. Another woman is kneeling beside the two, only she wears a black jacket and a grey plaid scarf along with a "Thin Blue Line" flag draped over her shoulders like a cape. She is also offering a water bottle and rummaging through a maroon backpack. Both women do not appear on the camera for very long,

²⁰⁴ @Drunkie, "PLEASE WATCH THIS AND ECHO THIS!" Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 19:33:54, retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/https://parler.com/post/b614f877edf3436998865efa0db99fbd>.

since the video primarily centers the man. However, both can be seen for brief moments when the camera shifts and moves.

The video depicts four women on the ground tending to a single man, while even more are standing and appear to be waiting on standby.²⁰⁵ They are persistent and primarily lead discussion and interactions with others during a one-minute video, yet they are not the focus. When asked whether or not he was alright, the man did not even speak for himself on his condition; another woman off camera said that he got tear gassed. One woman who remains unseen for almost the entirety of the video repeatedly asks the man what he needs, insisting that he take a face shield in order to protect him from other chemicals, such as tear gas or pepper spray. Both of the women on the ground dig through their backpacks and provide the man water to wash his eyes out, and all their interactions with others involve asking for other things to help him. They do not stay in sight of the camera for more than a few seconds each.

This video depicts the ways women become responsible for what happens to men, regardless of their actual affiliation to them. In order to be in public, women are to be responsible for men's morality and wellbeing. Therefore, they can participate so long as they are supportive of men in the background. If men are to put themselves at risk, either as a result of juvenile hijinks or soldiering, women will be there to soothe their wounds.

Cheerleaders and Sports Moms

Violence as a masculine virtue becomes something that women do not need to temper, but rather support, cheer, and direct. During sporting events, women (whether

²⁰⁵ @Drunkie, "PLEASE WATCH."

peers or mothers) cheer on the exploits of their boys. In this way, women do not temper violence, but encourage it.

Insurrection videos showcase women directly cheering on men climbing the walls and scaffolding, shouting to them “Proud of you, boy!”²⁰⁶ or “He gives no fucks! Yeah baby! That is the best!”²⁰⁷ They just as quickly reprimand the men, however, if they begin to do things like break away from the group or begin destroying the building itself.²⁰⁸

Women at the insurrection were supportive and aggressively vocal for men who were engaging in violence or threatening others. Take, for example, the video of the group of women helping the one man on the ground. It should be noted while the injured man’s identity has not been found, he can also be seen in other Parler videos engaging violently in the insurrection; two videos show this man marching down Pennsylvania Avenue chanting “Stack the bodies!”²⁰⁹ and then again confronting and attacking police with a wooden pole.²¹⁰ Despite such violent actions, no one addresses the actions of the man on the ground; rather, he is only addressed through pet names such as “honey” or “sweetie.” Only his injuries mattered.

²⁰⁶ “Proud of you boy!” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 19:04:06, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/p/p7xcGbF3C4w0/>.

²⁰⁷ “They are going up!” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 19:42:21, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/c/C4g9sJ6u4Zzg/>.

²⁰⁸ “Shaun! Shaun! Now!” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 14:43:38, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/4/4nZvifrR6Gb5/>; “They are going up!” Parler.

²⁰⁹ Hyperbole, “Capitol Protest in Washington, D.C. on January 6, 2021,” YouTube video, 20:19, January 15, 2021, <https://youtu.be/9mt8YGpJ5vs?t=289>.

²¹⁰ @SavSays, “More footage from yesterday’s siege,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 16:21:47, retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/https://parler.com/post/6ad12ba4315e468aa2f44b07cb65676f>.

It did not particularly matter what horrible things the man did before he got teargassed; what was more important to the women helping him was that he get back to the action. The unseen woman offering the man a face shield was doing so not just for care, but also for protection in order to get him back on the front lines. The water bottles offered were in case he got teargassed again. The women did support work to enable men to act.

Like a troop leader on the sidelines, the job of women at the insurrection was to get their boys back out on the field and on the front lines. Chaos and mayhem are allowed, but it is the responsibility of the den mother to ensure things do not get too far out of hand and the innocence of the cubs is defended.

Deferring Men's Responsibility

Mothers unconditional love and support for their children is a given. No matter what a child does, a mother must love them. In its most problematic form, this love means the child is incapable of wrongdoing, and anything that happens is the fault of another.

Women at the insurrection are quick to turn hostile attention to the Capitol police or legislators, shaming and chastising them for hurting “innocent peaceful protestors.” In their narratives as the women in charge of men's care, it was not the fault of the men who were getting hurt for behaving badly. Instead, it was the police, the legislators, and other disembodied figures of power who got in their men's way. Responsibility for injuries was placed on the defenders of the capitol rather than on the insurrectionists.

In the aforementioned video of the group of women tending to the man, the woman wearing the “Thin Blue Line” flag as a cape repeatedly speaks up to shame “them,” implied to be the police. When off camera, she addresses the rest of the crowd saying, “I’m from China. This country can’t go to be [sic] a socialist country or a communist country!” as well as “Fuck them. How dare they do this! Tear gas to our own...” before the video cuts her off.²¹¹ The crosstalk among the other feminine figures surrounding the man also use him as an example of the State’s fall from grace, repeating, “How dare they do this!” and “We need to stop this!” To them, it did not matter what the man actually did or whether the police’s action was warranted, but rather that the consequences were unacceptable. Not only that, but the women in the video then took the responsibility themselves to address the situation. It is not the men in attendance who need to answer for what they have done; it is the Den Mother who will swoop in and stand up for them instead. Bad men’s actions are framed as not their fault, and further how dare anyone harm them.

Another video taken on the Capitol lawn makes the shaming even more explicit. A younger man, who identifies himself as Andrew White, is talking to a group of women who are crying and holding each other. It takes place after the events of the day, so the scene is darker and there are fewer people around than seen in earlier videos. Andrew White introduces one woman in the group, who says her name is Tammy McDonald, and asks her what she thinks about the mayor of D.C. after the events that took place that day. Through tears, McDonald calls the mayor a “disgrace” and an “un-American human

²¹¹ @Drunkie, “PLEASE WATCH.”

being” for teargassing her and her mother, who is “70 years old [and] a double breast cancer survivor.”²¹² Conversely, she praises a group of men saying, “If it wasn’t for these patriots, we wouldn’t have even gotten down” from the Capitol steps.²¹³ When women got too close to the action, the men needed to save them. Much as a Boy Scout would help an elderly woman across a street, the insurrectionists helped an elderly woman down the steps. The insurrections were good boys.

In the insurrection videos, more than just being responsible for influencing men’s morality to “do the right thing,” den mother femininity holds a responsibility to defend men’s morality and supposedly “inherent goodness,” regardless of any transgressions they perform. Further, this feminine performance builds on previous scholarship on emphasized femininity, where it connects the morality and values of the country with the treatment of “their boys.” Scholar Barbara Welter refers to this as the cult of True Womanhood, where the ideal “true” woman is judged on their adherence to virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.²¹⁴ Relegated to the domestic sphere, responsibility was placed on women to care for and raise virtuous men, therefore shaping “moral and societal reforms” through relationships with boys and men in the home.²¹⁵

Den mother femininity provides a domestic role for flexibility in embracing masculine public performances and legitimacy of their presence. The role emphasizes a

²¹² @Whiteaf3, “Good evening everyone, my name is Andrew White...,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 17:18:53, retrieved from

<https://web.archive.org/web/https://parler.com/post/84d13c3457214ce4977a7c0f276d4185>

²¹³ @Whiteaf3, “Good evening everyone.”

²¹⁴ Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1976), 22.

²¹⁵ Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 31.

dialectic with masculine performances as well, since caring for the boys comes back around because they will take care of men when they need mothering. It is a performance that still acknowledges emphasized femininity's vulnerability but takes on masculine rhetorics of control, so long as at the end of the day, the men are still calling the shots.

Matriarchal Warriors

In addition to traditional performances of maternal femininity, the insurrection also showcases an alternative femininity where women hyper-perform masculine attributes of control and coordination. However, these performances are rarely documented in the Parler videos, even though it might be more representative of women in attendance given official reports of the day's events. Although police reports and court records indicate women were doing many of the same things that men were, women's militaristic actions were not documented in the Parler videos or, if mentioned in the videos, those actions were reframed as something else. The absence of video evidence, given so many videos document so many other activities, is worthy of analysis. What does this absence mean? In this case, it is especially important to analyze where these missing performances are taking place, and better understand fragmented performances to see a more militant and coordinated femininity and to explore what the absence of video evidence can illustrate about performances of femininity.

This femininity, which I name *matriarchal warrior*, names those women who engaged in militaristic action, but calls attention to the fact that these women justify their militarism as a defense of their children (actual and symbolic). It is a feminine performance that tends to be unintelligible within a binary gendered terministic screen,

given the extent to which *warrior* is so masculinized; all men should be warriors, and all warriors are men. This explains why images of matriarchal warriors are absent in the videos or only recognizable through trace evidence. But the data that does exist provides a silhouette of this performance. In order to make visible the absence, fragments of this performance can be seen through videos visually decentering women as agents, undocumented militaristic control, and justification solidified through relational roles.

Visually Decentering Women as Agents

Women at the insurrection were coordinating and rallying other insurrectionists to action. But, in reviewing the videos, I noted that women's actions as warriors are rarely recorded and can either only be seen in fragments or once their words are picked up by other men. The crowd, and videographers, at the insurrection did not recognize women as warriors or focus the camera's eye on them as the central agent of action.

For example, in the background of over nineteen different videos focusing on another person or the masses, women can be heard giving orders to other insurrectionists

or rallying the crowd.²¹⁶ Some can be heard directly behind the camera, directing a party of people saying, “Come here, you’re not getting caught today.”²¹⁷ Others can be heard in the crowd, telling other insurrectionists to “shut the door” or “not to break anything,” but are never seen within the frame of the video.²¹⁸ Of these videos, only nine actually show the woman speaking.²¹⁹ Further, only three videos actually focus on the woman giving the orders for more than five seconds.²²⁰

²¹⁶ “Thank you, God bless you, don’t kill no more of our patriots,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 16:43:03, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/v/VB04B4oHPLWw/>; “Don’t break anything, you don’t want to be liable,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 15:14:26, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/t/TzNP4slvH8hH/>; @Wsetzer2, “Yep, that’s teargas...,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 14:09:53, retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/https://parler.com/post/9bf61c265d084339b5fca6ce6fa08e67/>; “Shaun! Shaun! Now!” Parler; “Thank you, keep going!” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 14:16:21, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/k/kAv6wX8KsD1i/>; “Go, go, go! Keep pushing the door!” Parler, Video File, 16:14:16, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/u/Uq7a9O5w29W9/>; @Jamiel0402, “The tear gas was not fun,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 14:03:37, retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20210110203028/https://parler.com/post/581a449628014ee0bfd8f76ec398135c/>; “No justice, no peace,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 14:09:57, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/i/iVcQLmzfk5ms/>; “What a selfie that is,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 19:29:24, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/f/fo1Bh9ciOrwi/>; “They are going up!” Parler; “Dude, get out of there!” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 14:55:38, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/d/Djs6wFxVre2c/>; “We’re going in?” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 15:11:00, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/m/MlovWqQkXnaV/>; “We paid for this!” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 14:47:22, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/o/onVXm7gZrnOG/>; “We need people up here,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 16:42:32, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/6/6X2ZhStzVa3k/>; @snakle, “I’m not going to let a few bad apples define what happened on #january6th,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 15:55:08, retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/https://parler.com/profile/snakle/posts/>; @Tcapozella, “People are climbing the walls up there under the balcony, where there are normally just congressmen or senators,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 14:15:53, retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/https://parler.com/profile/Tcapozella/posts/>; @Christolight33, “The non judgment, unity peace and love was very much the energy,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 19:07:37, retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/https://parler.com/profile/Christolight33/posts/>; “Proud of you boy!” Parler; “They are going up!” Parler.

²¹⁷ “Thank you, God bless you,” Parler.

²¹⁸ “Don’t break anything,” Parler.

²¹⁹ @Wsetzer2, “Yep, that’s teargas...”; “Thank you, keep going,” Parler; “Go, go, go! Keep pushing the door,” Parler; “No justice, no peace,” Parler; “What a selfie that is,” Parler; “We’re going in,” Parler; “We need people up here,” Parler; @snakle, “A few bad apples”; @Christolight33, “Non judgment.”

²²⁰ @Wsetzer2, “Yep, that’s teargas...”; @snakle, “A few bad apples”; @Christolight33, “Non judgment.”

One video illustrates this dynamic and makes the absence abundantly clear.²²¹ The video begins as a panorama shot of the Capitol building and the mob on the lawn. A large American flag is being passed over the crowd at the base of the Capitol building, and in the distance, the insurrectionists and Capitol Police line begin to clash, to the cheers and chants of the mob. At one minute in, a few people begin to cough and a masculine voice behind the camera says that it is tear gas. A few people cover their faces with their hands or scarves. One man even acknowledges that the surgical face mask he is wearing is largely ineffective to the gas making its way towards them. A few airhorns go off, and about five people who are visible in the video turn away and begin to leave.

Approximately three and a half minutes into the video, the voice of a woman grows louder and louder from behind the camera. She then stands directly in front of the cameraperson, as the video pans down slightly to show her face and part of her upper body. She wears a charcoal grey felt sunhat on top of grey knit headband, along with a cream knit scarf and blue plaid poncho. She turns to the crowd behind her and shouts:

Guys, this is not the only poison you're gonna have. This is nothing. Nothing! Wait 'til you get the vaccines in you. Wait 'til they're forced in your body. Get your asses up on that fucking...[inaudible]...today! Let's go! Get the-, get that poison in your body for twenty minutes! Take the steps! Let's go, for our babies! I got kids at home, I need to fight for them, I'm a Christian and I want to have my religion in this country! I am here, and I am mad, and you're going up with me! Somebody, let's go!²²²

As she turns and pushes her way up through the crowd, another man cheers and continues her chant, at which point the people who were retreating begin to push forward. She

²²¹ @Wsetzer2, "Yep, that's teargas..."

²²² @Wsetzer2, "Yep, that's teargas..."

disappears from the camera's sight but can still be heard shouting "Push in!" until the video concludes.

The woman is clearly performing the role of a warrior when commanding the would-be soldiers. Instead of allowing them to retreat, she commands "Take the steps. Let's go." Like a drill sergeant, she yells "Get your asses up on that fucking . . ." However, instead of just assuming the troops would respond, she has to justify or actions by clarifying this is "for our babies." Also noteworthy is the fact that the crowd does not follow her lead until a man picks up her chant. A woman's voice commanding is not heeded.

Despite their significance in getting people together, as well as participating in violence, the fact this is only one of a very few videos that actually shows women engaging in warrior actions is noteworthy. Even though a woman sought to command, it is noteworthy that her commands did not appear intelligible until voiced by a man. Finally, even though a videographer might typically shift focus from panorama and to an action taken by an identifiable agent, it is noteworthy that the camera did not retain focus on her. The absence of women within videos showcases how they are not recognizable as leaders.

Undocumented Militaristic Control

Women behaved in a way very similar to militarized muscular Christianity/militant masculinity. But, while extended videos of men performing this form of masculinity are many, for women it is only recognizable through small

fragments. Occasionally a video captures a woman performing militant masculinity, but they are always a fleeting image or sound in the background, not the focus of the video.

Of the multitude of videos available from that day, only a single video shows a woman wearing tactical gear, and she is further behind the Capitol building and closer to the Supreme Court Building. Her bulletproof vest is also simpler than men's, being just a plain black that matched a shirt underneath instead of the more commonly seen camouflage.²²³

Fragments of other videos show women on the ostensible frontlines. During a pan-over of the crowd, a woman is shown in the background standing near the Capitol doors.²²⁴ She is giving orders through a bullhorn and coordinating the crowd as they attempt to ram through the doors.²²⁵ In another video, Ashli Babbitt is shown on the frontline of the mob, smashing the windows to the Speaker's Lobby and being the first to attempt jumping through before she was shot.²²⁶ Women were in the center of the action.

²²³ "Fuck you republicans. Fuck you democrats," Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 10:04:42, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/d/DW2A4cYBD1p1/>

²²⁴ "They're going in!" Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 16:47:20, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/m/MwV2lwWVgAF3/>

²²⁵ It is important to note that the woman in the cited video is *not* Rachel Marie Powell, also known as the "Bullhorn Lady" and "Pink Hat Lady." Powell was more broadly recognized at the insurrection for similarly clashing with police, she was part of the first wave of people to break into the building, and she also coordinated insurrectionists ramming a door with a bullhorn. The reason Powell is not cited here is because her actions were pieced together using multiple different images and videos of her in the background, and there were no videos on Parler specifically that showed her engaging in these acts.

²²⁶ @Krashkassaudy, "Get her down!" Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 21:48:05, retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/https://parler.com/post/8713896a-9e6e-4ad8-8640-89fefe4dafff>; "He's got a gun!" Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 20:34:14, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/n/N30HKj3gfWm9/>

Fragments of videos show women giving orders, coordinating within a scene of chaos. However, the videos do not focus on them as warriors; they are not intelligible as leaders, or soldiers. They are not the warrior heroes of this story.

This is further proven by the abundance of misinformation following Ashli Babbitt's death, and how the narrative of who Babbitt was circulated among insurrectionists. One man who claimed to be at the scene said that she knelt down on the ground as a sign of peace.²²⁷ Babbitt was also described by insurrectionists as a sixteen-year-old or a "little girl" in over eleven videos. One insurrectionist noted her "little cowboy boots"²²⁸ and another said that she was dressed up as Super Girl when she was shot without warning.²²⁹

To be clear, Babbitt was an Air Force veteran, a literal warrior. She was an adult woman. She was the warrior willing to be the first into the breach. But, instead of the videos hailing her as a fallen hero, a brave warrior, or military leader, she was reduced to a little girl in need of protection.

Women were militaristic matriarchs, but this performance was not recorded in the videos. What might explain this? Most simply, that the performance was not legible or intelligible to those who witnessed it. Women in the background made sense. Women in the foreground, presented as heroes, was not.

²²⁷ @JoeHarrison, "This guy was being interviewed after he helped storm the Capitol," Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 17:14:47, retrieved from

<https://web.archive.org/web/https://parler.com/post/0076f2f84d2f4977991c46a5ef6a76f1>

²²⁸ "These guys come out and here she comes," Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 21:35:33, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/t/rjFeiJtVQbR6/>

²²⁹ "D.C. Cops murdered an innocent girl for no reason," Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 4:40:22, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/8/8pl0Kg4W9fY5/>

Relational Justification

Whenever women did assume masculine traits of leadership, the commands and rhetoric that they used consistently connected the women relationally to men or to families. Women note in their self-documentation that they are there with their husbands or boyfriends,²³⁰ or that their reason for being in attendance is for their children.²³¹ As has been found in other research, references to familial relationships are a staple of emphasized femininity as well as part of a feminine rhetorical style.²³² However, being warriors in the name of defending their children or families is the only way that women's militancy becomes visible or intelligible. In the videos, women can only be warriors if they do it in defense of their children. Unlike men, women cannot fight to defend themselves, or their "brothers," or an ideal.

In the above example where a woman weaves through the crowd rallying insurrectionists to move forward, she specifically tells them she is there for her children and her Christianity.²³³ When videos show men giving commands, rarely do the men justify why they have a right to command. In the one video where a woman commands, she is compelled to justify her ability to do so. To maintain her femininity, the woman cannot fight just for the sake of fighting (as in delinquent masculinity) or fight as one of God's select warriors (as in militant muscular Christianity) or fight for herself (something

²³⁰ "Kate, put your mask on, I don't want anyone to see you," Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 14:30:47, retrieved from <https://jan6attack.com/videos/4/4wIDySD7tKxo/>; @skykevbray, "Thugs singing national anthem," Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 19:37:27, retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20210110201819/https://parler.com/post/81d04254991c4a51828f1ab62de60e62>

²³¹ @Wsetzer2, "Yep, that's teargas..."; @Whiteaf3, "Good evening everyone."

²³² Gibson and Heyse, "Depoliticizing Feminism."

²³³ @Wsetzer2, "Yep, that's teargas..."

wronged men claim as a right). Men can fight for themselves, but not women. Instead, women fight for their children.

A matriarchal warrior performance fulfills traditional expectations of women remaining in the background but provides invisible agency, through an emphasis on familial relationships. As Katie Gibson and Amy Heyse note, conservative women like Sarah Palin have used the manta of the “Mama Grizzly,” a frontier woman whose toughness is utilized “as a means to protect their children.”²³⁴ At the insurrection, this metaphor is performed literally. While men have historically justified using violence in order to defend the feminine figures in their lives, that justification has been extended to women to protect their ways of life and traditional femininity. This matriarchal performance is still distinct from den mother femininity. While den mothers organize delinquent and unruly men, this performance of femininity still adheres to and attempts to support men’s rhetorics of control. There is no challenge to gender dynamics and hierarchy. In contrast, the matriarchal warrior seeks to *command* others, disrupting a traditional gender hierarchy that is outside of the terministic screens that make their actions intelligible. While den mother femininity embraces a motherly role towards the men in attendance, the matriarchal warrior is not recognized unless the relationship with children and family is made clear.

During the insurrection, women did try to command. But they are not seen or recognizable as leaders. The absence of videos showing women organizing, ordering, or commanding is noteworthy, especially given we know women have long played an

²³⁴ Gibson and Heyse, “Depoliticizing Feminism,” 110.

important role as organizers within conservatism, and at the insurrection. Across all of these points, women are calling the shots. But they are not seen or recognizable as leaders. It goes to show, then, that they still hold significant influence as coordinators, recruiters, and motivators within the movement.

Conclusion

Even when women documented themselves, expectations of femininity still impacted how widely circulated or recognizable women's performances were at the January 6 insurrection. In such a hegemonically masculine space, there was not just one way for conservative women to uphold expectations of femininity while still being fully involved and engaging. Some, such as the shackled Lady Liberty and Lisa Hayes, fully embraced traditional understandings of emphasized femininity where women's voices are not heard but their place is solidified by being a feminine spectacle to be observed. Meanwhile, performances of den mother femininity and matriarchal warriors shifted traditional expectations of feminine gender roles, providing each with different rhetorical affordances.

Den mother femininity adhered to expectations of traditional femininity, in taking on performances of care, cheerleading, and deferring men's responsibility for their own actions. However, in doing so they also granted agency by the men that they are responsible for. Den mothers receive agency and control, but only so much as what men give them. Simultaneously, matriarchal warriors embrace masculine aspects of leadership, such as militarism and aggressiveness through commands. Yet, this only

becomes recognizable when a woman's maternal role is made clear. If that is not done, then matriarchal warriors are unintelligible, made evident only through their absence.

Conservative femininities constantly face a rhetorical balancing act, where success in leadership and engagement in political spheres requires embracing masculinity but they must also strictly adhere to upholding their own femininity. In both den mother femininity and matriarchal warriors, this balance is possible by domesticizing a scene of chaos. Den mothers domesticize a public sphere by performing the traditionally feminine care and moral responsibility of the private sphere. Meanwhile, matriarchal warriors justify masculine aggressiveness with domestic expectations of protection of their children. It is essential to recognize the dynamics that this balance brings when looking at rhetoric from the insurrection, as well as conservative politics as a whole, and especially more so when seeing how these performances of conservative femininity develop and construct arguments alongside conservative masculinity.

CHAPTER FIVE:

GENDER DIALECTICS AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

In a hegemonically masculine political sphere, gendered performances of conservative rhetoric have always been influenced by hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. Conservative masculinity is rooted in masculinist spectacle, bolstering masculine strength while framing political opponents as feminine and therefore weak. Consequentially, conservative femininity faces challenges of fulfilling the hegemonically masculine conservative canon while at the same time balancing traditional feminine expectations. Both exist in tandem with each other, influencing how such performances are shaped politically on the national, state, local, and personal level. The January 6 Capitol insurrection was no exception to this. Images and videos taken during the insurrection are a visual index of how conservative political and gender identities intersect and contribute to new rhetorical arguments.

Because gender exists in a dialectic, the different performances of gender at the insurrection reinforced each other. Although the previous chapters analyzed masculinity and femininity in isolation, critically analyzing these performances together and their interactions can yield new insights to understandings of conservative rhetoric. Delinquent masculinity needs a den mother. Militarized muscular Christianity allows a matriarchal warrior, as long as she defers to men. The woman as warrior remains unintelligible and, hence, invisible. Further, in legacy media, women in general were invisible, making their presence in the Parler videos remarkable and worthy of analysis. I conclude this thesis by analyzing the implications of the dialectic between delinquent masculinity and den

mother femininity, as well as militarized muscular Christianity and matriarchal warriors. Further, I explore broader implications for these performances of gender in conservative politics and provide insight and questions for research beyond January 6.

Delinquent Masculinity and Den Mother Femininity

While men were aged down in their delinquent masculinity, women were aged up in their maternal role (with the one notable exception of Babbitt who was aged down to disqualify her from the warrior role). Consequentially, men's violent actions were not taken as seriously, diminished to pranks or hijinks rather than felonious insurrection, while women were burdened with the additional responsibility of ameliorating and justifying the results of men's bad behavior. This was the form of masculinity that circulated in most of the images in commercial and legacy media: the QAnon shaman, the theft of the lectern, the climbing of the Capitol walls.

As Carly Gieseler argues, immature behavior might seem to undermine aspects of a dominant masculinity, but really it provides grown men slippage from traditional masculine expectations under a guise of a "boy code."²³⁵ Media scholar Kyle Christiansen argues that this immature performance influences the realm of fiction through real-world examples of "white men [that can] act like little boys and still (in most cases) wield power."²³⁶ Trump's most notable behavior, replicated by many of his supporters, is a refusal to act mature in any context and a refusal to be controlled by

²³⁵ Carly M. Gieseler, "Pranking Peter Pans: Performing Playground Masculinities in Extreme Sports," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2014): 350, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10462937.2014.940501>

²³⁶ Kyle Christensen, "The Monstrous Man-Boy: White Masculinity's Uncanny Immaturity in Contemporary Horror," *Communication Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2021): 90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2021.1879887>

others or by social convention. Name-calling, assault, and petty actions are traits that many supporters (and by extension Capitol rioters) admire and recognize as a “fighting spirit” and “manliness.”²³⁷ Trump and his supporters can be crass, rude, cruel, and destructive, but that is a proof of their manliness; they cannot be controlled. When men act this way, the role for women is to care for them when they experience self-inflicted wounds to shift blame for men’s bad behavior to demean others.

This dialectic also further continues the long history of claims by right-wing women that their “natural roles” are to be wives and subordinate to men. Even women who exhibit masculine style embrace this subordinate social position. In a speech for the Georgia Republican Assembly, Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene claimed to define a woman as a creation of God from Adam’s rib, saying, “We may be the weaker sex — we are the weaker sex — but we are our partner — we are our husband’s wife.”²³⁸ Greene is repeating arguments made by anti-progressive movements, going all the way back to the anti-suffrage movement. As scholar Elizabeth Burt explains, a persistent argument made by women in anti-suffrage movements was that God’s role for woman is to be devoted to their families, which justifies keeping separate public and private spheres.²³⁹ During the insurrection, this meant women performed the role of Den Mother.

²³⁷ Pierce Dignam et al., “Valorizing Trump’s Masculine Self: Constructing Political Allegiance during the 2016 Presidential Election,” *Men and Masculinities* 24, no. 3 (2021): 383.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X19873692>

²³⁸ Ron Filipkowski (@RonFilipkowski), “Marge Greene: ‘I’m going to tell you right now what is a woman..We came from Adam’s rib..We are the weaker sex, but we are our husband’s wife,’” Twitter post, April 4, 2022, 16:59:00, <https://twitter.com/RonFilipkowski/status/1511101197301821442>

²³⁹ Elizabeth V. Burt, “The Ideology, Rhetoric, and Organizational Structure of a Countermovement Publication: The Remonstrance, 1890-1920,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (1998): 69–83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769909807500109>.

A potential reason as to why the most widely circulated images in legacy media were the performances of delinquent masculinity is because it domesticated (tamed, made less frightening) the violence at play. Confronting the insurrection for what it was, a violent attack on the democratic process as a coordinated coup, was too overwhelming, or too wild.

At the time of this writing, it has been fifteen months since the insurrection and no consensus has emerged over what needs to be done about it. Republicans in Congress have boycotted the special committee created to investigate the insurrection, and further, Marjorie Taylor Green has argued people need to “get over” January 6, saying “the American people are fed up with this overdramatization of a riot that happened here at the Capitol *one time*. They are sick and tired of Jan. 6 — it’s over, OK?”²⁴⁰ Hegemonic Masculinity becomes palatable, further granting emphasized femininity access to the public sphere while still upholding power imbalances. All roles eventually defer to masculine dominance, and women as independent agents remain invisible.

Militant Muscular Christianity and Matriarchal Warriors

Of the variety of gender performances seen in legacy media at the insurrection, militant muscular Christianity and matriarchal warriors were the least circulated. Yet, militant muscular Christianity dominates the Parler videos. Also important to note is that throughout this thesis, all of the insurrectionists that were a point of focus in the Parler videos cited were either white or white passing. While white folks were not the only

²⁴⁰ Scott Wong, “McCarthy’s Jan. 6 Committee Gamble Faces Big Test This Spring,” *NBC News*, April 10, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/mccarthys-jan-6-committee-gamble-faces-big-test-spring-rcna23681>

racial demographic in attendance, they dominated being the focus of videos on Parler and circulated videos across legacy media, showing that there are racialized rhetorics at place at the insurrection as well. The dominating force of whiteness on display also shows how this dialectic of militant muscular Christianity and matriarchal warriors brings illustrates how coordinated violence is recoded as nonviolence when done by white bodies.

Throughout the videos, insurrectionists declared that they were peaceful, even as they were standing in the middle of the rotunda which had been accessed as a result of violence against the Capitol police.²⁴¹ When women treated wounded insurrectionists, they declared the violence was on the part of the police.

The evidence is clear, the insurrectionists were violent. Overviews of the cases in the year following found that over 187 arrested insurrectionists, or roughly a quarter of all defendants, were charged “with committing violence, such as assaults on law enforcement officers or members of the media present that day.”²⁴² The logic of the insurrectionists becomes clearer when looking at their language of what they emphasize they are *not* doing, specifically “burning down buildings” or “raiding.”²⁴³ One video featured a man giving his testimony and reason for being at the insurrection, saying,

I’m not keen on violence, breaking in doors, but outside of that there has been no violence. But other than that, there’s been no violence, and after hearing all

²⁴¹ @TylerEthrige13, “The church.”

²⁴² Tom Dreisbach, Meg Anderson, and Barbara Van Woerkom, “5 Takeaways from the Capitol Riot Criminal Cases, One Year Later,” *National Public Radio*, January 5, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/01/05/1070199411/5-takeaways-from-the-capitol-riot-criminal-cases-one-year-later>.

²⁴³ @Cakes28625, “I am posting a lot of videos in hopes you will share these to everyone you know!” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 14:10:29, retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20210110200741/https://parler.com/post/a54cf969de654ee2ba2ebfe262e0764d>

summer long city how city getting burned down was a “largely peaceful” protest, this is what a largely peaceful protest looks like.²⁴⁴

Other insurrectionists directly compare their treatment with police as worse compared to Black Lives Matter, claiming that the use of teargas or rubber bullets on innocent protestors was “unheard of” and was never used on Antifa or BLM.²⁴⁵ Even though the insurrectionists were using similar tactics (e.g., property violence) and even more violent tactics (physical assault on the police), and even though the insurrectionists were seeking the overthrow of a democratically elected government, they labeled their actions as peaceful and the BLM protests as more violent. What (il)logic enabled this?

As Lisa Flores argues, white masculine bodies are afforded an assumption of innocence, and any violence conducted by white masculine bodies is “deemed necessary, whitened violence orders society and ensures its civility.”²⁴⁶ Consequentially, if white masculine bodies are assumed to be innocent, then Black bodies are assumed to be violent. In this way, Flores argues that violence is Blackened, in that any actions performed by Black men are assumed to be chaotic, threatening, and controlled.²⁴⁷ Thus, because white men were the ones taking the actions during the insurrection, it could not be labeled violence, even while less destructive and less anti-democratic actions of BLM are pointed to as the real violence that warrants attention.

²⁴⁴ @Conleec, “All summer long we've been force-fed the narrative by the mainstream media that the Antifa and BLM riots were 'mostly peaceful' while buildings burned and cities were looted,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 20:23:53, retrieved at

<https://web.archive.org/web/https://parler.com/profile/Conleec/posts>.

²⁴⁵ @VBghostpatriot, “The Mayor of DC antagonized the 500,000 Trump patriots before we arrived, and continued to do so,” Parler, Video File, January 6, 2021, 16:26:25, retrieved at <https://web.archive.org/web/https://parler.com/post/b0e970fa11684d0eb6c89f83a2b10a2c>.

²⁴⁶ Lisa A. Flores, *Deportable and Disposable: Public Rhetoric and the Making of the “Illegal” Immigrant* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020), 57.

²⁴⁷ Flores, *Deportable and Disposable*, 59.

The insurrectionists whitewashed their violence. They were not violent, but simply doing God's work, maintaining order. The source of disorder and violence, according to the men and women engaging in insurrection, was on the part of the government (in the form of vaccines, teargas, and resisting the mobs attempt to enter the Capitol) or on the part of Black bodies.

Gender Performance in Conservative Politics

This thesis identified some worrisome variations on performances of masculinity and femininity in the insurrection. Unfortunately, evidence is mounting that these performances of masculinity and femininity are becoming the norm within conservative politics, leaning more towards and authoritative and violent performances of gender.

Conservative masculinity is embracing a masculinity performed by men at the insurrection, legitimating men's use of physical violence against other people as a manly and reasonable act. For example, during a keynote speech at the National Conservatism Conference in October 2021, Missouri Senator Josh Hawley blamed liberalism for the decline of American masculinity because he claimed it framed "traditional masculine virtues like courage, independence and assertiveness as a danger to society."²⁴⁸ However, according to the insurrection videos, the way in which white men manifest these characteristics is by showing courage to do violence, declaring independence from any forms of governmental or social controls, and asserting their superiority. This was even further evidenced at the first televised Ohio Republican Senate primary debate in March

²⁴⁸ Rachel Treisman, "Sen. Josh Hawley Claims Masculinity is Under Attack. This Historian Disagrees," *National Public Radio*, November 11, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/11/11/1054615028/is-masculinity-under-attack-sen-hawley-wants-to-defend-the-men-of-america>

of 2022. During the debate, candidates Mike Gibbons and Josh Mandel got into a verbal altercation that nearly turned physical, as they pushed chest-to-chest and got into each other's faces.²⁴⁹ Another candidate, J.D. Vance also stood, seemingly to get involved before the moderator intervened. Men's lack of control over their own emotions and reactions is not an indication of lack of masculinity; instead, it is proof of masculinity as men, to be men, demonstrate no one controls them (except God).

Performances of femininity are being seen in other areas of conservative politics. While there are a rising number of conservative women taking a role in Republican party leadership and legislative positions, performances of den mother femininity and matriarchal warriors are growing more prevalent in smaller areas of government. For example, these performances of femininity have been more widely seen across school board debates. For example, a little over a year after the insurrection, a Virginia mother threatened to bring loaded guns to her children's school should a mask policy be in place.²⁵⁰ Parents, and mothers in particular, have made headlines getting arrested at school board meetings and harassing and threatening school board members.²⁵¹ The sentiment is clearly stated by Elana Yaron Fishbein, a mother of two in Pennsylvania and founder of the anti-Critical Race Theory organization No Left Turn: "Our kids are

²⁴⁹ Harry J. Gomez, "Ohio's Rowdy GOP Senate Primary Gets Even Messier After First Debates," *NBC News*, March 24, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2022-election/ohios-rowdy-gop-senate-primary-gets-even-messier-first-debates-rcna21364>.

²⁵⁰ Caroline Vakil, "Virginia Mom Threatens to Bring Loaded Guns to School Over Mask Mandate," *The Hill*, January 21, 2022, <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/590815-virginia-mom-threatens-to-bring-loaded-guns-to-school-over-mask-mandate/>

²⁵¹ Hannah Natanson, "Death Threats, Online Abuse, Police Protection: School Board Members Face Dark New Reality," *The Washington Post*, November 9, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/death-threats-online-abuse-police-protection-school-board-members-face-dark-new-reality/2021/11/09/db007706-37fe-11ec-9bc4-86107e7b0ab1_story.html

captive audiences. And they think they can do whatever they want with our kids.”²⁵²

Much like what was seen in performances of den mother femininity and matriarchal warriors at the January 6 insurrection, maternal roles are being weaponized by conservative women. Aggressiveness and even calls to violence are viewed as acceptable, so long as it is being done in the name of mothers defending their children.

As political scientist Heather L. Ondercin says in an interview with the *New York Times*, regardless of gender/sex, individuals that identify as conservative are becoming distinctly more traditionally masculine, emphasizing traits of aggression and assertiveness, independent, holding a forceful and strong personality, and a willingness to “take a stand.”²⁵³ Meanwhile, individuals that identify as liberals are increasingly more stereotypically feminine, displaying traits of affection, compassion, gentleness, sympathy, kindness and responsiveness to others’ feelings.

Conservative masculinity not only becoming more hegemonically masculine, but it is also growing to represent the same masculinity performed at the January 6 Capitol insurrection. As Charles Homans argues, the glorification of violent paramilitaries and actors like Kyle Rittenhouse by conservatives exemplifies a new era in political violence.²⁵⁴ Gender impacts political identity, which in turn impacts gender performance

²⁵² Tyler Kingkade, Brandy Zadrozny and Ben Collins, “Critical Race Theory Battle Invades School Boards — With Help from Conservative Groups,” *NBC News*, June 15, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/critical-race-theory-invades-school-boards-help-conservative-groups-n1270794>

²⁵³ Thomas B. Edsall, “What We Know About the Women Who Vote for Republicans and the Men Who Do Not,” *New York Times*, March 30, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/opinion/gender-gap-republicans-democrats.html>.

²⁵⁴ Charles Homans, “Kyle Rittenhouse and the New Era of Political Violence,” *New York Times Magazine*, October 26, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/26/magazine/kyle-rittenhouse-kenosha-wisconsin.html>.

and so on. The ideal of what is considered an “ideal man” or an “ideal woman” will continue to shape political argumentation, and it is essential that scholarship continues to critique and seek to understand the ways hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity impact modern politics.

Beyond January 6

Gender performance in political identity matters, and alongside other intersectional identities, it is critical that scholars analyze these intersections when studying political rhetoric as a whole. This research identified four particular performances of gender, but this is only a fraction of the performances of gender on display at the insurrection alone. Beyond the events of January 6, conservative masculinities and femininities continue to be reformed, replicated, and constituted.

As a response to scholar Charlotte Hogg’s call to extend rhetorical studies to critically analyze “women complicit in the patriarchal structures feminism works against,”²⁵⁵ this research invites other rhetorical scholars to critically analyze conservative rhetoric along intersections of gender, along with race, class, sexuality, ability, and other intersectional identities. A person’s rhetoric is shaped by all aspects of the human experience, and just as rhetoric cannot be separated from the body in which it is perceived from, so does political argumentation and identity. In order to better understand the ways conservative rhetoric upholds hegemonic gender norms and systems

²⁵⁵ Charlotte Hogg, “Including Conservative Women’s Rhetorics in an ‘Ethics of Hope and Care,’” *Rhetoric Review* 34, no. 4 (2015): 398, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07350198.2015.1073558>

of dominance, it is essential for scholars to continue investigating the ways conservative rhetoric is impacted by a rhetors social location and identities.

There are certainly performances and videos this research may have missed. The sheer volume of videos uploaded to Parler required limiting what videos were worthy of analysis, and doing so inherently means that there could be videos with deep insight that went unnoticed. I also intentionally did not include the text within the Parler post itself within my analysis, which also holds significant potential for research on how conservative social media sites cultivate and circulate gendered and political rhetorical arguments.

As this research continues beyond the confines of this thesis, I still have questions regarding how conservative identities are constructed and influenced by social media. So much of the coordination of the insurrection took place in public forums, and the Parler dataset is rich with posts, shares, comments, photos, and videos that document the construction of conservative movements over the course of two years. The insurrection and Parler itself hold incredible potential for scholars to understand violent rhetoric, networked public spheres, propaganda, and beyond. Further, much like how women were only recognizable through self-documentation on January 6, so too were non-white insurrectionists. Beyond this thesis, I hope to explore how race and conservative rhetoric intertwine alongside gender, as all are significant factors when constituting identities.

As of this writing, the long-term impact of January 6 still has yet to be seen. Yet it is already clear that there is a battle over the public memory over what the insurrection was, and what influence it will have on society for years to come. From a scholarly

perspective, the January 6 Capitol holds the potential to better understand political rhetoric and argumentation. But as rhetorical scholars, we also must critically understand how this event came to be, knowing that it began long before Trump declared the election to be fraudulent. Understanding the ways that demagoguery, violence, identity, and gender performances influence the political sphere will be crucial not only in the fallout of the insurrection, but in all aspects of political scholarship. January 6 may be the just the beginning.

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