

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

UTC Scholar

---

Honors Theses

Student Research, Creative Works, and  
Publications

---

8-2018

## American foreign policy has a masculinity problem: a discourse analysis of the Iran deal

Rachel Emond

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, [jkm696@mocs.utc.edu](mailto:jkm696@mocs.utc.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.utc.edu/honors-theses>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Emond, Rachel, "American foreign policy has a masculinity problem: a discourse analysis of the Iran deal" (2018). *Honors Theses*.

This Theses is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research, Creative Works, and Publications at UTC Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of UTC Scholar. For more information, please contact [scholar@utc.edu](mailto:scholar@utc.edu).

American Foreign Policy has a Masculinity Problem:  
A Discourse Analysis of the Iran Deal

Rachel Marie Emond

Departmental Honors Thesis  
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga  
Political Science and Public Service

Examination Date: March 29, 2018

Dr. Jessica Auchter  
Assistant Professor of Political Science  
Thesis Director

Dr. Amanda Wintersieck  
Assistant Professor of Political Science  
Department Examiner

Dr. Jeremy Strickler  
Assistant Professor of Political Science  
Department Examiner

## **Abstract**

The research in this paper seeks to analyze the rhetoric surrounding issues of American foreign policy using the Iran Deal as a case study. The main question this research intends to answer is: Are suggested soft power policy solutions, such as that of the Iran Deal, characterized as either feminine or masculine? I seek to answer this question through a discourse analysis of the rhetoric in newspaper articles from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* about the Iran Deal from the year 2015. I identify common themes and phrases among these articles and draw my own conclusions about their frequency and relationship. Ultimately, I find that soft power policy solutions are characterized through the use of both feminine and masculine language depending on whether or not the owner of the rhetoric is supportive or unsupportive of the policy. This research begs the question of whether or not feminine language is used to render a soft power policy solution as inherently less legitimate than hard power policy solutions. Implications regarding soft power policies, women and heterosexual men in the field of foreign policy, and the difference in value given to masculinity and femininity will be discussed.

## Introduction

In 2016, 42 percent of voting-age Americans stated that the nation was becoming “too soft and feminine,” (Beinart 2016). In that same year, we saw the first nomination of a female candidate by a major party for President of the United States. Those who responded they “completely agree” that America is becoming “too soft and feminine,” were *four times* as likely to respond that they had a “very unfavorable” view of Hillary Clinton compared to those who chose that they “completely disagree” (Beinart 2016). Current research tells us that female leaders are “less likely” to be perceived as legitimate in their positions than their male peers, and that “subordination to women” is the number one type of emasculation men fear the most (Beinart 2016). As Secretary of State, Clinton began working on the Iran nuclear deal in 2011 (Landler 2016). Her role in the deal was what she characterized as, ““set[ting] the table” for Mr. [John] Kerry’s,” ultimate diplomatic success (Landler 2016). Clinton’s role in the creation of the deal is nuanced, though. She worked closely along side other members of the United Nations to pressure Iran into engaging with the negotiations, something that led to the continued existence of the agreement (Landler 2016). However, as a rather hawkish politician, Secretary Clinton did not come out of the gate fully supporting the Iran deal, nor did she completely agree with the path that President Obama and then-Senator John Kerry were pushing (Landler 2016). She didn’t trust Iran and, though she created a diplomatic team throughout a long negotiation

process and expected to implement the plan with full force, Secretary Clinton really saw the deal as a way to catch Iran in a fatal blunder (Landler 2016). Clinton consistently emphasized the importance of enforcement, setting her apart from President Obama's response to the nuclear deal in its final stages.

The Iran nuclear deal has become a defining debate of American foreign policy. Ultimately, the goal of the agreement is to decrease Iran's nuclear capabilities in exchange for the lifting of international economic sanctions. The agreement has stripped Iran of almost all of its enriched uranium and has given significant power to the International Atomic Energy Agency to conduct inspections at a much higher frequency (Szubin 2017). Critics of the agreement believe that it will have no effect on the nuclear capabilities of Iran. They see the deal as having no mechanism for proper accountability—that just the threat of the replacement of economic sanctions will not be enough for Iran to actually stop constructing a nuclear armament. Many critics are concerned that Iran will not only be able to continue its nuclear program without the knowledge of the U.S. or the IAEA, but also that increased economic stability will only give the state more regional power and prompt Iran to give increased funding to terrorist organizations (Szubin 2017). Though it will be discussed in greater detail later in the paper, this is where we see language characterizing the deal as “volatile,” “dependent,” and “powerless.” Supporters of the deal largely see the agreement as a better alternative to the use of total military force, even though many agree that

the deal is not perfect. Some supporters believe that the agreement should not have an end date, should cover a wider range of weapons, and should give more power to inspection agencies (Davenport 2018). The rhetoric seen coming from those who support the deal does recognize the agreement's potentially flawed nature, but they also characterize the agreement as "responsible" and "civilized." The deal has been hotly contested in Congress, and continues to be a source of major debate even though the IAEA has reported that, to-date, Iran has been compliant with the guidelines of the agreement (Davenport 2018).

Hillary Clinton's relationship with the Iran nuclear deal is an interesting introduction to the rhetoric surrounding the agreement. The language we use matters. If our politicians and journalists are using language associated with femininity to purposefully delegitimize an action of foreign policy that doesn't involve hard power—a concept that will be discussed shortly—then their words are having an effect on the women in our society whether they intend for them to or not. Though the academic community has accepted that femininity and masculinity do not correlate directly to femaleness and maleness, to the average person, femininity *does* equal femaleness. Thus, the continued use of feminine language to signify inferiority only further solidifies the assumption that women themselves are inferior to men, especially within the field of foreign policy.

American foreign policy has a masculinity problem. The ideology of masculinity is so engrained into the culture of our political system that anything

that does not align with the language of strength and dominance is seen as illegitimate. This limits our foreign policy options at the outset because certain options are already mobilized off of the agenda, while aggressive and military solutions are given prominence. This can be seen in the preeminence of military service as a prerequisite for foreign policy expertise (Enloe 2005). Moreover, the language we use to discuss foreign policy reflects this view. We almost exclusively view foreign policy and national security through a masculine lens, in which the United States must come out as the dominant player above all others. Dominance places an emphasis on physical power and supremacy, and more specifically involves the emasculation of others (Coe et al. 2007). Emasculation is a significant concept, particularly in the discussion of the rhetoric of foreign policy. The U.S.'s emasculation of their political adversaries not only involves the stripping of traditionally masculine qualities, such as courage and nobility, but it also involves attributing to them typically feminine qualities, such as weakness or lack of emotional control (Coe et al. 2007). It is not just that the United States seeks to be the most dominant player in any political relationship, but that the U.S. seeks to be the most masculine.

Carol Cohn (1993) argues, "...gender discourse informs and shapes nuclear and national security discourse, and in so doing creates silences and absences...it degrades our ability to think *well* and *fully* about nuclear weapons and national security, and shapes and limits the possible outcomes of our

deliberations,” (emphasis not my own). My project intentionally takes up these silences and absences to explore how American foreign policy is shaped and limited. The findings of this research add to a growing interest in issues of gender in American foreign policy, and aims to add nuance to this wider body of literature. It also hopes to spark a greater conversation about the gendered hierarchy of values I’ve traced here and about how those in the discipline can work to change it. The American affinity to the use of aggression and the ease with which our foreign policy makers gravitate towards it as the most sensible solution to a conflict keeps diplomatic responses on the backburner; this occurrence is demonstrated by the language with which policy solutions are discussed. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the language that is being used, and to discuss what the discourse of American foreign policy is currently ignoring.

Foreign policy solutions are typically categorized in two different classifications: hard power and soft power (Nye 1990). Without even defining what hard and soft power actually are, it is easy to discern that hard power includes the use of the military while soft power involves diplomacy; hard power is to the Department of Defense as soft power is to the State Department (Nye 1990). The reason most people, regardless of their level of knowledge regarding foreign policy, would be able to match hard power to the military and soft power to diplomacy is because the words “hard” and “soft” are descriptive rhetoric that

create images in our heads. Hard and soft power have been socially constructed to convey a specific meaning. Social construction occurs when a particular meaning is attached to a concept as a result of preconceived notions held by general society; further, these attached meanings create and solidify a reality that their subject then exists in (Doty 1993). Though this paper will delve even deeper into the details of masculine and feminine language later on, this is a meaningful introductory discussion. The word “hard” is associated with strength—strong substances such as steel, concrete, and muscle are all hard—and thus so is the military. The word “soft,” however, is associated with weakness—feeble materials such as cotton and foam are soft—and thus so is diplomacy. When we categorize words into a gender discourse, the word “hard” falls under masculine and the word “soft” falls under feminine. We have socially constructed the reality of hard and soft power, but more importantly we have socially constructed a gendered reality that these two concepts live in.

The concept of social construction will continue to play an important role throughout this paper. Using gendered descriptive language to brand the Iran deal is by definition the social construction of the Iran deal. Because soft power, hard power, masculinity, and femininity bring along with them their own realities, the Iran deal assimilates to these realities when this is the language used to discuss it. The Iran deal is an intangible, gender neutral subject so it can be neither hard nor soft and neither masculine nor feminine, but because the gendered language of

hard and soft foreign policy is used to discuss it, it comes to be defined by a mixture of these descriptors. The stance that a politician or journalist took on the deal impacted the reality they attempted to create for it. If the speaker did not support the Iran deal, it came to exist within a framework of feminine language. Potentially more interestingly, if the speaker did support the agreement, it was branded almost exclusively via masculine language.

Throughout the history of American foreign policy, our military defense program has been celebrated and over funded, while the State Department has consistently fought for its place in the federal government. It is inarguable that hard power—the use *or* threat of force—has been exalted far above soft power in American foreign policy. Historically, we can see one example of this preference for military power through the way negotiations were characterized as a policy of appeasement during the interwar period. Even the use of the term itself—appeasement as opposed to negotiations—placed a stronger emphasis on the concessions being made than on the goal of reaching peace without violence, conjuring a more negative connotation of the policy. Realist scholars and political actors posited appeasement policy as an aversion to an inevitable showing of military force that was undoubtedly needed to stop Italy and Germany, and was specifically described as naïve, corrupt, and cowardly (Ripsman and Levy 2008; Ashworth 2002). Appeasement policy, a soft power policy solution, was

denigrated in contrast to the use of the military, even during the aftermath of a war coined “The War to end All Wars.”

Scholars have been studying the relationship between foreign policy and masculinity for some time, but the research specifically regarding femininity is lacking. The work these scholars have completed has already established that masculine rhetoric is used in the discussion of foreign policy to display strength and power (Coe et al. 2007; Cohn 1993; Dean 1998; Enloe 2005; Ferguson 2007; Tickner 1992); in this paper I seek to determine whether or not feminine rhetoric is used to describe policies that do not fit the masculinized institution of American foreign policy. Previous work has focused largely on the impact of masculine rhetoric in foreign policy to legitimize particularly aggressive foreign policy options which typically encompass hard power, but there has been less attention paid to how less aggressive foreign policy solutions of soft power are feminized. Both this analysis and previous research show possible implications regarding whether or not the use of feminine language renders soft power policy solutions as less legitimate. In this vein, the key contribution of my project is to examine the rhetoric surrounding the discussion of a specific foreign policy that centralized the ideas of diplomacy and negotiation, and to analyze the gendered dimensions of media coverage of this policy option. In order to do this, I perform a discourse analysis of the Iran Deal during the year of 2015. I observe the rhetoric used by those discussing the Iran Deal (typically political pundits, journalists, and

politicians) and use these observations to further discuss the gendered implications of the language chosen. I pursue one main research question throughout the discourse analysis and discussion thereafter. Are soft power policy solutions, such as the Iran Deal, gendered feminine through the rhetoric that is used to discuss them? Furthermore, I find that supporters of a policy solution that is typically feminized use masculine language as a counter.

It is important to note that the goal of this research is not to implicate specific foreign policy actors as anti-woman. Furthermore, I also do not particularly intend to say that there is a conscious effort by politicians and journalists to equate femaleness with inferiority. As will be discussed later on, femininity and masculinity are not the same thing as femaleness and maleness. What I do intend to argue is that the words our society has come to recognize as masculine—strong, powerful, diligent, trustworthy—are given more credence; while the words our society has come to recognize as feminine—soft, dependent, compromise, thoughtful—are codified as “less than” those that convey masculinity. In her 1988 response to Morgenthau’s six principles of political realism, Ann Tickner seeks to uncover why international politics is perceived as “a man’s world,” and why women are so underrepresented within the active and the academic fields. Before she asks this question, Tickner (1988) states, “Nuclear strategy, with its vocabulary of power, threat, force, and deterrence, has a distinctly masculine ring; moreover, women are stereotypically judged to be

lacking in qualities which these terms evoke.” I quote Tickner in this instance to show that the questions she and I are posing are not unrelated, but they are still different questions.

Throughout the rest of this project I will show that soft power policy is inherently related to femininity. The remainder of my thesis proceeds as follows. First, I layout my theoretical framework through a discussion of masculinity and femininity and the relationship between gender and American foreign policy. Then I discuss my findings from the discourse analysis of the Iran Deal and use my theoretical framework to show how these concepts are interconnected. Finally, in my conclusion I gesture to larger questions that arise from my findings. Ultimately, I find that not only is soft power rhetorically categorized as feminine, but also that supporters of soft power policy almost exclusively use masculine language. I question whether or not this masculine rhetoric is used to legitimize a soft power policy solution as viable and effective. The distinction between these two types of language—feminine language to delegitimize, masculine language to legitimize—is important to make because it shows that there is an active understanding of feminine descriptive language as evoking a sense of inferiority.

### **Contextualizing the Question**

There is a long history between the concepts of gender and American foreign policy, so the questions I ask here are not unprecedented. In order to give context to my research questions, I divide my theoretical framework into two

categories. First is a discussion of masculinity and femininity; what these terms mean, how they are related, and the common rhetoric prescribed to both. This discussion allows me to structure and build my theory concerning the rhetoric of foreign policy, as I find that masculinity and femininity are evoked through language that is vastly different. I also find that femininity is relegated to a discourse of weakness and vulnerability, while masculinity encompasses anything that is strong and powerful. The distinction between this rhetoric is a continuation of the differences between hard and soft power that have previously been introduced. A discussion about the relationship between American foreign policy and gender follows. This discussion in particular gives historical context to the part of my theory that relies on masculinity already being established as prominent in American foreign policy. The standard discourse of American foreign policy is gendered masculine, and this shapes the way society perceives the best policies to implement and the best leaders for the field. The literature shows that language gendered masculine has long been used in American foreign policy to convey a message of strength, dominance, and power in the realm of international politics in foreign affairs. I intend to use this literature to frame the questions I am asking and to structure the theoretical discussion that will follow.

### **Masculinity and Femininity**

A tale as old as time; the connotations of the words masculinity and femininity have been forming from the dawn of society. In today's rhetorical

world, masculinity denotes what is “manly,” while femininity conveys the image of what is considered “womanly,” or rather, whatever the opposite of “manly” is (Paechter 2006). It is, however, incredibly hard to define what exactly is and is not “manly,” (Paechter 2006; Connell 1995). One interesting aspect of masculinity is that it is socially perceived to be something that is earned, whereas femininity is something one is born with (Gilmore 1990, 1); women are born while men are made. A person, typically a male, “becomes” masculine through a process that involves heterosexual sexual conquests and excellence in challenging situations (Gilmore 1990, 1). More importantly, because masculinity is something that can and must be earned by males, women are completely excluded from the narrative. This means that femininity and masculinity are seen as two, mutually exclusive, separate binaries in competition with one another; it leads us to perceive that a person—or policy—exhibiting feminine qualities cannot possibly also exhibit masculine qualities. Until the mid-to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, academics and psychologists largely believed that masculinity and femininity were two polar opposites, and that people could be described as either one or the other (Hoffman 2001). Over time, the academic community has come to accept that masculinity and femininity exist on a scale, or a spectrum, on which people and characteristics fall (Hoffman 2001). Still, socially and rhetorically we polarize masculinity and femininity. The socially constructed connotations of what it means to be either

masculine or feminine have affected the language and rhetoric we use on a daily basis.

This concept of social construction continues to be important in the context of how politicians and journalists discuss the Iran deal because of the understood meanings that follow masculinity and femininity. We perceive masculinity and femininity in a certain way because of the societal definitions that we've given to them. The term masculinity is ultimately derived from the Latin diminutive "mas," meaning "male person" (Online Etymology Dictionary). As language evolved, masculinity did not simply become the adjective of mere maleness, it became the word used to describe "having the *appropriate* qualities of the male sex," (Online Etymology Dictionary, emphasis my own). These appropriate qualities include strong and powerful, aggressive, brave, competent and intelligent, independent, assertive, confident, and the ability to dominate, to use logic, and to reason (Cohn 1993; Dean 1998; Echabe 2010; Fagenson 1990; Pacholok 2009; Tickner 1992; Drew 2004). Admittedly, it is difficult to discern which came first: powerful men who pushed the idea of what a man should or should not be, or society's construction of such a man?

Men who portray *only* the ideals of masculinity have historically been rewarded with success in their pursuit of power in American society. The fervor with which our society has held on to this idea of what men should act like has led to what has been coined hegemonic masculinity. Because the men in power

portray characteristics like strength and dominance, we associate these terms with what “real” men should act like. Over time, the United States military has used this idea of hegemonic masculinity to draw on who they most want to be the members of the armed forces. The military has consistently portrayed its ideal candidate as an able-bodied male who is both heterosexual and cisgender, someone they can build into a strong, dominant, patriotic man (Locke 2013). Thus military masculinity and hegemonic masculinity have become virtually synonymous with one another, creating a problem when we seek to create soft power policy solutions—characterized as feminine—in opposition to military solutions. We also know of course that the terms listed above do not define the characteristics of all men; or in other words, not all men fit into one classification of masculinity (Paechter 2006; Hoffman 2001; Lansky 2001). Hegemonic masculinity in practice devalues not only women, but also men who do not fit into the idealized version of masculinity. “Masculine gender role training is probably more rigid than its feminine equivalent...men are confined to a much narrower range of acceptable gender performances,” (Lansky 2001) and we can see examples of how this plays out in our society fairly easily. Conservatives heavily ridiculed President Obama, questioned his authenticity, and called him “pathetic” and “weak” after he shed tears when discussing the 2012 Sandy Hook School Shooting (Bobic 2016; Lussenhop 2016). Homosexual men have been systematically discriminated against throughout the history of the military

(Sinclair 2009). Up until President Clinton's 1993 policy of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, homosexual men were strictly banned from the United States military, a policy that presumed that homosexuality inherently rendered someone not masculine enough—or rather, too feminine—to be capable of serving in the military (Sinclair 2009). Even the DADT policy assumes that homosexuality, once known of, has a negative effect on an organization structured on idealized masculinity (Sinclair 2009).

In the same way there are specific characteristics that we associate with masculinity, femininity can be defined by our social construction as well. The words that evoke these characteristics include pleasant, modest, helpless, dependent, emotional, cooperative, naïve, kind, selfless, serving, affectionate, understanding, and empathetic (Wilkie 2012; Takacs 2005; Cohn 1993; Tickner 1992; Fagenson 1990; Echabe 2010). Even though research widely accepts that masculinity and femininity are on a spectrum, society dictates that femininity is anything that is the opposite of masculinity. What is most important about the relationship between masculinity and femininity and the rhetoric with which we elicit their imagery, is the value we place on masculinity above femininity. In *Gendering War Talk*, Carol Cohn (1993, 229) argues

“...human characteristics are dichotomized, divided into pairs of polar opposites that are supposedly mutually exclusive: mind is opposed to body; culture to nature; thought to feeling; logic to intuition; objectivity to subjectivity; aggression to passivity; confrontation to accommodation; abstraction to particularity; public to private; political to personal, ad

nauseam. In each case, the first term of the “opposites” is associated with male, the second with female. And in each case, our society values the first over the second.”

The idea that these characteristics are mutually exclusive to one another is the foundation of the problem. When a person begins to exhibit one of these traits, the rest of society automatically positions them on the spectrum of masculinity and femininity (Cohn 1993). We force people—and policy—into boxes and place value on the categorization we’ve given them. So if a woman uses emotion, she is automatically characterized as feminine and is excluded from being able to own any of the traits we associate with masculinity, and because we inherently perceive feminine qualities as less valuable than masculine qualities, this creates a problem for women seeking positions of power. We can see now that using certain words as descriptors lead to how we categorize a subject subconsciously; and more specifically, we can see how it impacts the social construction of the Iran deal. When a male politician posits that his female opponent is “kind-hearted” and “well-meaning,” we associate her with feminized language, and even though he never said that she was “dependent” or “naïve” we assume that she is anyway. In the same way, when the Iran nuclear deal is characterized as “vulnerable” or “weak,” it is automatically precluded from being “responsible” or “smart,” because these descriptors exist on opposite sides of the gender spectrum.

I seek to use the concepts of masculinity and femininity to uncover the ways in which soft power policy solutions are constructed through the institution

of gendered rhetoric that foreign policy exists within. The contradictions that masculine and feminine language bring to life when used to build the rhetoric surrounding foreign policy solutions serve to characterize such policies as either valuable or invaluable. The feminine descriptive language discussed above is the specific type of descriptive rhetoric that I search for in my discourse analysis of the Iran deal. The Iran deal is consistently characterized as feminine because it is soft power and thus it is inherently feminized in nature, especially when it is in direct opposition to hard power solutions that involve military power, which owns an archetype of strength and dominance.

### **American Foreign Policy and Gender**

In general, there is a difference in the way that foreign policy overall is gendered in comparison to domestic policy. Foreign policy, because of its relationship to war, power, conflict, and security and to the language that inherently follows these concepts, is gendered masculine (Tickner 1988). Domestic issues, such as health care and education policy, are typically gendered feminine because they are associated with characteristics such as nurturing (Tickner 1988). The public—policies that affect the greater good, i.e. foreign policy—is in opposition to the private—policies that impact citizens more in their daily lives, i.e. domestic policy. This perception of foreign policy as innately masculine and domestic policy as feminine means that female voices are considered unimportant and unreliable (Tickner 1992). This gendering of the two

types of policy is why it's been easier for women to enter into the overall field of public policy work through feminized positions than through masculinized positions. Currently, there is one woman on the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, but ten women on the Committee on Education and the Workforce. It is important to recognize the way that our perceptions of public policy can have an effect on the people that we accept as worthy of playing a role in our foreign affairs.

After the 2002 midterm elections, Bill Clinton famously said, "When people are feeling insecure, they'd rather have someone who is strong and wrong than someone who's weak and right," (Goldstein 2003). The Bush administration's response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks was littered with language about strength, dominance, and aggression in the face of a challenge (Christensen 2008; Coe et al. 2007; Drew 2004; Ferguson 2007; Goldstein 2003; Takacs 2005). The Republican party did well in the midterm elections following the 9/11 attack because their rhetoric expressed what Richard Goldstein (2003) called "patriarchal values of strength and order," while the Democratic party talked about empathy, equity, conciliation, and peace talks—all words that trigger a feminine image in the minds of their constituents.

The strategic use of gendered language by the Bush administration didn't just refer to statements about dominating the Middle East and fighting back against terrorism. The language used by President Bush signified that America in

its current state was vulnerable; the United States needed to use military might—a masculine entity due to its inherent aggressive nature—to “defend its honor,” to protect the weakest among us—women and children—and become survivors of our tragic victimization (Drew 2004; Christensen 2008). The United States was painted as a feminine entity, one that was clearly weak and susceptible to violation, and the only solution was to begin projecting strength and hard power, that is to become more masculine (Drew 2004). There was no mistake in the way the Bush administration chose to characterize the United States. The mixture of feminine and masculine language to create the image of the United States military as the knight in shining armor swooping in on a white horse to save the damsel in distress—which became U.S. citizens, Western ideals of democracy and freedom, and women and children in the Middle East wrapped up in one—helped to legitimize the War on Terror.

George W. Bush was certainly not the first president to promote the idea of a masculine America. The rhetoric surrounding American foreign policy has always taken on a tone of dominance and aggression (Dean 1998; Enloe 2005). The conversation about American foreign policy and gender is much deeper than just the rhetoric used by politicians and journalists on TV and in the newspapers, because foreign policy becomes more than intangible language. Historically, policies of aggression involving military force have been, and continue to be, perceived as more viable options than those of diplomacy involving negotiations

(Cohn 1993). The concepts of hegemonic masculinity and mutual exclusivity discussed previously allow us to draw important conclusions about why aggressive policies are more legitimate than peaceful ones. Dominant males who personify the ideals of the true “manly man” are the people who have controlled American foreign policy since it existed, and the few women who have cracked into this glass encased field, such as Condoleezza Rice, Madeleine Albright, and Hillary Clinton, have been attributed many of the qualities identified as masculine.

In his 1998 article titled “Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy,” author Robert Dean stated, “Internalized ideals of manliness influenced the way leaders perceived threats posed by foreign powers. Fear of the consequences of being judged “unmanly” influenced the reckoning of political costs or benefits associated with possible responses to those threats.” The relative success of the United States is often credited to our style of foreign policy, and because that foreign policy has traditionally been saturated with a masculine dogma, any policies associated with soft power and femininity are delegitimized (Goldstein 2003; Tickner 1992; Cohn 1993).

This inherent delegitimization of soft power policy solutions limits the scope with which American foreign policy can respond to the multitude of challenges that face our political leaders on a daily basis. Shortly following World War II, Albert Einstein notoriously stated, “You cannot simultaneously prevent

and prepare for war.” What Einstein was alluding to was the concept of nuclear deterrence and the building up of arsenals of biological and nuclear weapons. Einstein’s statement characterizes what I argue throughout this thesis, whereas, more generally, he was alluding to the threat of force—which is the use of hard power—in order to prevent another war. There exists a dichotomy between soft and hard power—one cannot exist in the same instance as another; and furthermore, because hard power has historically been accepted as the most logical way to respond to foreign adversaries—clearly Einstein’s warning meant little to both the United States and Russia—soft power policy solutions are systematically overlooked as even potential choices. In some ways there was actually hypocrisy among the feminized rhetoric used to describe the Iran Deal; it was cast as both “dangerous” and “ineffective.” Regardless, those who opposed the deal were baffled that it was even being considered as a viable solution in the first place, and that mindset exists because of the reality of illegitimacy that soft power lives in.

### **Research Design & Methodology**

As the previous sections alluded to, themes of masculinity and femininity are pervasive in American foreign policy. We can see them in the existence of particular stories that are told about what policies are viable, and the language used to critique these policies. In *“W” Stands for Women*, author Michaele L. Ferguson (2007, 13) states, “Rhetoric is never merely rhetoric, it constructs a

particular (if incomplete) world view that enables us to see certain connections, yet occludes others. Like a picture frame, the rhetorical framing of political issues shapes and contextualizes the perspective of the audience.” Perception is reality, and rhetoric is undeniably used to influence the way that abstract concepts such as foreign policy become reified. Discourse, as it is essentially the action of nuanced communication, is constantly changing. Thus, the importance of tracking discourse over time is unquestionable.

This thesis has two main components: the empirical and the theoretical. The empirical evidence—found through a discourse analysis of the Iran Deal, discussed below, and a contextual discussion of masculinity, femininity, and the relationship between gender and American foreign policy—is used to shape the theoretical discussion of the legitimacy granted to the Iran Deal. It is important to note that this style of research intrinsically links the research completed to the researcher. Discourse analysis is a unique style of research in that it is based on observation and theory building, both of which are subjective and interpretative in nature. This study in particular is loosely influenced by Roxanne Doty’s 1993 discourse analysis of the U.S.’ counterinsurgency policy in the Philippines.

Doty (1993) uses what she calls the “Discursive Practices Approach,” to study the “linguistic composition of reality” in regards to U.S.-Philippines policy. I use this approach because I am interested in uncovering the underlying meanings and implications of the discourses on a particular American foreign

policy. While Doty (1993) also points out the connection between the researcher and the research due to the interpretative nature, she explains the validity and reliability well. Doty (1993) analyzes rhetoric by looking for distinctions in the presupposition, predication, and subject positioning of the subjects and objects related to her topic of choice. At its most fundamental level, discourse analysis is about identifying a subject, examining the language used to describe and discuss that subject, and then explaining the meaning given to that subject through its description. Meaningful discourse in and of itself is not always easily identified, and discourse analysis in practice can be ambiguous because of the multitude of meanings one type of discourse can take on at any point in time. Discourse analysis allows us to identify the ways in which our language is built upon a system of hierarchies and preconceived notions that impact our understanding of any given topic. Through my discourse analysis of the Iran Deal I seek to investigate the identity created for this specific soft power foreign policy solution through the rhetoric used to discuss the agreement. In my conclusion, I use the competing gendered characterizations of the Iran deal by critics and supporters to argue that this structure of language impacts the way that the Iran deal, and other soft power solutions thereafter, is perceived and thought about. I argue that the different language used to discuss the Iran deal is not simply arbitrary, but actually constructs multiple realities within which the Iran deal exists depending on the type of language that is used.

The main reason that Doty's 1993 discourse analysis in particular influenced this research is because she emphasizes that the empirical analysis of rhetoric is not interpreted subjectively by the researcher. The interpretive nature of her discourse analysis lies in how she explains what the existence of that rhetoric means. This aspect in particular is what separates a discourse analysis from a content analysis. Like Roxanne Doty, this research does not merely state the existence of certain content. Instead, this research pushes one step further. Through my interpretation, I theorize what the implications are of the existence of feminine and masculine language in the rhetoric used by those discussing the Iran Deal, and how that language codified the Iran Deal depending on which way a speaker gendered the agreement. Specifically, I discuss how the rhetoric surrounding the Iran Deal shaped the understanding of the legitimacy of the deal as an action of foreign policy.

The discourse analysis portion of this research is based on articles from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* from January through December of 2015. This range of dates was chosen for two reasons. First, there were several major developments regarding the Iran Deal made throughout the year of 2015. Second, the Google Trends data shows that the largest spikes in searches for the Iran Deal all happened between March 24, 2015 and September 12, 2015. The initial spike correlates with the announcement of a letter sent by Republican lawmakers in Congress to political leaders in Iran threatening the likelihood of the

deal's failure without U.S. congressional support which President Obama slammed as unconstitutional (Davenport 2018). This range of trends also includes the official announcement of an agreed upon deal, the support of the deal through a UN resolution, and the sending of this deal to Congress by President Obama (Davenport 2018). This trend data led me to believe that not only was the policy more prominent in media publications at this time, but also that more people were coming into contact with the rhetoric being used to discuss it. Thus, because I seek to argue that gendered discourse constructed the reality in which the Iran deal was perceived by those who participated in and bought into such discourse, I decided that the year of 2015 would be the most effective year from which to draw my empirical evidence.

In any situation of foreign policy, the main creators of the discourse being used are the politicians implementing or arguing against a policy, and the journalists commentating on their process. In this media analysis, I chose to use articles from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* because both publications are prominent political watchdogs of the United States government with significant reader bases, and neither is known for being substantially biased towards either end of the political spectrum (Glader 2017). I chose which articles specifically to analyze through a random sample. I found through the LexisNexis database that there were 467 total articles in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*—258 from the *Times* and 218 from the *Post*—that mentioned the

Iran Deal from January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2015. I inputted this range of numbers (1-467) into Excel to rearrange them into a randomized list, and then analyzed the articles in the order generated by Excel. I did not have a specific number of articles that I expected to read, but rather I decided I would continue reading articles until I felt like I wasn't receiving any new empirical evidence from my analysis.

Keeping in mind the Discursive Practices Approach outlined by Roxanne Doty (1993), I evaluated each article for descriptive language that painted the Iran Deal as either masculine or feminine. Because we know that both explicit and implicit rhetoric have an effect on the reality that language creates, I categorized my observations in these two separate categories. I used the descriptors that were repeated most commonly when discussing the Iran deal to structure my discussion of the reality this rhetoric creates. These are words used by politicians—domestic and international, as well as authors from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Notably, most of the people present in the discussions of the Iran Deal are men. Though the use of feminine and masculine rhetoric is not dependent upon the maleness or femaleness of the person speaking, it is interesting that the most prominent actors and commentators of the Deal were men. The Iran deal specifically was chosen because this policy solution encompassed multilateral negotiations and diplomacy—two of the main signifiers of soft power. The deal was also heavily debated and I expected there to be an

effort from those who did not support it to characterize the policy in an unfavorable light. In addition, the Iran Deal—as opposed to other issues I considered, such as responses to the Syrian Refugee crisis and the debate regarding the competition for funding between the State Department and the Department of Defense—has transcended academic and humanitarian discourse; the agreement has steadily been apart of household public discourse as well. Throughout the recent presidential election, a candidate’s position on the Iran deal was a frequent topic, whereas the Syrian Refugee crisis and the funding debate were less common. I thought that it was important to choose a debate that was prominent in both the professional and public aspects of foreign policy because of the emphasis I place on the ability rhetoric has to impact widespread perception.

The descriptors observed were used in all different aspects of the Iran Deal. They were present in discussions regarding the writing of the policy, the development of negotiations, the implementation process, and the potential outcomes of the proposed policy. Additionally, this rhetoric was also used concerning the individuals involved in the establishment of the policy, namely members of the Obama administration. In the case that a descriptor was only used to describe President Obama himself or his administration, but was not used to describe the Iran Deal, it has been italicized in the tables below.

## **Findings**

As previously stated, this section of my analysis is grounded in empirical evidence. I observed the language used to discuss the Iran Deal by identifying adjectives, adverbs, and characteristics prescribed to the deal. The methodology with which I studied each article is similar to the “predication” methodology of Roxanne Doty (1993). The articles used in this media analysis are listed in the Appendix in the order by which I analyzed them.

There are two existing tables that organize my findings; the information in these tables is categorized in three different ways. Table 1 organizes the explicit language used, while Table 2 organizes the implicit language. Then, these descriptors are categorized as either *for* or *against* and as either *feminine* or *masculine*. By *for* or *against* I do not simply mean whether the language was positive or negative, but rather whether the owner of the language was supportive or unsupportive of the Iran Deal. This style of presentation was chosen so as to best juxtapose the sheer amount of masculine rhetoric used in the discourse supporting foreign policy in comparison to the amount of feminine rhetoric used by those who oppose the policy. These differences seem to be particularly stark when the prevailing discourse is effectively a debate about whether or not a certain policy should be implemented.

The explicit language, presented in Table 1, is not surprising. These descriptors were taken from phrases such as, “an imperfect deal,” “a smarter, more responsible way to protect,” “strong and disciplined diplomacy,”

“vulnerabilities of the deal,” and “worrisome implications.” These are direct phrases that politicians used when discussing the Iran Deal in public settings (such as on the House and Senate floors, in press conferences, and in television interviews) or were stated directly to journalists, and were then reported in one of the two media outlets. In some cases, such as with the phrase “Iran...[is] rubbing Obama’s face in the *weakness* of his enforcement position,” (emphasis my own) the language is used not by a politician, but instead directly by the author of the article. As can be seen, there is a significant difference in the type of language that those who supported the Iran Deal chose to use in comparison to the type of language used by those who did not support the agreement.

**Table 1: Explicit Descriptors**

	<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>
<b>Feminine</b>	Imperfect (3) Multilateral (2) <i>Passionate</i> (2)	Vulnerable (2) Worrisome (1) [A] burden (1) Humiliating (1) Dependent [on compliance] (3) Dependent [on Iranians] (2) Imperfect (1) Dangerous (4) [A] misjudgment (1) Complex (1) <i>Soft</i> (1) <i>Weak</i> (1)
<b>Masculine</b>	Smart (1) Strong (2) Responsible (1) Disciplined (1)	

Valuable (1)
Promises possibility (1)
Appropriate (1)
Fair (1)
Comprehensive (1)
[Exemplifies] leadership (2)

This difference can also be seen in the implicit language, presented in Table 2, that was used. These descriptors were taken from phrases such as, “to signal readiness and restore a credible military option,” “providing a pyromaniac with matches,” “does not inspire confidence,” “instead of chest-beating,” “better than nothing,” “spur a nuclear arms race,” “increases the chances of war,” “disloyal to the U.S.,” and “will sustain the military options in case it becomes necessary.”

**Table 2: Implicit Descriptors**

	<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>
<b>Feminine</b>	Mediocre (5)	Dependent [on military backup] (6) Powerless (5) Submissive (6) Passive (3) Volatile (6) Unpreparedness (2) Illegitimate (2) Flawed (4) [Inspires feelings of] doubt, fear, hesitation (13)
<b>Masculine</b>	Civilized (1) Loyal (1) Patriotic (4) Adequate (3) Reasonable (6) Broad (2)	

Far-reaching (2)
------------------

The rhetoric listed in these tables has also been elementarily quantified. The parenthetical numbers next to each descriptor signify the number of times that descriptor appeared in the discourse analysis process. Initially, I was concerned that the limited number of explicit descriptors found would be limiting in my research. Because this is a random sample taken, it can be inferred that similar descriptors would be found throughout the articles that were not analyzed. Additionally, a significant amount of the descriptors come quotes of different speakers, and many of the explicit descriptors illicit similar connotations and implications. For instance, “vulnerable” and “worrisome,” though not the same word, bring forward similar feelings of inferiority and uncertainty. This shows that, though many of the explicit descriptors were only found once throughout the analysis, there was a widespread use of feminine language by critics and masculine language by supporters.

These numbers show an interesting disparity in the commonality of implicit and explicit language. In the discourse analysis, much of the explicit descriptors were seen only once or twice, while many of the implicit descriptors were seen more often. Though this is not relevant to the discussion of masculinity and femininity in foreign policy, this observation draws interesting questions

about the way that politicians discuss policies when addressing the public. Additionally, Table 1 and Table 2 show a notable difference in the amount of masculine and feminine language used depending on whether the person speaking was a supporter or not. Supporters of the Iran deal used a very minimal amount of feminine language when discussing why they were supporting the agreement; while those who did not support the Iran deal *only* used feminine language. No masculine language was explicitly used to show disagreement with the deal, and in general we wouldn't expect to hear someone—neither a supporter nor dissenter—say that any action of foreign policy should be considered “too strong” or “too powerful.” This observation is supported by the previous discussion of foreign policy being generally characterized in a masculine manner. Because the default characteristics within foreign policy are masculine, it stands to reason that masculine language is used as long as the policy is supported, and that feminine language is only used to argue against a policy.

My main goal in completing this research is to answer one question: Are specific policy solutions—for example, the Iran Deal—characterized as feminine or masculine? Due to the existing research that shows that foreign policy is almost entirely discussed through a masculine lens, I presupposed that the answer to my question would be that a soft power solution such as the Iran Deal would be characterized as feminine. Tables 1 and 2 provide evidence of my own that this is true. There is an overwhelming amount of feminine language used by those who

opposed the Iran Deal—as stated previously, these individuals did not use *any* masculine language to argue against the Iran Deal.

The findings of this discourse analysis also show that masculine language was used in direct opposition to feminine language. The tables provide further evidence that the rhetoric used in the discourse of foreign policy is gendered. Based on the observation that those who did not support the Iran deal used exclusively feminine language to describe it, and that the supporters of the Iran deal used almost entirely masculine language leads to the conclusion that masculine qualities are fundamentally more valuable in this realm of policy than feminine language. Supporters of the Iran Deal specifically chose to leave out descriptors such as “peaceful,” or “compromising,” or “nonviolent” because, even though the agreement was all of those things, these are not characteristics that make policymakers, journalists, or the public feel confident in a policy. Instead supporters focused solely on the typical rhetoric of foreign policy used to describe hard power policy solutions like “strength” and “security.” Even when President Obama praised the agreement for not being a symbol of “chest-beating,” he paired this phrase with words like “smart” and “responsible,” so that instead of this seeming like a criticism of masculinity, it became a criticism of barbarism; he painted a picture of the conqueror versus the conquered, a civilized, strategic diplomat versus an unintelligent caveman. Even in criticizing toxic masculinity, President Obama still managed to portray an image of a more advanced,

sophisticated type of masculinity—one that still very much held the power and control in the U.S.-Iran relationship.

Though there are many interesting items of discussion regarding the language I observed to be the most commonly used to describe the Iran Deal, there are three items which I believe are most important when considering the descriptive rhetoric surrounding it. The emphasis placed on the deal's dependent nature, the implication of mere mediocrity, and the use of masculine rhetoric by the supporters of the deal are the three predominant themes that I identified.

### **Emphasis on Dependence**

One of the most common themes in the language used by the opposition was that of dependence. Explicitly and implicitly, those opposed to the Iran Deal claimed that it was dependent on Iran, dependent on compliance, and dependent on military backup. The supporters of the Iran deal also reinforced the deal as a multilateral operation, which has interesting connotations in and of itself. The idea of dependence alone brings with it ideas of weakness, naïveté, and inability.

There are separate meanings between the Iran Deal being dependent on Iran and being dependent on Iran's compliance. At the very least, there are separate connotations. In an article written for the Washington Post, journalist Dennis Ross (Appendix A, Item 24) said that the success of the Iran Deal "depends heavily on Iranians allowing access to inspect sites." The identification of another state becoming dominant over the United States is incredibly

detrimental to the image of a foreign policy solution among policymakers. This specification of the Iran Deal being dependent on not just something outside of the written agreement itself, but on another foreign entity, i.e. Iran, in particular signifies a complete lack of control owned by the United States. As discussed previously, the United States places an incredible amount of effort into being the most dominant, and therefore the most masculine, state in any foreign relationship. Dominance evokes other descriptive words such as assertive, effective, powerful, and, above all, complete control of the situation; all things that are the opposite of dependence. Dominance is a key aspect of idealized masculinity as it directly includes being aggressive and risk-taking, and striving for power and success (Pacholok 2009).

Dependence on compliance, though it essentially has the same meaning when taken out of context, has a slightly different undertone. Senator Rand Paul said that the deal is “dependent on compliance,” suggesting that the deal is only legitimate if it works. In order to see how this implication relates to the ideas of masculinity and femininity we will have to dig a little deeper. Recall earlier in this paper when I discussed the relationship between femininity and femaleness. Though femininity and femaleness are not directly correlated, the language of femininity is often assumed to apply to women, and, vice versa, the characteristics and experiences of women are assumed to be distinctly feminine. Particularly in the field of foreign policy, women, if allowed a chance, are then expected to

prove themselves. They are only accepted as viable players once they prove that their policies work. Men, on the other hand, are assumed to be innately good at navigating the realm of international relations. When Senator Rand Paul stated that the Iran Deal was “dependent on compliance,” he was implying that the deal would have to prove its worth, that time would tell whether or not the agreement was viable—in the same way a woman would have to as the Secretary of State. What’s most interesting about this is not that it is fundamentally wrong to want a policy or a person to prove their worth through their outcomes, but rather that only feminine entities—be it policies or people—are expected to. Masculine entities, however, have failed time and time again. Aggressive actions do not always fix the problems they set out to fix, often they even make them worse, and masculine leaders, because they are human, have made countless numbers of mistakes. Still, these masculine units are assumed to be the most natural and effective options.

The reinforcement of the Iran deal as a multilateral operation has a similar effect in terms of drawing themes of femininity. The idea of being multilateral in and of itself is not a bad thing—it means the U.S. was following international protocol and respecting other states with interests in the region. Multilateral operations can also be considered a form of protection from retaliation of aggrieved states (Ikenberry 2003). Still, there is an underlying implication of dependence on other nations that follows multilateralism. It also brings with it

connotations of compromise and shared power and leadership responsibility.

These are all concepts that fall under the category of feminized rhetoric, and serve to place multilateralism into this category as well. The idea of a policy being managed by the United States as dependent on the buy in and political authority of other states and entities such as the European Union and United Nations served to secure the soft policy solution of the Iran deal as an inherently feminine action.

The emphasis placed upon dependence on military action is perhaps the most obviously feminine rhetoric available within the larger theme of dependence in general. General Martin E. Dempsey, the outgoing chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time of the implementation of the Iran Deal, said that the agreement [was] “better than launching a military strike, but I will sustain the military options in case it becomes necessary.” President Obama attempted to mollify concerns about the deal by assuring that Israel would always have military superiority over their neighbors. Senator Marco Rubio called for the United States to instead gain a stable military position in the Middle East “to signal readiness and restore a credible military option.” The King of Saudi Arabia was unhappy with the United State’s approach to Iran, and negotiated a \$1 billion arms agreement with the Pentagon to provide weapons for the Saudi Arabian war effort and bolster Saudi forces in order to reassure those with concerns about the shortcomings of the Iran Deal. Saudi Arabia was noted as becoming “increasingly assertive,” signifying that states who choose to use weapons are assertive, while

those who choose not to use weapons are the opposite: passive, meek, compliant. The previous discussion of hegemonic masculinity, idealized masculinity, and military masculinity all being relatively synonymous make the relationship between the rhetoric of dependence on the military and lack of masculinity quite palpable. The assertion that the Iran Deal would not be sufficient on its own accord from both the support and the dissent implies that the deal is feminine in nature, and is a strong indication that this form of foreign policy is not seen as entirely legitimate because of that implication.

“Weakness is *always* considered a danger when issues of national security are at stake,” states Tickner (1992, emphasis my own). The frequent portrayal of the Iran Deal as dependent in any form did more than just link the deal to ideas of weakness because it was also consistently paired with phrases that codified the deal as dangerous. This is significant because it further allowed the option of using military force to seem like the *safe* alternative, even though the use of military troops puts the livelihood of American soldiers in direct risk. Classifying the Iran Deal as a dangerous, unstable, or volatile policy solution that could only be made credible through the use of a hard power solution created a dichotomy in which the feminized Iran Deal existed in direct opposition to the masculinized military. This hierarchy inherently places hard power solutions above soft power solutions, and therefore allowed the Iran Deal to be depicted as a less legitimate response than the use of military force.

## **Implication of Mediocrity & Lack of Confidence**

Even though they are considered synonyms, there is a slight difference between the words “adequate” and “mediocre,” and that difference leaves one characterized as masculine and the other as feminine. When we decide something is adequate, we think of phrases such as, “This will work.” When something is defined as mediocre, however, the phrase that comes to mind is, “We can find something better.” Adjectives such as “imperfect” and “flawed” were used both by those who supported and those who did not support the deal, but the tone with which they were used is what signaled a difference between adequacy and mediocrity. Both supporters, Senator Blumenthal said that the agreement was “imperfect, [but] the best path forward,” and Senator Peters said that the deal “fell short [but that] ... alternatives [were] more dangerous.” Over 100 former American ambassadors came together to defend the agreement, saying that it was “comprehensive and rigorously negotiated,” and that though it was “not a perfect or risk-free settlement...without it the risks would be far greater.” Both of these statements imply that the deal itself would do, it wasn’t perfect, but it was acceptable.

Mediocrity more so than adequacy was implied across the aisle. There was significant emphasis placed on the “doubts,” “fears,” and “skepticism” surrounding the deal. President Obama and his administration pushed the agreement as an ultimatum. He said, “No deal means a greater chance of more

war in the Middle East,” and that the choice being made was “between diplomacy and some sort of war.” The opposition used similar language to that used by the supporters when saying that the deal was imperfect and flawed, but then followed up by saying that they were in favor of “tougher” and “more ironclad” deals—specifically deals that included the use of the United States military. President Obama’s language made the Iran Deal something that was standing directly in the middle of stability and chaos. The ultimatum he gave policymakers signified that it didn’t matter if there was a better deal to be had, this was the one that had been negotiated and it was the one they would be moving forward with. The language he used was the equivalent of a parent giving in to their toddler whining about how something “just isn’t fair.” In this metaphor, Obama-as-parent says to Congress-as-whining-toddler, “You’re right, it isn’t fair, but you’re just going to have to deal with it.” Adequacy is something we seek, while mediocrity is something we seek to overcome.

Similar to the discussion of the emphasis placed on the agreement’s dependence on compliance, the rhetoric of adequacy and mediocrity is gendered through our understanding of how femininity and masculinity relate to femaleness and maleness. Women are consistently held to different workplace standards than men, and it is well documented that women receive less workplace promotions than men. Often this is attributed to women’s personalities; hypocritical standards exist for women in positions of superiority in which they cannot be too strong or

too soft or too mean or too nice or too loud or too quiet or too or too or too. When it comes time for promotions, men are almost always assumed to be adequate for the position, and if they are excellent candidates that is just an extra bonus.

Women, on the other hand, are presumed to have certain personality qualities that they have to overcome, evoking a sense of mediocrity and less confidence, meaning that women often have to prove not only adequacy but true excellence in order to be chosen for a promotion. Similarly, those opposed to the Iran Deal emphasized a sense of mediocrity at best—signifying that there absolutely was something better out there, specifically something more closely aligned with a hard power solution.

### **Use of Masculine Language by Supporters**

Those who supported the Iran deal almost exclusively used masculine rhetoric when discussing the agreement in public settings. Phrases such as “increase of regional security,” “America will be safer and stronger,” and “strong and disciplined diplomacy,” were common. Some supporters stated that those who chose not to support the agreement were “treasonous” and “disloyal to the U.S.,” implying that support for the deal was patriotic and loyal—both masculine terms. Though this theme in the rhetoric is not directly related to the use of feminine language, I think that the implications are just as strong. In order to attempt to legitimize and increase support for a diplomacy deal, a type of soft power associated with femininity, supporters were careful to use the same type of

language that would be used to discuss military action. They assured those who were uncertain about the deal that the Iran Deal negotiations would bring strength, stability, and security.

The rhetoric with which supporters framed the Iran Deal is significant because it is purposefully lacking of language that included words such as “peace,” “compromise,” and “nonviolent.” Though peace and the absence of violence are typically the goal of any foreign policy—wars are waged in the name of stopping violent injustice—the use of these words were not used because supporters knew that they would not create the reality that those with concerns wanted to hear. The Obama Administration’s Iran deal was fighting an uphill battle, and policymakers across the aisle wanted to know what the benefits of this deal would truly be. Even the type of masculine rhetoric President Obama employed was strategic. In order to make the Iran Deal agreement seem like the most viable option available, he simultaneously condemned brute force and lauded a sophisticated, civilized function of power. Obama was quoting as saying that instead of “chest-beating,” it should be accepted that “strong and disciplined diplomacy is the best way.” There was a conscious effort here to reinforce that this policy would still result in the United States’ strength and power over another state entity.

## **Conclusion**

The observations I have made lead me to more nuanced findings than I originally expected to arrive upon. I did expect to find the discussion of the Iran deal to be largely characterized as feminine in nature. However, the overwhelming use of masculine language by supporters of the Iran deal was not something I expected to observe in this context. At the outset, I believed that I would see two different types of feminine language being used; supporters using positive feminine language such as “compromise,” and dissenters using language similar to what was seen—negative ideas such as “vulnerable.” The dichotomy that exists between the use of feminine and masculine language—feminine language to express a negative view and masculine language used to express a positive view—has incredible implications on what the use of feminine language does to any form of foreign policy. Previous research on masculinity and femininity shows us that masculine characteristics are inherently more valued in our society, and as such the feminine characterization of the Iran deal served to render it less legitimate than a more masculine policy. The empirical evidence of this study allows us to infer that feminine rhetoric is used to characterize policy solutions as an illegitimate act of foreign policy. Though I originally expected to be able to draw this conclusion in relevance to only soft power solutions, I wonder if this is truly the case. There should be further research done on the gendered rhetoric surrounding foreign policy solutions. The findings of this research raise an important question about whether or not feminine rhetoric is

used to negate any action of foreign policy as a viable option. Furthermore, is masculine language used intentionally to make feminized policy solutions seem more legitimate and effective?

This research is not without limitations. First, it is entirely possible that my sole analysis of newspaper articles contributed to the type of rhetoric that I found discussing the Iran deal. By limiting my analysis to exclude television news media, I may have also neglected rhetoric that was actually intended to reach a wider public audience. As television news media is typically more politically biased than print news, it would be interesting to extend this analysis to discussions of the Iran deal within television news media to see if there is a difference in the type of rhetoric used to characterize the agreement. The use of only print news media may have also contributed to the lack of explicit descriptors found. In each article, there was often only one quote that could be considered as intending to characterize the Iran deal. In many of the articles, unless they were opinion based pieces, journalists refrained from making any of their own comments about the intrinsic nature of the deal. This lack of biased descriptive language from journalists meant that most of the rhetoric was coming from politicians, and only searching for this rhetoric in print news media limited the volume available for analysis.

The difference between print news media and television news media implicates a different audience as well. Television news media is directed more

towards the general public looking to receive as much news as possible as quickly as possible. Print news media is typically more detailed and discusses current events in a much more educational manner. The rhetoric used in television news media is specifically directed towards an uninformed public, while print news media takes quotes from direct interviews, written statements, political hearings, or premeditated public addresses. The audience of print news media is a more informed public are often taken from a situation directly related to the policy being discussed, which means that the rhetoric being used seeks to delegitimize a policy solution for a completely different audience. In the case of this analysis, the rhetoric sought to delegitimize the Iran deal for political actors on the other side of the aisle from the speaker. The language found here shows supporters seeking to change the minds of dissenters and vice versa. If further research was to be done regarding the rhetoric used in television news media, the audience would shift and so would the rhetoric.

Furthermore, the Iran deal was an incredibly politicized agreement, and thus the discussion largely tended to be black and white. Though supporters of the deal accepted and stated that the agreement had its flaws, they stayed consistent in their use of language that characterized the deal as the most reasonable option. On the contrary, those who did not support the deal did not waiver from their characterization of the deal as a dangerous policy that would not do what it was intended to do. Furthermore, the time frame with which I analyzed the rhetoric of

the Iran deal was in the middle of an extremely politicized relationship between Republicans and Democrats, and between Congress and the Executive branch. I believe it is possible that the extreme politicization of the deal led to the polarized nature of the rhetoric that surrounded this debate. Similar research should be done to analyze the rhetoric of soft power policy solutions that are not so politicized to find if there is a similar pattern in the use of feminine and masculine rhetoric.

In the case of the Iran deal, feminine language was used by those who did not agree with the policy as a worthwhile solution, while masculine language was used by those who did. In order to prove that this characterization had an impact on the perception of the Iran deal as legitimate or illegitimate, more research would need to be done in regards to public perception of the specific descriptors used to discuss the policy. It would also be interesting to apply this theory to other instances of soft power policy solutions. One such policy debate that would produce interesting detail to this discussion is the War on Terror. There has been a major emphasis throughout multiple presidential administrations that the United States government does not and will not ever negotiate with terrorists, but we consistently interact with state entities that have committed atrocities against their citizens more horrific than the average terrorist attack. While the approach to terrorism is riddled with grey areas, it is interesting to consider how our preconceived notions and innate acceptance of hard power policy solutions may

inhibit us from considering how any sort of soft power solution may be better suited to reaching the goals of the War on Terror.

Currently, there is a noteworthy discussion happening regarding the United States approach to our relationship with North Korea. The Trump administration has maintained simultaneous uses of hard and soft power in response to North Korea; threatening military attacks while also verbally supporting the existence of a diplomatic relationship between President Trump and Kim Jong Un. A discourse analysis of President Trump's proposed policy solutions in general would surely yield interesting insights, but this policy in particular has been a highlight of his since he began his presidential campaign. President Trump has relied on the use of masculine imagery of dominance from the very beginning, so I believe we would find similar findings in that the rhetoric surrounding a diplomatic relationship with North Korea would probably be characterized by masculine terms. Furthermore, it would be interesting to analyze the way in which Republicans and Democrats have changed their rhetorical framing of the debate between the use of hard or soft power policy solutions from the Obama administration to the Trump administration.

The implications of these findings are far-reaching within the field of foreign policy, and beg much larger questions. If soft power solutions are delegitimized through feminine rhetoric what does this mean for individuals who are not perceived to own the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, such as

women and heterosexual men, seeking positions in foreign policy? Liberals and typically Democrats, are more likely to be proponents of soft power solutions than of hard power solutions, what does the delegitimization of soft power solutions do to the credibility of Democrats in the field of foreign policy? To what extent does the public's perception of the value implicit to masculinity and femininity shape the discourse within which policy solutions are discussed? How important is it that soft power policy solutions are at the very least perceived as legitimate in order for them to be effective? Is there any truth to the characterization of soft power policy solutions as less legitimate than hard power policy solutions? Perhaps the most important question that this research begs is one of change. How, with such an intrinsic relationship to masculinity, can the field of foreign policy separate itself from the gendered bias it is currently steeped in? Furthermore, do we actually want this bias to change?

As stated previously throughout this research, rhetoric is incredibly important. It creates the reality that we exist within, and dictates how we perceive everything around us. The findings of this research have important implications on the perception of femininity on a greater scale within American society. We place a significant amount of responsibility and status on the state, and thus the state's affairs. If the actions of the state continue to be inherently biased against femininity, then progress to correct the value disparity between masculinity and femininity will eventually plateau. Furthermore, as our social construction of

masculinity and femininity causes us to prescribe the characteristics of each to men and women respectively, then this biased rhetoric will only continue to uphold the notion that women are inferior to men in the realm of public matters, including the field of American foreign policy.

The gendered bias that exists within American foreign policy is hindering our ability to curate flexible, multifaceted policies that are easily personalized to different solutions. I hope that as more women begin to enter the field of foreign policy, feminine qualities such as empathy, the propensity to listen, and compassion begin to be more valued in our policymaking strategies. That being said, the women who have progressed the closest to surpassing the ultimate glass ceiling in American foreign policy have all been somewhat hawkish in their foreign policy, which further goes to show that femininity and femaleness are not truly synonymous. Ultimately, regardless of gender, foreign policy actors have to be more cognizant of their preconceived notions of legitimate foreign policy solutions and have to start asking themselves why those preconceived notions exist in the first place. It will take the self-awareness of all those involved in the discourse of foreign policy to recognize how their gender biased language affects the perceptions of the public on subjects beyond those of foreign policy.

### Appendix:

#### Articles Observed in Discourse Analysis (listed in order of observation)

1. Rudoren, Jodi. 2015. "Netanyahu Appoints Right-Wing Politician as Israeli Ambassador to U.N." *The New York Times*
2. Gladstone, Rick and Jodi Rudoren. 2015. "Benjamin Netanyahu, at U.N., Continues to Condemn Iran Nuclear Deal." *The New York Times*
3. Erdbrink, Thomas. 2015. "Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei Urges 'Careful Scrutiny' of Iran Deal." *The New York Times*
4. Shear, Michael D. 2015. "Jonathan Pollard, Spy for Israel, to Be Released on Parole." *The New York Times*
5. Harris, Gardiner. 2015. "Obama's Quiet Vacation Will Yield to a Noisy September." *The New York Times*
6. Mackey, Robert. 2015. "Complete Video of Obama's Case for the Iran Deal." *The New York Times*
7. Birnbaum, Michael and Carol Morello. 2015. "No breakthroughs as Kerry, Putin meet in Sochi." *The Washington Post*
8. Roth, Andrew. 2015. "Russian official denies reports of Iranian general's secret visit." *The Washington Post*
9. Weiner, Rachel. 2015. "Democratic Sen. Ben Cardin says he will vote against the Iran deal." *The Washington Post*
10. No Byline. 2015. "The Iran deal's credibility." *The Washington Post*
11. Shear, Michael D. 2015. "In Speech to Veterans, Obama Says Iran Deal Is 'Smarter' Path to Take." *The New York Times*
12. Weisman, Jonathan and Alexander Burns. 2015. "Iran Deal Opens a Vitriolic Divide Among American Jews." *The New York Times*
13. Davis, Julie Hirschfeld. 2015. "Former U.S. Diplomats Praise Iran Deal." *The New York Times*
14. Kristof, Nicholas. 2015. "Mr. Obama, Try These Arguments for Your Iran Deal." *The New York Times*
15. No Byline. 2015. "The Iran deal hurts U.S. allies." *The Washington Post*
16. DeBonis, Mike. 2015. "Obama may not need veto pen to save Iran deal." *The Washington Post*
17. Kamen, Al and Colby Itkowitz. 2015. "The real winners in the Iran deal: The lawyers." *The Washington Post*
18. Tumulty, Karen and Paul Kane. 2015. "Clinton making a sales pitch for the agreement." *The Washington Post*
19. DeYong, Karen. 2015. "Joint Chiefs chairman offers 'pragmatic' nod to Iran deal." *The Washington Post*
20. Rucker, Philip and Robert Costa. 2015. "Ohio senator tries to dodge Trump's shrapnel." *The Washington Post*

21. Editorial Copy. 2015. "what are the Iran deal alternatives?" *The Washington Post*
22. Editorial Copy. 2015. "Too desperate for an Iran deal." *The Washington Post*
23. Rudoren, Jodi. 2015. "Netanyahu May Turn Iran Defeat to His Favor." *The New York Times*
24. Ross, Dennis. 2015. "Iran deal leaves U.S. with tough questions." *The Washington Post*
25. Davis, Julie Hirschfeld. 2015. "White House Turns to Social Media to Sell the Iran Deal." *The New York Times*
26. Morello, Carol. 2015. "Why this Sunday is a significant day for the Iran nuclear deal." *The Washington Post*
27. Harris, Gardiner. 2015. "Biden Trip to Florida Raises Speculation About Presidential Run." *The New York Times*
28. Bird, Kai. 2015. "The Ghosts That Haunt an Iran Accord." *The New York Times*.
29. Davis, Julie Hirschfeld and Ashley Parker. 2015. "Ambassador Tries to Bridge Gap with U.S., but on Israel's Terms." *The New York Times*
30. Gerson, Michael. 2015. "Obama's bitter endgame on Iran." *The Washington Post*
31. Morello, Carol. 2015. "Key senator says to forget the deadline on Iran talks for a better deal." *The Washington Post*
32. No Byline. 2015. "Today in Politics: A Pledge for Republican Togetherness, on Donald Trump's Terms." *The New York Times*
33. Davis, Julie Hirschfeld. 2015. "Pro-Israel Aipac Creates Group to Lobby Against the Iran Deal." *The New York Times*
34. Dowd, Maureen. 2015. "Hi-Ho, Lone Ranger." *The New York Times*
35. No Byline. 2015. "Today in Politics: Jeb Bush Is Still Waiting for Polling to Catch Up With Fund-Raising." *The New York Times*
36. The Editorial Board. 2015. "Israel and America After the Iran Deal." *The New York Times*
37. No Byline. 2015. "Today in Politics: Democrats Gather for Chicken wings in Shadow of Iowa State Fair." *The New York Times*
38. Weisman, Jonathan and Michael R. Gordon. 2015. "Kerry Defends Iran Nuclear Deal Before Skeptical Senate." *The New York Times*
39. Brooks, David. 2015. "The Marco Rubio-Carly Fiorina Option." *The New York Times*
40. Krguman, Paul. 2015. "R-E-S-P-E-C-T." *The New York Times*
41. Cooper, Helene and Gardiner Harris. 2015. "An Arms Deal is Aimed at Saudis' Iran Worries." *The New York Times*

42. Parker, Ashley and Peter Baker. 2015. "G.O.P. Senator, Bob Corker, Is Key Player in Iran Accord." *The New York Times*
43. Steinhauer, Jennifer and Julie Hirschfeld Davis. 2015. "Irate Democrats Denounce G.O.P. on Iran Letter." *The New York Times*
44. Giacomo, Carol. 2015. "How to Get Smart About Iran." *The New York Times*
45. Marcus, Ruth. 2015. "A break in Congress's gridlock?" *The Washington Post*
46. Fifield, Anna. 2015. "N. Korea expanding its ability to mill uranium, analyst says." *The Washington Post*
47. Johnson, Jenna and Robert Costa. 2015. "In Nev., Trump takes off the heavy boxing gloves." *The Washington Post*
48. Eilperin, Juliet and Steven Mufson. 2015. "Obama calls congressional oversight on Iran deal 'reasonable'." *The Washington Post*
49. DeBonis, Mike and Katie Zezima. 2015. "At Capitol, a chorus against Iran deal." *The Washington Post*
50. No Byline. 2015. "Sen. Cardin does not represent his constituents on Iran." *The Washington Post*
51. No Byline. 2015. "Accord didn't open door to nukes." *The Washington Post*
52. Krauthammer, Charles. 2015. "The Iran deal: Anatomy of a disaster." *The Washington Post*
53. Weigel, David. 2015. "At GOP debate, Paul seeks edge as a dove in sea of hawks." *The Washington Post*

## References

- Ashworth, Lucian M. 2002. "Did the Realist–Idealist Great Debate Really Happen? A Revisionist History of International Relations." *International Relations* 16 (1): 33-51.
- Beinart, Peter. 2016. "Fear of a Female President." *The Atlantic*  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/10/fear-of-a-female-president/497564/> (Accessed September 9, 2016).
- Bobic, Igor. 2016. "Conservatives Mock Obama for Crying about Newtown School Shooting." *The Huffington Post*  
[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/conservatives-mock-obama-crying\\_us\\_568c091be4b014efe0dbdf2c](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/conservatives-mock-obama-crying_us_568c091be4b014efe0dbdf2c) (Accessed March 20, 2018).
- Christensen, Wendy M. and Myra Marx Ferree. 2008. "Cowboy of the World? Gender Discourse and the Iraq War Debate." *Qualitative Sociology* (31): 287-306.
- Coe, Kevin, David Domke, Meredith M. Bagley, Sheryl Conningham, and Nancy Van Leuven. 2007. "Masculinity as Political Strategy: George W. Bush, the "War on Terrorism," and an Echoing Press." *Journal of Women, Politics, & Policy* 29 (1): 31-55.
- Cohn, Carol. 1993. "Wars, Wimps, and Women: Talking Gender and Thinking War" in *Gendering War Talk*, eds. Miriam G. Cooke and Angela Woollacott. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 227-246.

- Davenport, Kelsey. 2018. "Timeline of Nuclear Diplomacy with Iran." *Arms Control Association* <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheet/Timeline-of-Nuclear-Diplomacy-With-Iran> (March 22, 2018).
- Dean, Robert D. 1998. "Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy." *Diplomatic History* 22 (1): 29-62.
- Doty, Roxanne. 1993. "Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines." *International Studies Quarterly* 37 (3): 297-320.
- Drew, Julie. 2004. "Identity Crisis: Gender, Public Discourse, and 9/11." *Women and Language* 27 (2): 71-77.
- Echabe, Agustin Echebarria. 2010. "Role Identities Versus Social Identities: Masculinity, Femininity, Instrumentality, and Communalinity." *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* (13): 30-43.
- Enloe, Cynthia. 2005. "Masculinity as Foreign Policy Issue." *Foreign Policy in Focus* [http://fpif.org/masculinity\\_as\\_foreign\\_policy\\_issue/](http://fpif.org/masculinity_as_foreign_policy_issue/) (Accessed September 23, 2016).
- Fagenson, Ellen A. 1990. "Perceived Masculine and Feminine Attributes Examined as a Function of Individuals' Sex and Level in the Organizational Power Hierarchy: A Test of Four Theoretical Perspectives." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 75 (2): 204-211.

- Ferguson, Michael L. 2007. "Feminism and Security Rhetoric in the Post-9/11 Bush Administration." In *"W" Stands for Women*, eds. Michael L. Ferguson and Lori Jo Marso. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 191-220.
- Filipovic, Jill. 2013. "Can Girls Even Find Syria on a Map?" *The Guardian*  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/sep/13/syria-almost-no-female-voices-in-debate> (September 19, 2016)
- Gilmore, David D. 1990. *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Glader, Paul. 2017. "10 Journalism Brands Where You Find Real Facts Rather Than Alternative Facts." *Forbes*  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/berlinschoolofcreativeleadership/2017/02/01/10-journalism-brands-where-you-will-find-real-facts-rather-than-alternative-facts/#232e772e9b5a> (March 24, 2018).
- Goldstein, Richard. 2003. "Neo-Macho Man." *Cultural Criticism and Analysis*
- Hoffman, Rose Marie. 2001. "The Measure of Masculinity and Femininity: Historical Perspective and Implications for Counseling." *Journal of Counseling and Development* 79 (4): 472-485.
- Ikenberry, G. John. 2003. "Is American Multilateralism in Decline?" *American Political Science Association* 1 (3): 533-550.

- Khanna, Parag. 2004. "The Metrosexual Superpower." *Foreign Policy* (143): 66-68.
- Landler, Mark. 2016. "For Hillary Clinton and John Kerry, Divergent Paths to Iran Nuclear Talks." *The New York Times*  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/03/us/politics/for-hillary-clinton-and-john-kerry-divergent-paths-to-iran-nuclear-talks.html> (April 13, 2018)
- Landreau, John C. 2011. "Fighting Words: Obama, Masculinity and the Rhetoric of War." *thirdspace* 9 (1): 1-24.
- Lansky, Mark. 2001. "Gender, Women and All the Rest (Part II)." *International Labour Review* 140 (1): 85-115.
- Locke, Brandon T. 2013. "The Military–Masculinity Complex: Hegemonic Masculinity and the United States Armed Forces, 1940-1963." Master's thesis. University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
- Lussenhop, Jessica. 2016. "President Obama's tears prove as controversial as gun policy." *BBC* <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-35238309> (March 23, 2018).
- Nye, Joseph. 1990. "Soft Power." *Foreign Policy* 80: 153-171.
- Pacholok, Shelley, 2009. "Gendered Strategies of Self: Navigating Hierarchy and Contesting Masculinities." *Gender, Work and Organization* 16 (4): 471-500.

- Paechter, Carrie. 2006. "Masculine femininities/feminine masculinities: power, identities and gender." *Gender and Education* 18 (3): 253-263.
- Ripsman, Norrin M. and Jack S. Levy. 2008. "Wishful Thinking or Buying Time? The Logic of British Appeasement in the 1930s." *International Security* 33 (2): 148-181.
- Sinclair, Dean G. 2009. "Homosexuality and the Military: A Review of the Literature." *Journal of Homosexuality* 56 (6): 701-718.
- Szubin, Adam J. 2017. "The Debate Over the Iran Deal is Utterly Perplexing." *The Washington Post* [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-debate-over-the-iran-deal-is-utterly-perplexing/2017/09/21/0996985e-9e3c-11e7-8ea1-ed975285475e\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.c6e3a1eb9e6a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-debate-over-the-iran-deal-is-utterly-perplexing/2017/09/21/0996985e-9e3c-11e7-8ea1-ed975285475e_story.html?utm_term=.c6e3a1eb9e6a) (April 12, 2018).
- Tickner, J. Ann. 1988. "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation." *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 17 (3): 429-440.
- Tickner, J. Ann. 1992. *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Takacs, Stacy. 2005. "Jessica Lynch and the Regeneration of American Identity and Power Post-9/11." *Feminist Media Studies* 5 (3): 297-310.
- Unknown. No year. "masculine (adj.)" *Online Etymology Dictionary* <https://www.etymonline.com/word/masculine> (March 17, 2018).

Wilkie, James E. B. and Galen V. Bodenhausen. 2012. "Are Numbers Gendered?" *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 141 (2): 206-210.