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# Dissent As "Aid and Comfort to the Enemy": The Rhetorical Power of Naïve Realism and Ingroup Identity

## Patricia Roberts-Miller

*This paper argues that, for many people and in many circumstances, public deliberation is about group identity rather than argumentation. Research on ingroup and outgroup thinking in social psychology helps to explain why thinking in terms of group identity is so powerful. The power comes from the promise that the world is a stable and easily known place, made up of discrete and transparent groups.*

In May of 2007, an interviewer for the online and print magazine *Radar* asked Gene Simmons, of the band KISS, about his stance on the "protest the war, not the troops" distinction. Simmons replied:

> I don't see the difference. Aid and comfort to the enemy is when you do it through media and there are big headlines like "We've Lost the War" and things like that. What makes you think that any graduate of any madrassa in the Middle East doesn't blow that up? In other words, make a big copy of it and show it to everybody. (Keller)[1]

This is not normally the kind of rhetor, journal, or even argument to which scholars of public deliberation pay much attention. *Radar* is not a very serious political

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[1]I ran across the interview because it was linked to another Web page I often read, and, as in the comments section in *Radar*, it was met with considerable praise. It was also ridiculed, critiqued, and met with sneering. The longest discussion I found was on FARK.com (http://forums.fark.com/cgi/fark/comments.pl?IDLink=2824752), which was predominantly negative. It was interesting to me that the positive comments (mostly along the lines of Simmons being a "hero") did not reply directly to the criticisms, even when posted hours later (so that the person could easily have read the criticism). On that website, commenters do often reply to one another, and do engage in fairly sophisticated debate within the comments.

*Patricia Roberts-Miller is Associate Professor of Rhetoric and Writing at The University of Texas at Austin, 1 University Station B5500, Austin, TX 78712, USA. E-mail: redball@mindspring.com*

journal—its masthead motto is "pop*politics*scandal*style," the publisher has identified the target market as "savvy urban readers aged 25–30" (Granatstein), Simmons is hardly an expert on foreign affairs, and his equation of "protesting the war" with saying we have lost appeals to the logically problematic major premise that what "any graduate of any madrassa in the Middle East" would find useful propaganda is "aid and comfort to the enemy" (the constitutional definition of one kind of treason). For all those reasons, scholars of public discourse may be tempted to reject the interview as not public deliberation.

Yet, Simmons's premise—that one should not say anything with which one's enemies agree (regardless of whether it is true)—is common.[2] On 23 November 2005, Ann Coulter used this argument (that North Vietnamese were encouraged by the peace movement and that current calls for troop withdrawal are treasonous) in order to label Democrats as treasonous:

> The Democrats are giving aid and comfort to the enemy for no purpose other than giving aid and comfort to the enemy. There is no plausible explanation for the Democrats' behavior other than that they long to see U.S. troops shot, humiliated, and driven from the field of battle.

A major argument for silencing criticism of slavery was that abolitionists took comfort in such criticism; George Orwell complained about the way that argument was used to silence criticism of the Soviet Union (especially its behavior during the Spanish Civil War); it was used during the Vietnam War as a reason not to prosecute the perpetrators of the My Lai massacre. Similarly, it is reasonable to infer that many of the people who commented on the interview in the "comments" section of the online magazine, or who forwarded it around the Internet, or who posted it (with praise) in other fora believed that it made a valid point in a valid manner. Hence, if we dismiss this kind of argument as unworthy of scholarly attention, we exclude from consideration an argument that a large number of people seem to think is appropriate in public argument.

Scholars regularly invoke Kenneth Burke's parlor to justify our continued interest in old topics we cannot finally settle:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment

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[2]I am deeply indebted to Susan Schorn and Randy Cauthen for sending me additional examples of this topos.

> or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's
> assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you
> must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.
> (*Philosophy of Literary Form* 110–111)

It is common for rhetoric classes to use the Burke passage to inspire students to see their writing essays on free speech, the death penalty, race relations, or other issues as valuable, even if they concern controversies about which students cannot know everything that has been said, or hope to solve in short essay. Yet, as anyone who skulks around the places of popular argument on the Internet knows, the Burke passage is a perfect description of many sites—places in which interlocutors come and go, attack and defend, form alliances, and make better and worse arguments on very old issues. These are the sorts of places in which the Simmons interview (and other pieces much like it) are posted, defended, attacked, and debated. In other words, if we are genuinely interested in public discourse, as it is experienced by much of the public, we need to take more seriously rhetors like Simmons, sites like comment fora, and arguments like ''criticizing the war is treason because enemies of the state approve of it.''

In this essay, I want to pursue the question of how we—that is, scholars of rhetoric—fail to describe how discourse works in such popular sites of the Burkean parlor, and suggest that we should draw on existing scholarship in social psychology, as that work does explain the impact such discourse has. My point is not to criticize, let alone add to, that work in social psychology (in fact, much of this article is simple summary and application of the work), but to persuade scholars in rhetoric that this scholarship provides a richer and more productive way to think about the real experience of public persuasion than does our own (too heavy) reliance on traditional explanations of expertise and authority.

I want to begin by considering how difficult it is to use traditional rhetorical concepts to describe the impact of rhetoric like the Simmons interview. What impact did people imagine it had when they praised and distributed it? Surely, the people who sent it around did not expect that someone who was previously anti-war would suddenly be persuaded to change positions because a has-been glam rocker asserted that terrorists approve of criticism of the war. Yet, to say this kind of argument is ineffective is inaccurate. It has some kind of effect, or it would not have been mailed around. It seemed powerful to people who already agreed with it; it seemed like a good argument,. But, their mailing it around is not an invitation to argumentation, not the opening of a rational-critical discussion in which the expertise of glam rockers might be considered. So, if not the authority of the speaker, what about this interview seems worth quoting and praising? Why should someone reject any stance that the enemy would approve, simply on the grounds that the enemy approves it?

As a rhetorician, one's first impulse is to call it an argument from authority: the people who linked to and mailed the interview were passing it around because an

authority made an argument with which they agreed. But, obviously, Simmons is not an authority in the sense of intellectual expertise, so conventional rhetorical practice would identify this as false authority, an example of the fallacious *argumentum ad verecundiam*. Douglas Walton, for example, lists five criteria to determine whether an argument from authority (which, when legitimate, he calls "appeal to expert opinion") is valid: the credibility of the expert, his/her expertise in a field relevant to the issue, the internal logic of the assertion, the trustworthiness of the expert, the relation of his/her assertion to what other experts say, and his/her evidence (224, see also 258). Obviously, Simmons fails every one of these criteria. He is not an expert on either treason or the war, his expertise (being a prosperous glam rocker) is not relevant to the topic, the interview is internally contradictory (in ways discussed later in this article), he is not a particularly trustworthy person, experts disagree about the war (and scholars of public deliberation generally insist on the importance of dissent), and he provides no evidence for his assertions. I will suggest, in fact, that it is the last quality that is most important, and most attractive, about the interview, and, to the extent that there is an argument in the interview, it is that evidence is unnecessary on topics about the war.

Another possibility is to describe the power of this interview as essentially along the lines of what Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson call celebrity endorsements:

> By shaving with the right razor or eating the right cereal, we are saying, "I am just like that ballplayer; I am part of the attractive in-group." By purchasing the "right stuff," we enhance our own egos and rationalize our inadequacies as we "become" just like our favorite celebrity. (131)

The problem with looking at the interview this way is that I doubt Simmons was the favorite celebrity of the people who liked the interview. If one analyzes the argument as "criticizing the war is bad because Gene Simmons says so"—that is, if the support for the assertion derives from Simmons's celebrity—then his argument could be countered by quotes to the opposite effect from any other member of a has-been glam rock band. At that point, the assertion would lose its support, and it would collapse. And, of course, that is not the case. The people who praised and distributed this interview would not shift position if Paul Stanley (another member of KISS) declared himself to be anti-war; or if there were a later interview with Simmons in which he changed his mind; I doubt that people *adopted* the position because Simmons took it.

Even more puzzling, what, exactly, is *the* position? When someone who approves of what Simmons says in the interview posts links to it, adds praise in the comments, or emails it to friends, what is s/he asserting? I will argue that we miss the point of the act of expressing approval of the interview if we see the interview as having some kind of propositional content fully captured in the assertions that Simmons makes about politics. After all, Simmons's assertions have a problematic relation to one another: calling for a pullout is bad because a graduate of a madrassa

would like it; yet he makes other assertions that this hypothetical graduate would also like, such as that the war has been handled badly, the nation state of Palestine should exist, and Israel should not have nuclear weapons. In fact, by granting that the war was badly handled, he seems to have done precisely what he was criticizing. In addition, he condemns ''Hollywood idiots'' who use their stance on the war for the sake of the publicity, but that is an accurate description of the very interview in which he makes that assertion: he did the interview just before going on tour, and with another season of his reality show about to air.

The first part of my answer is not complicated. Neither the interview nor the act of praising the interview is argumentation; they are performances. William Brandt, author of *Rhetoric of Argumentation*, used to describe such moves as ''stance-taking.'' The point of such behavior is not to persuade an informed and intelligent opposition to change position, but to impress some group of people by taking a certain stance. Brandt's favorite example was the practice of medieval lords of making elaborate oaths of loyalty shortly before switching sides; their rhetoric did not persuade anyone of the merits of the lord whom they were praising, but was intended to satisfy him while they weighed options. As such, this kind of rhetoric is a species of *epideictic*: praise or blame that confirms community values and, not coincidentally, persuades the audience of the merits of the speaker. The benefits of stance-taking are not limited to rhetoric that pleases the audience; even controversial stances benefit celebrities to the extent that they ensure publicity, and media outlets publicize them in order to get readers. After all, Simmons's visit to the military hospital was with media in tow, his visits to Camp Pendleton were part of his A&E ''reality'' series, and this interview was shortly before KISS's summer 2007 tour commenced, so the benefits to Simmons of taking a stance that was likely to garner publicity are fairly obvious. My question, instead, is what act was performed by praising and publicizing the interview on the part of people with no obvious monetary interest in publicizing Simmons or KISS?

To pursue this question, I need to begin with a long explanation of how social psychologists describe ingroups and outgroups, before returning to the issue of the rhetorical force of ingroup/outgroup ways of presenting policy issues. I want to suggest that this research is valuable to scholars in rhetoric and composition because it explains how political discourse really functions for many active participants: what makes Simmons' rhetoric so pleasing to many people is that it confirms their sense of reality itself; one of the main functions, and pleasures, of the interview is to endorse a sense that the world consists of a stable taxonomy of identity which is easily perceived. People who called Simmons a hero, and who seemed to think his interview (as well as their calling him a hero) an appropriate intervention in political deliberation, see the function of political discourse as identifying the place(s) of interlocutors in that stable taxonomy.

At the same time (and perhaps for the same reasons) that Kenneth Burke was describing the importance of identification and division in rhetoric, social psychologists like Gordon Allport were describing the importance of groups in

the construction of group and individual identity. This work has been both complicated and confirmed in the ensuing fifty years of experimentation; what follows is an outsider's view of what is most striking in that research from the perspective of public discourse and policy.

The "ingroup" is an imagined construct to which we belong, and membership in which is crucial to our sense of identity; it is a favorable stereotype, generally closely connected to our self-image (if not self-esteem). Groups are not simply collections of items (or people)—scholars like Craig McGarty use the term "type" for categories that are not socially meaningful and "group" for those that are (see "Stereotype Formation" 35)—nor are they always formally structured; "scholars" might be an important ingroup for a person, although there is nothing that formally makes one a member of that group, whereas that same person might find the group "members of the AAUP" only trivially meaningful, although it has formal membership qualifications. The categories are made up of whatever features are salient, and the salience of features depends on context. As Patricia Brown and John Turner say, stereotypes about groups are not "fixed prototypes or schemas waiting to be activated. Categories and their contents are constructs 'on the spot' to reflect an interaction between theory and data" ("The Role of Theories" 74, see also 88; by "theory" and "data" Brown and Turner mean the larger explanation and the specific instance). McGarty says that group membership can be determined along various dimensions: "the relevance of particular dimensions changes from context to context" (McGarty "Stereotype Formation" 21). That is, one might group the same set of people by height, religion, profession, or athletic skill depending on which of those dimensions is relevant for one's immediate purposes.

There are two points here: first, groups are surprisingly ad hoc, a point that is easily and often overlooked, particularly when we want to imagine groups as real; second, groups are organized around characteristics that seem relevant because they seem to explain something (McGarty "Stereotype Formation" 21; Yzerbyt and Rocher 39; Brown and Turner 75). As John Jost and David Hamilton say, a "category must also provide some intuitive theory, some rationale, some *explanation* as to why these category members belong in the same category, that is some causal means for understanding how and why these features are related to each other" (emphasis in original 212). What matters is whether the categories *seem* to explain something: for people who believe in astrology, a shared birthday explains something about their shared behavior; for someone who does not hold that belief, it would not (hence, whether astrology really explains anything about people's behavior matters less than whether people believe it does). People will often assume that types must be groups: that people who simply happen to share some surface characteristic must share some deeper and essential characteristic that causes (and is signified by) that surface feature. Vincent Yzerbyt and Steve Rocher summarize what much social psychology shows: "people are extremely ingenious in their ability to find surface regularities that can be seen as expressions of deep underlying characteristics" (66).

Hostility between the ingroup and outgroup is not inevitable; identification does not always depend on denigrating some other group (for a review of this research see Nelson 29–30). Intergroup rivalry can be pleasurable and harmless at the same time, as when one side of a stadium tries to out-yell another, or beneficial, as when groups compete to raise money for charity. Haslam, Turner, and Oakes have argued that "social identities do not simply provide group members with a common perspective on social reality and common motives for imbuing stereotypes with differentiated meaning, but that they also provide a platform and a motivation for *coordinating* social perspectives and *using* particular stereotypes in the service of social action" (161). Scholars of the Civil Rights movement have emphasized that the movement depended on generating a sense of group solidarity that crossed previously maintained lines; scholars of abolition have emphasized the power in the abolitionists' insistence on a shared group identity with slaves.

Because of its relation to social movements, group identity formation may be tragic and beneficial at the same time. The rise of the Irish to political power (and political enfranchisement, in many states) depended on dismissing group identities that had previously been considered essential (such as the county from which one's family came). But, this political unity was achieved, tragically, by defining the Irish as "white" as against African Americans (for more on this point, see Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*).[3]

In short, part of the "effectiveness" of the interview with Gene Simmons, and one reason some people liked it, was that he effectively identified himself as members of their ingroup, and he implicitly and explicitly defined that ingroup in ways that they found satisfying. This ingroup was constructed in opposition to a vague outgroup (Sean Penn, critics of the war, "the" media, Hollywood "idiots") that pleased people who saw themselves as part of that ingroup and opposed to that outgroup. What Simmons promised his audience is that there is a stable taxonomy of political persuasion and identity, this taxonomy is ontologically grounded, and that it is easy to perceive.

In addition to ingroup identification varying depending on circumstances, the research suggests that it varies for individuals. For some, ingroup identification is very strong, and group lines are rigid. Considerable research supports the notions that some people are "equal opportunity bigots"—racist toward many ethnicities and hostile toward a variety of groups. In the 1950s, Allport summarized the research that showed that people like this are likely to be generally rigid

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[3]Violence against members of a group is always committed by an individual *qua* ingroup member against other individuals *qua* outgroup members. This is especially important in random acts of violence such as hate crimes, in violence against entire populations (as in war), or in terrorism (when the act is "justified" because the victim is an outgroup member). Thus, an important question for social psychologists (and I would argue, for theorists of rhetoric) is whether the ingroup/outgroup construction of a friendly athletic rivalry is of a different kind or degree from that which motivates terrorism and genocide.

thinkers, uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity; John Duckitt says that more recent research "suggest that rigid, limited cognitive styles are integral aspects of authoritarianism, but are not themselves responsible for the relationship of authoritarianism to prejudice" (400). Religious people with a "quest" orientation (believing that the search for religious answers is difficult) are less likely to be bigoted than religious people with an authoritarian orientation (that the answers are clear and known; this research is summarized in Nelson 97–99). Much research has supported the hypothesis that people with an "authoritarian personality" are more likely to believe in rigid racial and ethnic categories.[4] Jason Plaks et al. argue that their research shows that what they call "entity theorists" (people who believe that characteristics cannot be changed) are more likely to be prejudiced than "incremental theorists" (who believe that people can change). Thus, the extent to which people depend upon stereotypes for reaching decisions, the degree to which their imagined taxonomy of groups is hierarchical, how much they resist reconsidering stereotypes, all vary from person to person. It also varies for individuals depending on immediate circumstance—anxiety, distraction, time constraints, and even reminders of mortality—make people more likely to rely on stereotypes, insulate them from disproof, and support ingroup/outgroup-based social policies (see, for instance, Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszcznski).

What social psychologists call "social meaning"—"the perceived 'goodness of fit' between the attitude object and socially shared values" (Cohen 809)—correlates to traditional analyses of how enthymematic reasoning functions, rather than the ethos/pathos/logos triumvirate. Jeffrey Walker (much like John Gage) argues that the minor premise of an enthymeme (the "because" clause) "is not simply a proposition but an inferential and attitudinal complex—a stance" (59). This stance consists "not simply of a quasi-syllogistic premise but, more fully, of a cluster of emotively significant ideas (or images) that work to motivate a passional identification with the speaker's stance" (59). This is not, then, another version of Toulmin's warrants/claims/data, but something much more akin to the notion of seeing argumentation—as it really functions for many people, not as we think it should—as a process of seeing one's self as a member of an elite group who share an essence that is made manifest in the stance, the attitude, they (we) take. Enthymematic reasoning, Walker argues, happens when a rhetor presents us with an attitude (or, I would suggest, an identity) we wish to adopt and suggests that this attitude is necessarily connected to an action (or another belief, in the case of ratiocination).

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[4]Although there is substantial disagreement among scholars about the precise mechanism, as well as disagreement as to the most useful way to characterize "authoritarianism," that is, whether it is best characterized as an authoritarian dynamic (Stenner), right-wing authoritarianism (Bob Altemeyer), or social dominance orientation (Pratto et al.), each of those scholars points to the cluster of beliefs that correlate.

Research suggests that this is how many individuals reach conclusions about policies: on the basis of the kind of person who seems to endorse it. Cohen explains this process:

> For example, a Republican who learns that other party members support a government-funded job training program will regard that program as conservative by definition. He or she will construct the attitude object to fit its assigned social meaning, by ascribing it value-consistent factual qualities (e.g., ''teaches important job skills'') rather than value-inconsistent ones (e.g., ''gives money away''), and by highlighting moral commitments congenial to the party's position (e.g., ''we must help people to help themselves'') rather than uncongenial (e.g., ''we must [increase] government spending''). (Cohen 809)

Rather than determine that the policy is appropriate for a Republican because it has been demonstrated to have certain political consequences, some people will simply assume it has those political consequences (ones in line with what is conventionally presented as ''Republican'' values''), once other ingroup members have endorsed it.[5] Although Cohen's explanation involves Republicans, his research shows that both self-identified liberal and conservative students privileged group endorsement information over factual information. This is not how people would explain their behavior: people regularly underestimate the influence of groups on their own behavior (Miller and Ratner; Pronin et al.). Cohen noted that participants in his research:

> realized the power of group influence in a general sense; thus, they could accurately estimate its impact on the attitudes of others. In addressing the causes of their own attitudes, however, they found reason to believe that they were exempt from its effect. (820)

Cohen emphasizes that students whose stance toward a policy was largely derived from group endorsement were not engaged in ''mindless conformity'' (819). The knowledge of group endorsement triggered ''biased systematic processing'' (819); that is, the students still processed the other information, but did so in ways that confirmed the rightness of the ingroup endorsement. The need to make the endorsement fit meant, in fact, that biased students may have engaged in ''additional cognitive effort to figure out why the actual position of their party differed from the expected one'' (819).[6]

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[5]Cohen could have made the same point using an outgroup example. A self-identified non-Republican (e.g., Libertarian, Democrat, Socialist) would, once the policy had been endorsed by Republicans, assume it had values and consequences consistent with their construction of Republicans. One can see an example of how much the perception of policy details are inferred from group identity by looking at the public discourse following Richard Nixon's endorsement of a ''negative income tax.''

[6]This study thereby throws some doubt on the notion that stereotypes are mental shortcuts, enabling cognitive misers to save thinking energy. On the contrary, holding on to perceptions of the group is so important that it is worth expending additional energy to maintain.

One of the most obvious places one can see one's own reliance on ingroup/outgroup thinking is when explaining the bad behavior of drivers. Various studies have shown that we rationalize our own rudeness in driving (we are in a rush, we see ourselves as clever drivers) when we condemn the same driving tactics in others (they are jerks). I tell my students to imagine that they are driving down one of the over-crowded highways in town, and some-one cuts them off. If the offending car has bumper stickers with which they agree, what do they think to themselves? Students report that they do the same thing I do—we tell ourselves the person must be in a hurry, or did not see us, or, as I once found myself thinking, they borrowed the car from a nice person. But, I ask my students, what if the car has bumper stickers showing the driver endorses policies or groups the student hates? Then the students, like me, think to themselves, ''Typical.'' Members of the ingroup engage in aggressive and irresponsible driving because there are contextual or external factors that excuse the behavior, but outgroup members do it because that's how they do everything.

As mentioned earlier, ingroup/outgroup construction relies on stereotypes about individuals. Some social psychologists reserve the term ''stereotype'' for category errors (e.g., Allport), but more recent work emphasizes how necessary they are for cognition. Stereotypes are generally grounded in a kind of reality insofar as people can point to examples (from experience or cultural narratives) that confirm the stereotype (McGarty 13, 33), even if they are inaccurate. Gene Simmons, in the interview mentioned at the beginning of this article, refers to the stereotype of Hollywood types who criticize the war but do not visit mili-tary hospitals. He mentions Sean Penn specifically, who may, for all I know, fit the stereotype; if not, Simmons certainly could find an anti-war celebrity who has never visited a military hospital. This move typifies the tendency that people have to attribute good motives to the same behavior in ingroup members that they describe with bad motives in outgroup members: when members of the ingroup express a political viewpoint it is sincere patriotism, but when outgroup members do so it is attention whoring. The problem is that people protect stereotypes from disproof through holding them to different standards of evidence and, generally, engaging in what is commonly called ''confirmation bias.''

Before discussing the issue of confirmation bias, however, I want to return to the discussion of stereotypes as narratives. They *explain* situations. Yzerbyt and Rocher describe what they call ''subjective essentialism'':

> Perceivers not only rely on observable associations to infer the presence of some profound reality common to all group members, but also use their naïve theories about the inherent nature of people to generate surface links among the members. In a nutshell, the surface characteristics that are associated with the group members are both the antecedent and the result of the beliefs that people entertain about any given social group. (in McGarty 41)

Thus, rather than see the homeless as a profoundly diverse group with very different reasons for being homeless (whose only shared characteristic is the homelessness), people want to see them as *essentially* the same sort of person (whether lazy miscreants, innocent victims, disabled outcasts, or substance abusers). That essence explains (that is, *causes*) the homelessness.

Yzerbyt and Rocher's point is that the explanation predates and is confirmed by the beliefs about the group members. If I see war advocates as heroic, then I will perceive an individual war advocate as heroic, thereby confirming my perception of the category as made up of heroes, a category that, not coincidentally, includes me. Thus, group members' own identity is entangled in the connection between other group members and what is supposed to be an essential characteristic of *me*; consequently, the more that one's own identity is seen as connected to the essences of the group identity, the harder it is to admit error about other ingroup members. Just as perceiving other ingroup members as heroic enhances my own sense of my self as heroic simply for having the same stance, so seeing them as flawed implies flaws in me. This is partially because such an admission means that one must question the accuracy of one's own discernment (a major problem for naïve realists, below), but also because it suggests that group membership and goodness are not *essentially* connected. If one might be a member of the ingroup and not a hero, then *I* might not be a hero. This move functions the other way as well, so that, when people praised Simmons as a hero for holding their stance, they were praising themselves for having a heroic stance.

I want to emphasize the *logic* underlying this perception, as there is a tendency to contrast logos and ethos. The logic is: I am a good person; I am a member of X ingroup; my membership in X ingroup *makes* me a good person; therefore, members of my ingroup are also good people. My goodness and the goodness of others in my ingroup are logically connected. To acknowledge that members of the ingroup might not share that good quality means changing the narrative about the relation of good-ness and ingroup identity. This is not only threatening to our sense of self, but to our sense of reality: if our imagined taxonomy is wrong, then the world may not be quite as easy to interpret as we would like.

My point is that thinking in terms of ingroups and outgroups provides a tremendous amount of security.[7] ''Subjective essentialism'' provides even more security; it is the belief that people in the same groups share the same stable essences, and that groups, therefore, are not ad hoc mental constructs but ontologically grounded and therefore eternally meaningful identities. ''Naïve realism'' is the term social psychologists use for the belief that it is easy to perceive reality with perfect accuracy (in other words, what many people in rhetoric call foundationalism). Naïve realists reject the need for complexity or nuance in descriptions of

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[7]This was the basic point of Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*, but more recent research on authoritarianism, even studies that significantly modify the concept (such as Altemeyer or Pratto et al.) emphasize the personal, institutional, and societal security provided by these ideologies.

situations (whether interpersonal, political, philosophical, religious); they tend to see calls for deliberation, further research, more complicated descriptions, or skepticism as intentional attempts to obfuscate a situation that is clear to all right-thinking people. Essentialism and naïve realism are mutually reinforcing. Essentialism means that people are transparent, that one can make broad generalizations about groups without reflection, that group stereotypes need no evidence; naïve realism means that one can trust one's perception without second guessing; thus, group behaviors are predictable, hierarchies are meaningful, the saints and the sinners in any situation are clearly marked.

For instance, if groups are stable and essentially connected to good-ness, then the goods of society can be easily distributed along the lines of group membership. That is, social psychologists have noted the ways that stereotypes function to preserve current hierarchies, and are especially useful for rationalizing injustice: oppressed people deserve their treatment because it is the consequence of their essential natures (see Pratto et al.; for a review of this material, see Jost and Hamilton, especially 219–220). If, on the contrary, groups are constructed and not constituted by essence—if, for instance, there is no essential characteristic that causes homelessness among all members of that group—then public policy toward the homeless is considerably complicated. That outcome is just as undesirable for people whose construction of "homeless" is dismissive ("they are all lazy") as it is for people for whom it is compassionate ("they are all victims of circumstance"). A more nuanced understanding of the category of "homeless," perhaps the perception that it is a type and not a group, would necessitate a more nuanced public policy and debate: neither the punitive nor compassionate stance would suffice. But nuanced public discourse is difficult, so, instead, public debate tends either to assume a single identity for such groups, or to argue about what "the" correct group construction is.[8]

Decisions would be much easier if there were only two options, because, if one could be associated with good, the other, by logical consequence, is bad. Then, one could determine the correct policy simply by discovering someone associated with either option. If bad people are associated with option A, then option B must be good; if good people are associated with option A, then option B must be bad. I would suggest that this is part of the attraction of the "this position must be bad because the outgroup approves of it": it appeals to a sense of the world and political options as straightforward and obvious. Something like the Iraq War is a terrible challenge to naïve realism, subjective essentialism, and bifurcated thinking. The Bush administration presented a very straightforward picture: we would shock, awe, and democratize a nation oppressed by a hated leader who was planning to unleash weapons of mass destruction on

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[8]And this, really, is the heart of my argument about the teaching of argumentation: I am unhappy about how we tend to teach public argument because much pedagogical practice neither allows nor encourages nuanced discussion of public events, settling instead for debate about unconsidered stereotypes.

the world. Because Saddam Hussein was evil, anything done that harmed him must be good. It was a narrative of saints and sinners. Most threatening to naïve realists was not that Bush turned out to be wrong, but that the situation turned out to be complicated: the simple and straightforward case presented by the Bush administration included some outright fabrications, but also some bad guesses and very risky decisions.

Even more flummoxing for the ingroup/outgroup model of the Iraq war is that there are not, and never were, only two policy options in regard to Iraq. Even among people who believed that Saddam Hussein was a menace who needed to be contained or destroyed, there was a wide range of disagreement.[9] There were people who were in favor of military action, but only if endorsed by the UN. There were people deeply opposed to any military action against Iraq. There were people who said the sanctions were working, and some who said the sanctions should be dropped. There were people, such as the military advisors to the Bush administration, who were in favor of military action, but who believed that the one the Bush administration planned was doomed because it was under-manned. There were people who believed that military action against Iraq should wait until the situation in Afghanistan was stabilized. There were people who believed we could be in and out within a year; there were people who believed it would be another Vietnam. There were people who believed that we could have won Vietnam had we stayed in another year, and that the United States can win any military action with sufficient resources. All of these positions had advocates of intelligence and goodwill.

Yet, during the debate that led up to the war, the arguments in favor of the Bush administration policy (only one of many possible policy options) was ''We must invade now because Saddam Hussein is a menace.'' If someone disputed the major premise on policy grounds—that this kind of invasion at this point was not wise—they were painted by the right-wing media as disputing the minor premise. The tendency toward bifurcating policy options served the Bush administration well, as it effectively silenced the anti–Saddam Hussein, anti-war position. To acknowledge that position, and the goodwill and intelligence of people who held it, would be to acknowledge the inadequacy of naïve realism: it would mean that there was not perfect agreement among good people, and that the true course of action was not obvious. The Bush administration, and the various media figures who ''carry the water'' for them (in Rush Limbaugh's phrase), may have been cunning in presenting a bifurcated view of the options. Silencing the anti–Saddam Hussein and anti-war position may have been a deliberate strategy on their part (although it might not have been—that really

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[9]I think it is significant that Coulter and Limbaugh continue to argue that Bush's policy was (and is) right *because* Saddam Hussein was, demonstrably, a bad person. That continues to be a relevant point if, and only if, there were (and are) not policy issues to be debated. However, anything that hurts bad people does not necessarily help good people.

may be how the individuals involved see the world), but I would suggest they were successful in that endeavor because naïve realism and bifurcated policy options are so comforting. In other words, I am making a similar argument about the Simmons interview and the pro-Bush version of the pro-war argument: it is obvious why Bush and his "water carriers" would advocate that position, but why would people find it persuasive? Not because it was accurate, but because it was simple.[10]

An increasing number of people who initially supported the invasion came to the conclusion that this invasion was being bungled. Whether these criticisms are valid is not my point; my point is that they have often come from people who were not, and are not, opposed to military intervention generally or in the case of Iraq specifically. They were not, and are not, anti-war. This kind of position is the most threatening to the Bush administration, as it's a kind of criticism that can lose the support of traditionally Republican voters, and as it throws doubt on the administration's competence generally (which would affect the political credibility of everyone associated with the administration). It also throws doubt on the discernment of people who have supported the Bush administration: that someone who seemed so obviously good could turn out to bungle something means he was not the person they thought he was. Someone whose support for Bush (and the invasion) resulted from faith in naïve realism and bifurcated policy options has limited options when presented with the pro-war anti-Bush position: s/he can conclude that s/he was wrong to have supported Bush, but that throws doubt on her/his judgment (if the truth in any situation is obvious, then it must have been obvious that he was a bad choice, so why did s/he make it?) or on naïve realism (he was not, at the time, obviously a bad choice). Either of those choices means coming to an entirely new understanding of one's self and one's perception of the world. It is far easier to deny the goodwill of people who hold the challenging position.

And *that* is the attraction of the "criticism provides comfort and aid to the enemy because the enemy likes to see it"—it gives someone permission to ignore criticism from members of the ingroup; that is the rhetorical power (and, for some, the pleasure) of the Simmons interview. It enables them to recategorize those people by shoving them into the outgroup rather than having to rethink their own epistemology. It enables them to hold on to the perception of essentialism by denying group membership to those who appear not to share the essence.

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[10]Although I am discussing this view in terms of support for the Bush administration's way of handling the invasion, one could make a similar argument about much anti-war rhetoric. During the public debate before the war, I talked to several people who dismissed my representation of a range of positions by categorizing large numbers of them as "essentially" pro- or anti-war. For advocates of Bush's policy, this move erased the people who agreed with the goal—removing Saddam Hussein—but disputed the policy; for critics of his policy, it erased the people who argued that forcibly removing Saddam Hussein served leftist foreign policy. In both cases, in other words, this move denied the existence of ingroup members who disagreed.

It resolves the cognitive dissonance created by the existence of multiple positions held by people of intelligence and goodwill on an issue about which one wants to believe there is an obvious answer. In other words, just as students in Cohen's study worked hard to maintain ingroup identification (expending cognitive energy to rationalize what appeared to be a violation of group essence regarding a public policy), so people are willing to expend cognitive energy to find ways to dismiss positions that threaten essentialism and naïve realism. I am suggesting that many people liked the Simmons's interview, not for the specifics of his rather problematic assertions, but for his representation of the issue as a simple one of in- and outgroups: "I am fully on board with his 'hippy beating' policy," said one commenter.

What significance does this research have for scholars in rhetoric? I would suggest several implications. First, this research helps to explain how a certain kind of epideictic works (one that is sometimes described as confirming values): a certain kind of discourse is effective to the extent that it persuades the audience that they and the speaker are members of an ingroup; this very act of persuasion thereby confirms "the" values, and value, of that ingroup relative to an outgroup. The discourse invokes, or sometimes creates, a constructed ingroup of people who not only share the same values, but whose very value comes from the essence of the ingroup (and its opposition to an outgroup).

At the same time, such persuasion (perhaps all persuasion) is about the nature of reality and identity. The rhetor persuades the audience that this ingroup is made up of people who are *essentially* the same. Some discourse works to persuade (or confirm) the audience that in and out-group identity is ontologically grounded, that inter- and group identities and relations are perfectly stable and rigidly meaningful. Because group taxonomies are meaningful, political discourse is about identities—establishing group identity (that is, naming someone as a member of an ingroup or outgroup) is the same as deliberating policy. For this kind of persuasion (or confirmation) to be successful, the rhetor need not succeed at the kind described in the previous paragraph. For instance, a large number (probably the majority) of people who commented on the Simmons interview in the FARK.com website were hostile, and the vast majority of those condemned *Simmons*. In short, although people who liked and people who disliked the interview disagreed as to what his identity was (hero or moron), they implicitly agreed that the issue was his identity. Just as many people who favored his stance prior to reading the interview expressed their agreement with praise of *him* (with simplistic comments about his being a "hero" and so on), so people who disagreed with the stance engaged in simplistic, vitriolic, even anti-Semitic name-calling ("what a moron," "Thank-you rock n' roll jew," "retarded neocon"). Hence even the attacks on Simmons often failed to engage his argument, instead presuming that his identity was the important issue. I am saying more than just that, for many, political debate is about name-calling, and more even than that such name-calling is about group identity, but that much political debate simultaneously asserts and presumes that

reality—which is synonymous with in- and outgroup identities—is easily perceived and named. On that point, those who said "hero" were in perfect agreement with those who said "retarded neocon."

Stereotypes are necessary for generalizations about people, and are therefore inevitable in public policy discourse. It is useless to aspire to be free of stereotypes, but neither are we trapped by them. We can, as Theodore Newcomb famously said, treat stereotypes about groups as hunches to be tested. We should recognize that stereotypes are cognitive and discursive constructs, not ontologically grounded. The more that they are preserved from testing, the more likely they are to be damaging; thus, teachers of public argumentation should model, inspire, and even require critical approaches to common stereotypes about group construction and should avoid presenting public issues in terms of intergroup conflict. But, testing stereotypes is not an easy process: people often have a large number of specific examples that support their stereotype. Because of a stereotype, for example, people might believe that members of a certain group are inappropriate for a certain social role. When members of that group play that role, people are likely to perceive them as less effective by ignoring disconfirming data, highlighting confirming data, applying inconsistent standards, or recategorizing. That perception is then used as though it confirmed the original stereotype when it actually derived from it. Unhappily, much practice in rhetorical instruction encourages students (and teachers) to think in stereotypes, especially when the practice presents groups as stable binary oppositions (as in textbook readings or prompts that invite students to consider "both" sides, meaning the current Republican and Democratic stances), encourages students to assume that all types are groups (as in assignments that asks students to imagine audiences in socioeconomic terms), and fails to teach students to reconsider group identities. My argument, in short, is that, for many, public deliberation is about group identity, and traditional ways of thinking about public discourse do not explain why that is such a powerful model for so many people. The power comes from the promise that the world is a stable place, and that all the one really needs to know is the very easy to know fact of whether an interlocutor is an ingroup member.

So, what does all this mean for understanding the rhetorical power that some people saw in the Gene Simmons interview? To be honest, I think that admirers saw the same power that I saw in a bumper sticker that I still sometimes think about putting on my car: "The Dixie Chicks were right." While my impulse is to argue all the ways that my wanting to cite the Dixie Chicks is different from someone wanting to cite Gene Simmons (I would start with the quality of their music), fundamentally, what, exactly, would my motives be in putting such a sticker on my car? Natalie Maines is no more an expert on political affairs than Gene Simmons, and, most important, I am no more likely to persuade someone to change stances on the war by invoking her authority than someone else is by citing Gene Simmons. My motive, to put it bluntly, would be to irritate people who were pro-war, and to show solidarity (i.e., ingroup membership) with

anti-war people. That I further like the ethos of the Dixie Chicks would simply be icing on the cake.

This is not, then, celebrity endorsement, at least in terms of my being more interested in the anti-war position *because* Maines took it. In fact, I own CDs by both KISS and Dixie Chicks, and I would probably have been pleased with him had Simmons advocated my position on the war. Part of the motivation in praising and distributing the Simmons interview was, I would suggest, like my approval of the pro–Dixie Chicks bumper sticker: it was seeing public discourse as taking a ''stance'' not intended to persuade the opposition, but indicate identification with a certain sort of person—with members of my ingroup.

But ingroup/outgroup thinking plays into the Simmons interview in another way. As I said at the beginning, the notion that one should reject a position simply because it pleases the opposition is a common topos. The presumption is that the outgroup—in this case, graduates of any madrassa—is so bad that any likeness to them is itself bad. Seeing public discourse as, at least partly, a question of taking sides is not necessarily harmful, although perhaps the world would be a better place if people like me did not use our bumpers to express positions on complicated political questions. But, it seems to me that this second invocation of the ingroup/outgroup dichotomy *is* necessarily harmful, as it inherently makes dissent a declaration of outgroup membership. It presumes that the world is bifurcated into the good and bad, so that dissent from the presumably good ingroup means that one must be a member of the bad outgroup. Sides of a stadium trying to out-yell each other is harmless, but it does not enable the people in the stadium to come to better understandings of political issues. And, if we yell one another into a sufficient frenzy, there just might be carnage on the field.

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