"They Can't Even Define What a Woman Is": Gender, Narrative, And The 2024 Republican National Convention

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Abstract

Gender is a core contested construct in political agendas. The current Republican Party in the United States (US) can be understood as a right-wing nationalist populism movement. One forum to examine the intersection of gender and this movement is the Republican National Convention (RNC). In summer 2024, the RNC took place over 4 days, with politicians and members of the public featured as speakers. We conducted a feminist critical discourse analysis of speeches to answer two research questions: 1) How does the political discourse in speeches reinforce or challenge a hierarchically gendered social order?; and 2) How are gender ideology and gendered relations promoted, negotiated, and/or contested in political discourse at the RNC? We analyzed 59 speeches using a process including open coding, descriptive analysis, and interpretive analysis. Speakers used grammar, vocabulary and storytelling to construct and defend a Republican Party vision of a desired gender order. Grammar masculinized transgender women, established cisgender women as helpless victims, and perpetuated stereotypes about immigrants and gender minorities. Vocabulary polarized Republican and Democratic agendas in relation to gender and sexuality. Finally, storytelling represented and performed desired gender roles and norms through character development and plot. We interpret our findings within the context of scholarship on political storytelling, myth, and significance quest theory.

Keywords: nationalist populism; discourse analysis; United States; significance quest theory; political storytelling