Millennial Women and Madam President: Is the Future Really Female?

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By

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Abstract

This thesis examines the ways in which millennial women are prone to gender bias in their evaluations of female presidential candidates and the factors that contribute to millennial women's gendered expectations for female presidential candidates. In order to respond to these areas of inquiry, the researcher applied social role theory and system-justification theory to survey and interview data collected from a population of Boston College undergraduate women. Ultimately, it was found that millennial women are prone to gender bias when evaluating female presidential candidates and that the gender beliefs that prompt this bias are so deeply ingrained that they appear almost inevitable.

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And to the first female president of the United States, whoever she may be. Because despite everything, I believe that she is out there and I believe that the future really *is* female.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

It is no secret that women are grossly underrepresented in United States federal politics. At the time of this writing, women hold only 21% of seats in the U.S. Senate and 19.1% of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives ("Current Numbers", 2017). Three out of nine current Supreme Court justices are women. And then, of course, there has never been a female president.

In 1937, Gallup conducted a poll asking the American population about its willingness to vote for a female presidential candidate. Interestingly, only 33% of those polled responded that yes, they would vote for a woman for president (Newport, 1999). To phrase this another way, over half of the U.S. population in 1937 reported that they would *not* vote for a woman for president. And although many polls from the past several years reveal that this is no longer the case, there still does not exist overwhelming support for the prospect of a female president.

Take, for example, the 2014 Pew Research Center poll that posed the following question: "Do you personally hope the United States will elect a female president in your lifetime, or does that not matter to you?" Out of the 1,004 individuals polled, Democratic women appeared most enthusiastic about the prospect of a female president, with 69% responding that yes, they hoped to see a female president elected. This group was followed by Democratic men at 46%, independent women at 45%, independent men at 32%, Republican women at 20%, and lastly, Republican men at 16% (Cohn & Livingston, 2016). Although this poll represents a slightly more positive state of affairs than past polls on the subject, the data suggest that 31% and 80% of the female population do *not* want a female leader.

Despite the less-than-enthusiastic views of many Americans, several women have endeavored to run for president. In 1872, 48 years before the 19th Amendment afforded women the right to vote, a woman named Victoria Woodhull courageously and ambitiously ran for president under the Equal Rights Party, which supported rights for women (Felsenthal, 2015). Although Woodhull was obviously unsuccessful in her attempt (she was jailed on election day along with other women who attempted to vote for her), she became the first woman in United States history to test the strength of the nation's highest glass ceiling.

More recently, Hillary Rodham Clinton left some sizable dents in that glass ceiling with her 2016 presidential run. While Clinton won the popular vote, she lost the electoral vote and thus the election to Republican nominee Donald Trump. Nonetheless, her presidential run was no small feat. Out of all the women who endeavored to journey to the Oval Office, Clinton has made it the farthest.

In the hours following the election, *Newsweek* magazine released images of the magazine cover they would have run had Clinton won the election (Harper, 2016). The cover features the words "Madam President" in bold above a photograph of the smiling Democratic nominee. Alluding to the novelty and historical significance of Clinton's hypothetical win, the cover story's byline reads: "Hillary Clinton's historic journey to the White House." And although the cover never ran, the story of "Madam President" is still important and still needs to be told.

The United States has never known a "Madam President" because 100% of U.S. presidents have been male. And while women account for over half of the U.S. population, they have never had their gender represented in the highest and most visible

office in the nation. Karen Vasby Anderson (2002) points out that "although women are making strides in other realms of public governance, the U.S. presidency remains a bastion of masculinity" (p. 105). This matters because representation matters. Representation—or lack thereof—creates a framework for how we mentally organize our society and conceptualize our roles within that society. Consider this: Would there ever exist a poll to assess the willingness of Americans to vote for a *male* presidential candidate? The simple answer is no. And yet, pollsters continue to ask Americans about their willingness to elect a woman as president, recognizing that there is something inherently different and potentially negative about female candidates. It is crucial to recognize that the U.S. has a long way to go before it can tout itself as a place of gender equality.

In this thesis, I explore the ways in which women (specifically *millennial* women) are prone to gender bias in their evaluations of female presidential candidates. I also explore the factors that contribute to women's gendered expectations for female presidential candidates. I do this by analyzing rich survey and interview data that I collected from a potential female voter population of Boston College undergraduate women.

In the next chapter of this thesis, Chapter Two, I provide the necessary background and context for this study and I review the existing literature. In reviewing the existing literature, I highlight gaps that I intend to address with this thesis. In Chapter Three, I introduce and explain the relevant theories and theorists that I will use to inform my interpretation of the data. These include Eagly's social role theory and Jost and Banaji's system-justification theory. In Chapter Four, I outline my research methods. In

this chapter, I explain the IRB approval procedure, my data collection methods, the process of acquiring informed consent from participants, participant confidentiality, and the manner in which I will analyze the all of the data. In Chapter Five, I analyze and interpret the data and develop a new theory helps to explain my findings. And finally, in Chapter Six, I conclude the thesis, summarize the findings, discuss the implications of those findings, and consider the limitations of the project as well as potential directions for further study.

Chapter Two: Context and Literature Review

Context and Description of Study

A surprisingly small amount of research exists on the topic of female candidates and the U.S. presidency, and much of the research that does exist focuses on media framing of female candidates. Additionally, very little research has emphasized the female voter's attitudes towards women in politics. Poll data, as outlined earlier, has been illuminating insofar as it points to a prevalent lack of enthusiasm for the prospect of a female president among certain groups, but it fails to explain precisely *why* that is the case. As such, this qualitative research project aims to fill that gap by exploring the relationship between female voters and female presidential candidates.

This research project will examine young female voters—or *millennial* female voters— specifically. Millennial participation in the highly-contested 2016 presidential election inspired, in part, the topic of this research project. Hillary Clinton received more support from millennials during the election than did Donald Trump, but millennial Trump supporters reported being more enthusiastic about their candidate than did Clinton supporters (Galston & Hendrickson, 2016). This is particularly interesting as Trump maintained a platform that might appear to exist contrary to women's interests. With this in mind, the research will explore how a population of millennial females—comprised of women who span the political spectrum—feel about the prospect and importance of a female president.

Millennial viewpoints are especially critical because millennials surpassed Baby Boomers as the largest living generation in 2016 (Fry, 2016). As such, millennials are worthy of our time and attention. At the time of this writing, millennials comprise the

largest generational voting bloc, and therefore have the potential to greatly influence future elections and affect major political change.

If the U.S. is ever to elect a female president, political change is paramount. Perhaps if we can better understand the barriers that women face in their march to the Oval Office, we can start to organize and mobilize in such a way that will allow us to one day elect a woman as president.

Literature Review

The following review of the literature is intended to provide a comprehensive look at the existing research on the topic and to map out the gaps in said work. The review is organized thematically and examines pervasive themes that emerged from the literature. It will begin by exploring the negative role of the media in covering campaigns of female politicians, as well as the specific media frames that are employed in such coverage. It will examine the concept of political gender stereotyping in relation to the double bind of female politicians, candidate evaluation, the glass ceiling and system justification, the salience of specific issues, and popular culture. It will explore the behavior of the female voters—with emphasis on the concept of homophily, the gender gap, and sources of disunity among female voters–before examining the behavior of young voters. Finally, the review will summarize the gaps in the existing literature that this research seeks to address.

Media framing of female political candidates. Media plays an integral role in both informing and reinforcing a society's cultural beliefs. And, to be sure, media is not always objective in its representations. For better or for worse, the way that the media frames a candidate helps to shape and perpetuate that candidate's image (Parry-Giles,

2009). As voters rely heavily on these constructions when forming evaluations of political candidates, the media's role in image-making is an important one. Political news coverage allows voters to form evaluations of candidates, and these evaluations greatly inform how voters ultimately decide to vote (Meeks, 2012). As such, differences in the media framings of male and female political candidates are likely to have profound effects.

Existing research indicates that the media frames female politicians differently than their male counterparts (Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005; Meeks, 2012; Belt, 2013). News coverage of female presidential candidates often adopts a novelty-frame and over-emphasizes the novelty of the woman's candidacy (Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005; Meeks, 2012; Khan & Blair, 2013). Such framing can be detrimental to the electoral prospects of the woman seeking office (Vasby Anderson, 2002).

For instance, Elizabeth Dole's run for Republican nomination in the 2000 presidential election may have been undercut by print media coverage that focused first and foremost on the novelty of her gender (Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005). Coverage of Dole's candidacy employed a "first woman" frame that emphasized, over and over again, the fact that Dole was the first serious female contender for the presidency (Woodall & Fridkin, 2007). The news media also emphasized Dole's gender by devoting the majority of its coverage of her to analysis of her personality and appearance (Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005). Thus, novelty framing, in addition to and excessive coverage of her personality and appearance, served to cast Dole as a woman instead of a serious candidate. Bose (2007) even suggests that voters may have become disenchanted

with Dole specifically because of the media's negative and superficial coverage of her candidacy. Dole did not receive the nomination.

Meeks (2012) found that coverage of female political candidates invariably codes female candidates' character traits and stances on political issues as "feminine." Being stereotyped in this way can be greatly detrimental to a female candidate's electoral prospects. In fact, according to Meeks (2012), "the disconnect in America between women and political office is fed by the cultural premise that politics is a domain for masculinized behaviors, messages, and professional experiences" (p. 176). If political roles are considered masculine, then news coverage that frames female candidates as feminine in effect polarizes those candidates.

An interesting variation of this phenomenon occurred when Hillary Clinton ran for Democratic nomination in the 2008 presidential election. Media coverage of Clinton's candidacy focused more on her husband, former President Bill Clinton, that it did on her (Khan & Blair, 2013). This coverage marginalized Clinton's campaign by deferring attention to Bill while also highlighting a centuries-long connection between hegemonic masculinity and the United States presidency (Khan & Blair, 2013). Essentially, news coverage reminded viewers that Clinton sought a traditionally masculine role.

Not surprisingly, media coverage that does not emphasize a female candidate's gender may be advantageous to that candidate. When Hillary Clinton ran for an open Senate seat in New York in 2000, the media concerned itself primarily with her status as a "carpet-bagger" as she sought election in a state in which she had never lived and in which she had few connections (Vasby Anderson, 2002). Although coverage was still

largely negative, the news media cast Clinton as a serious candidate by privileging her outsiderness over her gender. Clinton won the Senate seat.

Finally, it appears that media framing effects permeate popular culture as well. An analysis of viral videos featuring Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin during the 2008 presidential election season revealed that the videos frequently employed gender stereotypes in their portrayals of the female candidates. Whereas Palin was frequently depicted as overly-sexualized and unintelligent, Clinton was often portrayed as conservative in appearance and boring. The videos emphasized both the personalities and appearances of female candidates more than those of male candidates (Belt, 2013). As mentioned earlier, media coverage that emphasizes a female candidate's personality—especially when that personality is coded as feminine—can be detrimental.

Political gender stereotyping. Many studies note that gender stereotypes often come into play in the political realm (Rosenwasser & Dean, 1987; Rosenwasser & Seale, 1988; Leeper, 1991; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Vasby Anderson, 1999; Rudman & Kilianski, 2000; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) note that a candidate's gender is politically relevant and forward the idea of "political gender stereotyping." Political gender stereotyping, as the researchers define it, is "the gender-based ascription of different traits, behaviors, or political beliefs to male and female politicians" (p. 120). Basically, voters expect different competencies from male and female candidates.

Political gender stereotyping facilitates voters' expectations for different areas of competency and expertise from male and female candidates (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). Male candidates are commonly expected to excel in "masculine" issue areas, such as

dealing with terrorism and overseeing military defense, while female candidates are expected to excel in "feminine" issue areas, such as dealing with children, the aged, the racially marginalized, and the disabled (Rosenwasser & Dean, 1987). This can be explained, in part, by the fact that female candidates are stereotyped as being more compassionate than male candidates (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993).

A landmark study conducted by Sapiro (1981) demonstrates political gender stereotyping at work. Sapiro (1981) presented study participants with a fairly neutral speech devoid of clear ideological or partisan leanings. She then informed half of the study participants that a male political candidate had given the speech, and informed the other half of the participants that a female candidate had given the speech (Sapiro, 1981). Although both groups were given identical information on the candidates, participants evaluated the male candidate and the female candidate differently. Participants evaluated the female candidate as being more competent in traditionally "feminine" issue areas, such as education, while they evaluated the male candidate as being more competent in traditionally "masculine" issue areas, such as dealing with military issues (Sapiro, 1981). Sapiro's findings demonstrate that individuals, even when presented with very little information on a political candidate, are likely to employ political gender stereotyping to make arbitrary assumptions about the strengths and weaknesses of that candidate.

Interestingly, Sanbonmatsu and Dolan (2012) posit that political gender stereotypes– as well as attitudes towards women's representation– are distinct attitudes in and of themselves. Although these stereotypes and attitudes are distinct from beliefs about the appropriate social roles of men and women, they *can* be related to gender attitudes. For example, individuals who believe that a woman's place is in the home are

more likely to believe that women are less emotionally suited for politics than men (Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2012).

In a particularly illuminating study, Rosenwasser and Dean (1987) presented participants with descriptions of hypothetical male and female presidential candidates that contained references to masculine or feminine descriptors. "Masculine" descriptors included the terms *assertive*, *forceful*, *self-sufficient*, *defends own beliefs*, and *strong personality*, while "feminine" descriptors included the terms *warm*, *compassionate*, *sensitive to the needs of others*, *cheerful*, and *affectionate* (Rosenwasser & Dean, 1987). The researchers discovered that even when male presidential candidates were described with exclusively feminine descriptors, participants ranked them as more likely to win the election than female candidates (Rosenwasser & Dean, 1987). Thus, the implication is that when "handicapped" with the stereotypes that bar women from electoral success, male candidates still manage to come out on top. Thus, for voters, gender legitimizes a candidate more so than character.

Rudman and Kilianski (2000) suggest that men and women alike might hold similar perceptions about the role of women in society. Using an implicit association test to measure attitudes towards female authority, Rudman and Kilianski discovered that both men and women possess similarly negative attitudes towards females in positions of power. Both men and women's attitudes towards female authorities were more negative than their attitudes towards male authorities, low-authority males, and low-authority females. And although women displayed slightly less explicit prejudice than men, both genders seemed to associate men with high-authority roles and women with subordinate, low-authority roles (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000).

The double bind of female politicians. Dolan (2014) argues that voters see individuals and not abstractions. This view, however, vastly reduces the profound and far-reaching effects of political gender stereotyping. To start, political gender stereotypes influence voters' evaluations of political candidates. Leeper (1991), in an attempt to further the exploration of the relationship between female candidates and masculinity, sought to examine differences in voter response to male and female candidates pushing an objectively tough ("masculine") stand on policy. Ultimately, voters evaluated the female candidate as exceeding the male candidate in possessing feminine areas of strength, but evaluated *both* candidates equally as possessing male areas of strength (Leeper, 1991). As such, to counter effects of political gender stereotyping, female candidates might find it beneficial to espouse "the masculine."

Espousing the masculine, however, is not a straightforward task. The public is apt to analyze male and female politicians differently, even when they are behaving in similar ways. Anderson (1999), observes that it is not at all uncommon for a powerful female in the public eye, such as Hillary Clinton, to be referred to as a "bitch" while her male counterparts are referred to as "aggressive" for demonstrating the same behavior. Political gender stereotyping creates a "double bind" for female politicians, meaning they face an incompatibility of stereotypes about women's strengths and stereotypes regarding what constitutes a strong and effective leader (Woodhall & Fridkin, 2007). Woodhall and Fridkin (2007) observe the following:

> Women leaders are often punished if they act in a way that reinforces sex role expectations (e.g., showing emotion signifies weakness), and they may be

> punished if they act in a way that conflicts with commonly held stereotypes (e.g., acting tough signifies insensitivity). (p. 70)

In this way, the double bind traps female politicians in a no-win situation.

Additionally, sexist gender stereotypes that contribute to voters evaluating a behavior as negative when performed by a female and neutral or positive when performed by a male make it extremely difficult for female candidates to be perceived as competent and able to lead (Anderson, 1999). In fact, "leadership behavior" is perceived less favorably when demonstrated by a woman than when demonstrated by a man (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Eagly and Karau attribute this to apparent paradox to voters' perceptions of discrepancy between the "masculine" role of leader and the "feminine" role of woman.

The perception that leadership itself is a masculine role appears to be pervasive. Researchers found that electoral offices themselves are perceived as being gendered; voters perceived local, state, and presidential offices are being markedly more "masculine" than "feminine" (Rosenwasser & Dean, 1987). As such, perceptions that high electoral offices are not "feminine" might contribute to the continued majority of males filling these roles. Findings from a study that required participants to rank hypothetical male and female candidates on their effectiveness in handling masculine and feminine presidential tasks support the hypothesis that an effective president is a *masculine* president (Rosenwasser & Seale, 1988). Participants rated female candidates as highly-effective in performing feminine tasks and male candidates as highly-effective at performing masculine tasks. When rating the importance of these tasks, participants ranked feminine presidential tasks (such as managing the educational system or

advocating for the rights of minorities) as less important than masculine presidential tasks (such as dealing with terrorism or a military crisis).

Thus, the consistent coding of female political candidates' behaviors, competencies, and traits as "feminine" renders them incompatible with "masculine" electoral offices. Rosenwasser and Seale (1988) suggest that it might be necessary for a candidate to possess markedly masculine traits, such as authoritativeness, in order to be perceived as an actual contender for the United States presidency. Anderson (2002) notes that "until the office of the presidency changes, spurred by a broader understanding of presidential leadership, it will never seem normal for a woman to compete for that particular job" (p. 123).

In what appears to run contradictory to previous studies on the topic, Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes (2003) found that women may gain an electoral advantage on the state and local level when they run "as women" and emphasize traditionally "feminine" issues. The researchers examined survey responses regarding campaign strategy from female candidates who ran for U.S. House and state legislature seats in 1996 and 1998. Using the candidate's electoral win or loss as the dependent variable, they discovered a trend that female candidates who targeted women and stressed "feminine" issues did indeed gain a strategic advantage. As such, the researchers argue that "one of the keys to success for female candidates is to wage campaigns that use voters' dispositions toward gender as an asset rather than a liability" (p. 244). What separates this study from studies that appear contradictory is its emphasis on female candidates marketing themselves as feminine in order to appeal to *other women*. Rosenwasser and Seale (1988) and Leeper (1991), on the

other hand, suggest a method that might enable female candidates to garner widespread support across the electorate as a whole.

Impact of stereotypes on candidate evaluation. As noted earlier, political gender stereotyping impacts voters' evaluations of candidates. For example, Koch (2000) observed that the gender stereotype that women tend to be liberal can inform voters' perceptions of a female candidate's ideological position. As such, voters are likely to view both female Republic and female Democratic candidates as being more liberal than they may be. If political candidates are viewed on a spectrum, this perception effect polarizes female Democratic candidates by positioning them even further to the left on the spectrum and moderates female Republican candidates by positioning them closer to the center of the spectrum. Koch (2000) found that the moderation of the Republican candidate and the polarization of the Democratic candidate increases the Republican's chance at electoral success and hinders the Democrat's chance. Although Koch's study highlights the importance of a candidate's party identification, it falls short because it homogenizes the U.S. electorate and fails to consider differences in voter demographics. For instance, it is unclear if a highly conservative female would lend support to a female Republican candidate even though she perceives that candidate to be extremely moderate.

Sanbonmatsu and Dolan (2012) conducted a study on political gender stereotyping that consciously accounted for the party identification of voters. The researchers found that although gender stereotypes transcend party lines, Republicans are less likely than Democrats to view women as being competent politically. Additionally, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to view female politicians unfavorably in general. This particular study goes a long way in highlighting the importance of voter

party identification, but it fails to account for the impact that a voter's gender might have on his or her perception of a female candidate.

Finally, Sanbonmatsu (2002) argues that voters employ gender stereotypes to form a baseline preference to vote for male over female candidates, or female over male candidates. Gender stereotypes about a male or female candidate's traits, beliefs, and areas of expertise can inform this preference. This baseline preference might help to explain the findings of a study conducted by Paul and Smith (2008). Upon studying a pool of likely Ohio voters' reactions to five potential presidential candidates, Paul and Smith (2008) found that the two female candidates (Hillary Clinton and Elizabeth Dole) were viewed as significantly less qualified for the U.S. Presidency than their male counterparts (John Edwards, Rudy Giuliani, and John McCain). Thus, when compared to male candidates with the same credentials, it is possible for female candidates to be viewed less favorably by voters.

Although a candidate's gender is significant, Alexander and Anderson (1993) discovered that voters rely heavily on their own attitudes towards gender roles to inform their evaluations of female candidates, specifically when information about the candidate is sparse or when a female candidate challenges a male incumbent. Important to note is that not all gender role attitudes are negative. Alexander and Anderson (1993) found that voters who possessed "egalitarian gender role attitudes" were more likely to evaluate female candidates just as favorably as male candidates.

Issue salience. Issue salience, which refers to the prominence or perceived importance of specific issues at certain points in time, can interact with political gender stereotypes that voters might hold. For instance, researchers have discovered that issue

salience affects the electorate's perceptions of male and female presidential candidates in dramatic ways (Paolino, 1995; Lawless, 2004; Falk & Kenski, 2006b). Falk and Kenski (2006b) observe that issue salience has a greater impact on informing a voter's preference for male or female presidential candidates than considerations such as voter demography and political affiliation. Thus, the effects of issue salience are significant and worth examining.

Voters tend to evaluate male presidential candidates as being better equipped to deal with terrorism than female presidential candidates (Rosenwasser & Dean, 1987). Americans are also more likely to desire a male president if they cite homeland security, terrorism, or U.S. involvement in Iraq as the most pressing issue facing the nation (Falk & Kenski, 2006b). Lawless (2004) suggests that an atmosphere of war may hinder the electoral prospects of a woman seeking high office.

The September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center provide an illuminating case study for this effect. Following the attacks, an overwhelming majority of Americans were understandably compelled to view issues of national security and foreign policy as being of critical importance (Lawless, 2004). The salience of such issues may pose considerable obstacles to women seeking office, because as Bose (2007) contends, female presidential candidates are unlikely to be viewed as being equally or more competent in these situations as men.

It is crucial to note, however, that issue salience does not always negatively impact female political candidates. Paolino (1995) furthers the concept of issue salience and found that in the 1992 U.S. Senate elections, female voters were inclined to vote for female senatorial candidates because of perceptions that a female might be better-

equipped than a male to deal with women-salient issues. As such, attributing women's tendency to vote for women candidates due solely to homophily—the idea that individuals are likely to endorse and be persuaded by those who are similar to them—might be an oversimplification. Furthermore, the existence of group-salient issues—in this case, *women*-salient issues—contributes to the gender gap in support for female candidates (Dolan, 2008).

Stereotypes and popular culture. Similar to major national events, popular culture has the capacity to inform politics. Uscinski (2013) aptly summarizes the relationship between popular culture and politics as follows: "Popular culture has an important nexus with politics—it reflects, reinforces, and affects public opinions about a great variety of issues" (p. 122). Indeed, political gender stereotypes are coded into popular TV and film representations of the presidency and the political realm.

Hungerford (2010) explored representations of the presidency, masculinity, and femininity in the major motion pictures *Independence Day* and *Air Force One*. The researcher found that prevalent themes of masculinity, heroism, the citizen soldier, and the family patriarch were integral to representations of the presidency in these films (Hungerford, 2010). Uscinski (2013) similarly observes themes of fear of femininity, fear of feminine power, subordination of women in American society, and gendered view of leadership in popular cinema's portrayal of the presidency. In popular cinema, it seems that the highest leadership role women can aspire to is the secondary role of the vice president. This trope is present in films such as *The Contender*, *Air Force One*, and even *A Very Brady Sequel* (Uscinski, 2013). Popular cinema's failure to represent powerful

women holding high political office both normalizes and perpetuates the idea that men, and *only* men, are qualified for the presidency.

Behavior of the female voter. Although popular media representations depict them as ill-suited for the presidency, women play no small role in electing the president. Since 1964, women have constituted the majority of U.S. voters (Sanbonmatsu & Dolan; 2012). Due to an increasing number of female voters relative to male voters, female voters are slowly beginning to influence both the discourse of campaigns and the issues that those campaigns focus on (Mueller, 1991). As this research project focuses on women voters in the United States, an examination of the literature on the relationship between the female voter and the female candidate is necessary. A voter's gender, regardless of party, is significantly related to voting for female candidates (Plutzer & Zipp, 1996).

Homophily. In stark contrast to the Pew Research Center poll, several studies found that female voters are highly likely to favor female candidates (Eckstrand & Eckert, 1981; Sigelman & Sigelman, 1982; Sigelman & Welch, 1984; Falk & Kenski, 2004; Falk, 2010). Erika Falk (2010) points to the concept of homophily—the idea that individuals are likely to endorse and be persuaded by those who are similar to them—to explain this phenomenon. Results from a 1996 study appear to support the same conclusion (Plutzer & Zipp, 1996). Plutzer and Zipp (1996) found that female voters were especially inclined to vote for female candidates seeking statewide office who ran "as women" and as representatives of women. Thus, because female voters are likely to relate to female candidates, and because they are likely to see similarities between

themselves and those candidates, they might be more easily persuaded by those candidates.

In a study that simulated a mayoral election, Sigelman and Sigelman (1982) found that female voters, when presented with a choice between a male candidate and a female candidate, tend to exhibit a pro-female bias in favoring the female candidate (Sigelman & Sigelman, 1982). This study lends support to the hypothesis that similarity breeds attraction. With a voter's gender serving as a stronger predictor of their presidential gender preference than the voter's party identification (Falk & Kenski, 2004).

To further study this phenomenon, Sigelman and Welch (1964) conducted a study—during the same year that the Civil Rights Act was enacted—to identify sources of opposition to hypothetical black and female presidential candidates, and their findings are largely consistent with the concept of homophily. The researchers found that although white men are just as likely as white women to support female candidates, black women are much more likely than black men to support female candidates (Sigelman & Welch, 1964). Additionally, black voters are significantly more supportive of black candidates than were white voters (Sigelman & Welch, 1964). For the most part, it appears that individuals are likely to favors those like themselves. In fact, Eckstrand and Eckert (1981) conducted an experiment to measure the impact of a candidate's sex on voter choice, and found that female voters were 10 percent more likely to favor the liberal leaning candidate when that candidate was identified as a woman instead of a man. Given that the majority of white female voters in the recent 2016 presidential election did not support the Democratic female candidate, Hillary Clinton, this particular study might

have proven more illuminating had it included an examination of the female voters' race as a variable.

So, if individuals are likely to favor those like themselves, why have female voters not been successful in electing a female president? One explanation is that homophily might actually decrease as the level of office a particular candidate seeks increases. Dolan (1997) found that although 93% of study participants would consider supporting a female in a local election, only 66% would support a female in a presidential election. Important to note is that the participant population was comprised of women *and* men, and the researcher hypothesizes that much of the decrease in support likely came from male participants. Nevertheless, a drop of 27% is still significant.

The gender gap. Although sources of disunity exist among female voters themselves, even greater sources of disunity exist between male and female voters. The gender gap refers to "differences between men and women in vote choice, voter turnout, other types of political participation, policy preferences, and public opinion differences" (Conway, 2008, p. 170). As evidenced by this definition, there are many different forms of the political gender gap.

As the political gender gap does not point to one distinct phenomenon, the origins of the gender gap are understandably complex. Wolak and McDevitt (2011) contend that a gender gap in political knowledge may originate as early as adolescence. Even after controlling for individual political interest and political efficacy differences, researchers found that young women consistently receive significantly lower scores than their male peers on tests of political knowledge (Wolak & McDevitt, 2011). Although young women appeared to possess less political knowledge than their male peers, the

researchers found young women to be no less interested in politics than young men (Wolak & McDevitt, 2011). Therefore, the researchers hypothesize that young women lack not political interest but *political efficacy*. Young women "withdraw from politics from a sense that they are not politically influential" (Wolak & McDevitt, 2011, p. 512). Finally, the researchers discovered that young women tend to be more knowledgable about politics in states where female representation in state politics is greater (Wolak & McDevitt, 2011). The implications of this finding are profound. Having descriptive representation in political office might facilitate both political learning, political interest, and political efficacy for young women.

Unlike Wolak and McDevitt, Elder and Greene (2008) hypothesize that the gender gap originates during parenthood as an individual's political ideology is subject to change after he or she has a child. The researchers found that an individual's attitudes on issues that relate to parenthood (including education, healthcare, and childcare) are related to that individual's status as a parent and his or her level of involvement as a parent. Interestingly, this phenomenon was significantly stronger for mothers than for fathers. As parenthood impacts women's political attitudes more than men's, it might contribute to a gap between women's and men's policy preferences.

Finally, and perhaps most relevant to this thesis research, Dolan (2008) examines the existence of a gender gap in support for female candidates. She contends that the existence of such a gap is complex and cannot be attributed solely to the shared gender identity of female candidates and female voters (Dolan, 2008). Thus, while homophily does contribute to this gap (Falk, 2010), it by no means tells the entire story. Instead, Dolan (2008) suggests that the gender gap in support for female candidates might emerge

for several reasons, including women's desire for descriptive representation, a sense that women's fortunes are connected to the fortune's of other women, women's perception that female candidates are especially well suited to deal with issues that are important to female voters, and shared political ideologies. Naturally, combinations of any of these reasons can contribute to the existence of a gender gap.

Disunity among female voters. While it is useful to examine the voting behaviors of women, it is crucial to note that female voters do not exist as one cohesive, monolithic group. Much of the existing research indicates the female voters in the United States tend to favor the Democratic Party and are more likely to vote for Democratic candidates than Republican ones (Mueller, 1991; Dolan, 2008; Huddy, Cassese, & Lizotte, 2008; Rackaway, 2013). While this is statistically true, it would be a gross oversimplification to assume that differences do not exist within the all-encompassing category of "female voters." As such, it is necessary to examine the areas of difference and disunity that exist among female voters.

Racial and ethnic divides among women voters can function as strong predictors of voting behavior. Black women, for instance, are more likely than white women to support the Democratic Party and to vote for Democratic candidates (Huddy, Cassese, & Lizotte, 2008). Additionally, researchers compared the gender gap across five different racial and ethnic groups and found that white, African American, Hispanic, and American Indian women– but *not* Asian American women– are less likely than men to pay attention to government and political affairs (Conway, 2008). To be sure, race, religion, and socioeconomic status are all powerful drivers of disunity among female voters (Huddy, Cassese, & Lizotte, 2008).

Various other differences can also serve as predictors of vote choice. For example, women in wealthier households and women who are strongly religious are more likely to support Republican candidates (Huddy, Cassese, & Lizotte, 2008). Women in union households, on the other hand, are more likely to support Democratic candidates (Huddy, Cassese, & Lizotte, 2008). These findings are paramount because they serve to both legitimize the differences between women voters and examine how those differences might result in predictable voting behavior.

Conclusion. The literature provides valuable insight into reasons why the United States electorate has not yet been successful in electing a woman as president. In sum, media's gendered framings and representations of female political candidates, the pervasiveness of political gender stereotypes, and the existence of a gender gap between men and women's political behaviors all contribute to the continued existence of the nation's highest glass ceiling.

There are, however, flaws and gaps within the existing body of research. First and foremost, many of the studies explored in this review utilize poll data exclusively. Poll data is not a perfect measure of attitudes and is subject to considerable social desirability bias. Several researchers note that participants' tendency to respond in such a way that they believe will represent them favorably to others might skew the data acquired from polls (Sigelman & Welch, 1984; Streb, Burrell, Frederick, & Genovese, 2008; Falk, 2010). For example, Sigelman and Welch (1984) noted that social desirability bias might have skewed the results of their study on sources of opposition to black and female presidential candidates. Thus, respondents who did not want to appear racist or sexist might have falsely indicated support for those candidates. Falk and Kenski (2006)

contend that polls themselves might actually skew results in the opposite direction. They found that individuals who claim that they will not vote for a female presidential candidate in polls would actually do so if presented with realistic and specific political scenarios involving potential candidates (Falk & Kenski, 2006a). In this manner, conclusions drawn from poll data might, by overemphasizing gender, dismiss the role of party identification and individual differences in predicting voting behavior (Falk & Kenski, 2006a). Although no perfect measure of attitudes exists, this thesis research seeks to enhance understandings of polling data by using survey and interview data.

In the same vein, a majority of the studies that constitute the existing body of research on the topic of women and the U.S. presidency are quantitative in nature. Very few take a qualitative approach to the topic. As a qualitative research project, this thesis aims to incorporate the individuality and lived experiences of study participants into the existing pool of mainly quantitative research.

Finally, this research intends to address specific gaps that are common in the existing research. Many of the studies examined look at either voter gender or voter party identification, but no study examines both simultaneously. Additionally, several studies that suggest the existence of a gender bias in voting fail to consider the gender of voters. And as such, they fail to address potential differences in the voting behaviors of men and women. Finally, the majority of studies that consciously consider voter gender also tend to fall short because they homogenize women into one cohesive, monolithic group.

This research aims to address the proposed gaps by observing the differences among young female voters and examining how the variable of party identification might contribute to specific attitudes towards the prospect of a female president.

Given the identified gaps in the literature, this study seeks to respond to the following research questions:

RQ1: In what ways, if any, are millennial women prone to gender bias in their evaluations of female presidential candidates?

RQ2: What factors, if any, contribute to millennial women's gendered expectations for female presidential candidates?

Chapter Three: Description of Theory

I will be utilizing two theories to inform my interpretation of the data. These theories are Alice Eagly's social role theory and John Jost and Mahzarin Banaji's system justification theory.

Social Role Theory

Overview of the theory. I will primarily be utilizing Alice Eagly's social role theory. Eagly initially began to develop the theory in the 1980s and has since fleshed it out with an array of co-researchers. Thus, all social role research that was conducted by Eagly, regardless of the co-researcher, will be used in this section to refer to social role theory. Social role theory posits that a gendered division of labor produces differences in the the way that men and women behave and in how much social influence the sexes wield. The ramification of this is that women tend to hold drastically different roles than men, and these roles require different behavior and traits than the roles that men hold (Carli & Eagly, 1999).

At a base level, social role theory provides a framework for understanding and examining societal beliefs about the roles of men and women. Gender stereotypes—or gender role beliefs, as Eagly calls them—are central to the theory. These beliefs form as individuals observe examples of male and female behavior in their society and assume that the sexes possess personalities and dispositions that correspond to these behaviors. Eagly and Wood (2012) provide the example of women in industrialized societies being more likely than men to serve as caretakers in both their professional life and home life. Thus, because members of this society frequently see women fulfilling the social role of caretaker, they infer that women possess compassionate and nurturing dispositions. This

leap seems natural. The researchers note that "because gender roles seem to reflect innate attributes of the sexes, they appear natural and inevitable" (Eagly & Wood, 2012, p. 459). In other words, we are predisposed to associate a woman's social role with her character.

Early origins of social role theory. When Eagly first began to develop social role theory in the 1980s, she paid particular attention the concept of role. Preliminary role theory research posited that individuals not hold role expectations for members of a society in their minds, but share these expectations with others. These shared expectations then produce a sort of consensus that facilitates both the structure of a society and the culture that exists within that society (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Eagly used this concept of role, as outlined above, as a starting point for developing a gender theory that emphasizes the influences of social structure and culture on male and female behavior.

Role of socialization. The process of socialization is central to social role theory. Eagly and Wood (2012) claim that extensive processes of socialization prepare men and women for their professional and familial roles. Societies promote different traits and skills for men and women that then facilitate men and women's differing social role performances. As such, socialization enables men and women to develop the "appropriate personality traits and skills" required to enact gender-specific performances (Eagly & Wood, 2012, p. 458). In this way, the process of socialization facilitates gender-specific role performances.

Incongruency of leadership roles and female social roles. Eagly's social role theory was heavily influenced by Bakan (1966), who found that while men are commonly thought to be agentic (meaning more dominant, assertive, and competitive), women are

thought to be communal (meaning more compassionate, selfless, and emotionally-expressive). Eagly and Wood (2012) suggest that Bakan's research highlighted gender role stereotypes that are "not arbitrary nor essentially inaccurate" (p. 462). The researchers turned to the cognitive process of correspondence bias to explain this phenomenon. Correspondence bias supposes that individuals are inclined to view another person's behaviors as reflective of character (Gilbert & Malone, 1995). As an example, Eagly and Wood (2012) suggest that if you see someone perform an act of kindness, you will likely think of that person as a kind and caring individual. The same phenomenon occurs with the sexes. Perceptions of male and female behaviors inform perceptions of male and female dispositions, including strengths and weaknesses.

Furthermore, Eagly and Karau (2002) found that perceptions of men and women's differing social roles cause leadership roles are viewed as congruent with male gender roles but not with female gender roles. The perceived discrepancy between the role of a leader and the role of a woman makes it difficult for individuals to accept or even just view women as viable leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The ramification of this incongruity is that members of a society can act prejudiced against potential or actual female leaders who are acting in opposition to their expected role.

Eagly and Wood's biosocial approach. More recently, Eagly collaborated with Wood and expanded social role theory to address both the social and evolutionary origins of the gendered division of labor. Eagly and Wood (2012) found that men and women's evolved physical sex differences—notably, men's strength and size and women's child-rearing capabilities and activities—facilitate differing social role expectations for men and women. These biological differences interact with culture to render certain activities

gendered. Eagly and Wood (2012) note, "Sex differences and similarities in behavior reflect *gender role beliefs* that in turn represent people's perceptions of men's and women's *social roles* in the society in which they live" (p. 459). Essentially, as men and women carry out their social roles, they are enacting gender roles.

Relevance to study. Social role theory is extremely applicable to this research project. The project examines millennial women's perceptions of and beliefs about the prospect of a female president. More broadly, it is an exploration of how women conceptualize the role of the United States presidency. Social role theory will be invaluable in examining the beliefs that women hold about their own gender, about a role that has been traditionally pegged as "masculine," and about the potential limitations of women. It will be interesting to see if traditional social beliefs about women do appear natural to study participants.

System-Justification Theory

In addition to social role theory, I will be using Jost and Banaji's system-justification theory to inform my findings. Researchers Jost and Banaji (1994) define system-justification as "the psychological process by which existing social arrangements are preserved in spite of the obvious psychological and material harm they entail for disadvantaged individuals and groups" (p. 10). Essentially, system-justification describes a psychological phenomenon in which members of a disadvantaged group possess stereotypes and beliefs that legitimize or attempt to justify that group's place in society. Such a phenomenon serves to preserve existing social arrangements, even though those arrangements might be problematic.

The researchers suggest that the interaction between two central concepts—stereotypes and false consciousness—results in system justification. I will now explore these concepts in more detail.

Stereotypes. In order to understand system-justification theory, we must first understand stereotypes. Jost and Banaji (1994) define stereotypes as prevalent beliefs about certain social groups. The researchers note that stereotypes exist in any society in which people are divided in different groups or categories (such as class, status, position, etc.) because "such arrangements tend to be explained and perceived as justifiable by those who participate in them" (p. 3). Thus, stereotypes are central to system-justification theory. The researchers use the theory to highlight the ways in which individuals use stereotypes to justify or explain an existing state of affairs, such as economic imbalances or power hierarchies. In fact, stereotypes can be so powerful that they can operate at the expense of the individual who possesses them and maintain that individual's disadvantaged station in society.

False consciousness. The concept of false consciousness is also crucial to understanding system-justification theory. False consciousness is defined as "the holding of beliefs that are contrary to one's personal or group interest" (Jost & Banaji, 1994, p. 3). It is clear to see, then, that false consciousness perpetuates the disadvantaged person or group's position in society. When an individual maintains stereotypes that exist contrary to their group's interests, they possess false consciousness.

Relevance to study. Although the researchers do not apply system justification theory to women's view of themselves and other women, the implications of applying this theory to such a realm are important to consider. In light of this theory, we might

consider that women possess certain stereotypes and beliefs about the role of women and the role of authority that ultimately facilitate the maintenance of a system that bars women from obtaining authority roles. If we consider this theory in conjunction with the voting behavior of women, we might see that women actually facilitate the continued existence of the glass ceiling via stereotypes that they hold about themselves and their gender.

Chapter Four: Methods

IRB Procedure

In the summer of 2017, I submitted my research study proposal to the Boston College Institutional Review Board for approval. On September 8, 2017, I was granted initial IRB approval and began recruiting study participants. Throughout this process, I made several modifications to my methods and subsequently submitted three IRB amendments. On October 17, 2017, my final amendment was approved.

Participants

The participant population for this research project was comprised of millennial women from the United States. Due to my easy access to the population, I recruited female Boston College students to participate in an online survey and in-person interviews. All participants were undergraduate students at Boston College at the time of the data collection and were of voting age at the time of the 2016 Presidential election. Overall, 69 women participated in the survey component and 16 women participated in the interview component. These numbers allowed me to accumulate an expansive pool of general survey data and a smaller, more in-depth pool of interview data.

In order to assure a diversity of viewpoints, I aimed to recruit participants spanning the political spectrum. Thirty-eight Democratic women, thirteen Republican women, sixteen women who identified with neither party, and two women who did not wish to divulge her affiliation participated in the survey component of the study. Additionally, eight Democratic women, five Republican women, and three women who identified with neither party participated in the interview component of the study.

To recruit these participants, I utilized a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling. I sourced participants by reaching out via email to various on-campus, student-run organizations (political organizations, female interest organizations, etc.) and to potential participants that were suggested to me by acquaintances and existing participants. I attempted to reach women with some level of interest in politics, with the hope that they would be interested in participating in the study. Recruitment emails can be found in Appendix A.

Informed Consent

All study participants were required to read and respond to an informed consent form before participating in the study. Survey participants were required to read a digital consent form and indicate their consent online before accessing the rest of the survey. Interview participants were required to read a physical consent form and sign to indicate their consent before the interview commenced. Additionally, I did not begin recording interviews until participants completed the consent process and indicated their willingness to be recorded. As such, all participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the benefits and risks of the study, and, most importantly, the voluntary nature of the study. All participants obtained informed consent and were aware that they could choose to stop participation at any time. Both the digital and physical consent forms are included in Appendix B.

Data Collection Methods

To collect the necessary data, I had participants respond to an online survey. The survey was hosted on the website SurveyMonkey. It greeted participants with an informed consent form and then posed several general questions. Among other things,

survey participants were asked to indicate, if they chose, their political affiliation, to list the issues that were most important to them in the 2016 presidential election, and to detail their interests and concerns regarding the election of a female president. The survey was intentionally short and generally took participants less than three minutes to complete. If a participant wished to continue her participation by the time she reached the end of the survey, she indicated her interest in an interview and entered her first name, phone number, and email address.

Once a survey participant indicated interest in an interview, I contacted her via email to schedule an interview at a time most convenient for the participant. I then interviewed participants in person in a public location on the Boston College campus. For each interview, the interviewee and I agreed upon a location where there would be little or no likelihood of being overheard and where the interviewee would feel most comfortable. For each interview, I conducted the informed consent procedure and then asked participants to respond to and elaborate on a series of seven to eight questions. Interviews were recorded and generally took no longer than 25 minutes to complete. The complete list of survey and interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

Confidentiality

I took great care to protect the privacy of participants in several ways. First, I created the online survey so as to not collect survey participants' IP addresses. All data (survey responses, interview recordings and transcripts, etc.) was stored in a private, password-protected file on my computer. Thus, with the exception of the transcription service, only I had access to the data.

Additionally, the survey did not collect the name of any participant, unless that participant opted to be interviewed (in which case, she was required to enter only a first name and method of contact). I assigned interview participants code names and stored the document that connected code names to participants' real names on an external flash drive, separate from the interview responses and other data.

Analytical Procedures

For this project, I chose coding as my method of analysis. I coded all survey and interview data to look for primary codes and patterns in the responses. I began by conducting primary cycle coding, including descriptive, interpretive, and in vivo codes to capture the essence of the data. I then conducted secondary cycle coding and organized my primary cycle codes into patterned concepts (Tracy, 2013).

I selected coding as the method of analysis because it was the method that best allowed me to synthesize and organize the interview data. As a method, coding "enables you to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or 'families' because they share some characteristic — the beginning of a pattern" (Saldana, 2009, p. 8).

Chapter Five: Analysis / Interpretation

Data Analysis

As outlined in the previous chapter, I analyzed the data through primary and secondary cycle coding. Although I coded the survey and interview data separately, many of the same codes and patterns emerged. Thus, I will discuss the findings from both the survey and interview components below.

Primary coding. Throughout my primary coding process, I generated a total of 91 codes from both survey and interview responses. Some of these codes related to qualities that participants found desirable in political candidates. Among these were grit, grace, experience, authenticity, conduct, track record, personable, intelligence, qualified, respectful, honesty, commands respect, advocate, and has the people's interests in mind. Other codes related to the survey respondent or interview participant herself. These included excitement, concern, disconnect, family influence, peer influence, media influence, concern for others, disagreeing, frustration, makes own decisions, sadness, and unsure. Many codes related to women and societal perceptions of the traditional role of women. These included stereotypes, lack of aggression, motherhood, socialization, young girls, outdated beliefs, name-calling, confidence, emotion, self-view, perceived as less than, women's role, sexism, First Lady, power, and male-dominated. Some codes related to female candidates specifically, such as glass ceiling, lack of precedent, scrutiny, unique strength, gender as unimportant, double standard, representation, risk, and empowering. Finally, several codes related to the women's movement and history. These included feminism, historically significant, timeline, "traditionally" language, "not there yet" language, and equality.

Secondary coding. During my secondary coding process, several key patterns emerged from the data. The most important patterns—and the ones that I will be focusing on in my interpretation—are the following: situating historically, metaphors evoking effort or labor, novelty of female candidates, young girls and socialization processes, female candidates as advocates, risks of female candidacy, contradictory stipulations for female candidates, male and female roles, gender stereotypes and women's self-view, and influences on participant. I will now explore these patterns in greater detail.

Situating historically. Survey and interview participants would situate both themselves and the women's movement historically. They did this in part by referencing a "timeline" of sorts detailing the history of women's fight for equality. To this end, one interview participant, Lauren, noted the following: "As a woman, you understand that over the past hundred years we've had to fight for our rights and respect and access to education and equal opportunity." Like Lauren, many participants were quick to acknowledge the historical oppression of women and many remarked that women have still not yet achieved full equality today. Both survey and interview participants interpreted the lack of a female president as proof of women's continued lack of equality. One interview participant even suggested that "if women are equal and that's really something that we believe as a country… we should by now have a woman president" (Caroline). Survey respondents in particular mirrored this sentiment, commenting that "it is time for a woman to be in the Oval Office" (Aubrey) and "I think that it's about time" (Charlotte). Statements like these suggest that participants are more than ready for a groundbreaking event to be introduced into the timeline of women's fight for equality.

Taking this a step further, both survey and interview participants suggested that the election of a female president would be historically significant for both women and the nation. Carly, a survey respondent, wrote that "having a female president would have changed the course of history," while another wrote that the election of a female president "will be a huge step in our country's history" (Leah). Respondents seemed to demonstrate an awareness that the election of the first female President of the United States would be a largely symbolic win for the women's movement. Participants also considered where the first female president might fall on the "timeline." A conservative interview participant, Sophia, grappled with whether or not the United States will elect a female president in her lifetime, saying, "I think before we die it's gonna happen. It's soon. But at the same time, would I be shocked if it's not for another hundred years? No."

Metaphors evoking effort or labor. Survey and interview participants often used language that suggests that women have to put in a considerable amount of effort or labor to be respected and viewed as equals. Following this sentiment, survey respondents and interview participants seemed to conclude that women still have a lot of work to do before they will be fully considered equal. One survey respondent, Ellie, wrote that "it shows how much work we as women have to do because we still have never had a female president." Interview participants iterated the same idea, commenting that "we still have so far to go as women" (Lauren) and "there is still a lot of work to do" (Sophia).

Along with observing that women still have a way to go, participants often referenced the "glass ceiling" that women have thus far been unsuccessful in shattering. Interview participants Sarah and Abigail discussed women's failure to attain the office of the presidency by commenting that "there's this huge glass ceiling" and "there's an

important glass ceiling that hasn't been broken yet." Going along with this, Kelsey, a survey respondent, answered a question that asked respondents to detail their interests and concerns regarding the election of a female president by simply and succinctly responding with the following: "breaking the glass ceiling."

Novelty of female candidates. As evidenced by their frequent "timeline" references, survey and interview participants appeared to be extremely aware that the election of a female president would be a novel event. Participants discussed the lack of precedent for a female president in the United States, noting that "there has never been in a woman in office" (Anna). One interview participant—who expressed support for the prospect of a female president earlier in her interview—candidly shared, "I have a hard time picturing a woman running our country" (Sarah). She explained that because every single U.S. president has been male, it is hard for her to imagine a female in that role.

Participants also considered how the first female president will inevitably set the precedent for female presidential candidates going forward. These participants seemed to arrive at the conclusion that setting the precedent is no small task, with many alluding to a "burden of representation" that would fall upon the first female president, should she ever be elected. An interview participant, Brianna, considered the ramifications of this and stated:

> Anytime you are the face of an entire populace… I feel like that's a heavy weight to carry. So I think that it's important for women to be there but I also think it's really important for them to be someone who has all the qualifications for it.

To this end, several other participants noted the need for the first female president to perform to near-perfection. Abigail commented that "some people want the first female president to be like a pillar of everything you would want a president to be."

Along with referencing a burden of representation, survey and interview participants alike expressed concern that if the first female president were to mess up, the nation would blame her misstep on her gender rather than her capabilities or the demands of the role. An interview participant lamented that any such mistake would simply be "blamed on the fact that she's a woman" (Evelyn). And on a more sobering note, another interview participant, Sarah, shared the following sentiment: "Whoever that woman is better do a f*cking good job because otherwise we're screwed."

We might be getting ahead of ourselves in discussing a female president, however, because participants cited a distinct lack of women in politics at any level. When I asked interview participants to share the name of a female politician they admire, many of them appeared to be at a loss. Natalie and Paige referenced the small pool of options to choose from, saying, "I can only think of like three female examples—our sample size is so small" and "I don't know a lot of female politicians—I really can't call to mind many in history." Perhaps due to the lack of women in politics, interview participants often cited the First Lady—who maintains an unelected position—in response to the question. Paige and Lauren named Michele Obama as the female politician they most respect, noting that "she very much had a voice of her own and wasn't just the wife of the president" and that she "took advantage of the power she had as First Lady to make a real impact."

Young girls and socialization processes. Related to the lack of women in politics, the themes of young girls and processes of socialization emerged. Participants frequently alluded to young girls being socialized to believe that women do not belong in politics because they grow up only ever seeing men in these roles. Relating this to her own life, Claire shared that she harbored dreams of becoming the first female president when she was little. As she got older, however, she quickly abandoned this dream. She commented that this experience is not unique to her and that the "dream fades out as we get older, as most girls get older." Similarly, another participant, Victoria, suggested that if a female student at the high school or college level were to express an interest in the presidency, she would simply get laughed at.

Participants seemed to largely agree that society does not raise young girls to see themselves in political roles. Lauren attributed this to the fact that young girls usually only see men in political roles. When I asked her participant why she thought this might be the case, she responded, "Based on how we're socialized and how we see ourselves and our skill set, I think generally women are less aggressive and might have less confidence in entering into a political race." Another participant, Brianna, astutely noted that "you can't be what you don't see" and suggested that "when young girls don't see people in office, it's really hard to project themselves onto being those people."

On a more hopeful note, survey and interview participants suggested that the election of a female president would be naturally empowering for women and young girls especially. Caroline hypothesized that the election of a female president "would inspire so many young girls to aspire towards politics" and Evelyn smiled as she said "I just can't imagine being a little girl growing up and knowing that the president is a woman."

Another interview participant, Hannah, drew a parallel between the novelty of a black president and the novelty of a female president. She noted that when Barack Obama was elected in 2008, black children felt for the first time that the presidency belong to them too. Hannah suggested that this phenomenon would extend to the impact that the election of a female president would have on young girls: if a woman were to be elected president, then young girls would be more inclined to see themselves in that role. In the same vein, Chloe felt strongly that having a woman hold the highest office in the nation would "send a very clear message about what's possible" to young girls.

Female candidates as advocates. Many survey and interview participants expressed interest in the potential of female candidates to serve as representatives of and advocates for women and other marginalized groups. When I asked interview participants to name a politician they greatly admire, many responded with Joe Biden because they respect that he emphasizes with and advocates for traditionally oppressed groups to which he does not belong. Although participants noted the rarity of this quality in men, they proposed that such empathy would come "naturally" to women. One interview participant, Lauren, suggested that women are much more likely than men to understand oppressed and marginalized groups, simply women themselves comprise a historically oppressed group. She said, "I think females understand these groups—through their own experience they understand groups of people who are overlooked." Both survey and interview participants seemed to agree with this statement and expressed confidence that a female president would be aware of and fight for the people's interests.

It appears that women want a female advocate for them in office. Brianna stated that, as women, "we deserve to have our rights advocated for by someone who is one of

us." Similarly, Hannah—concerned that affluent white males do not understand or support people who are not like them—posed the following question: "If we just continue to have presidents that are white males from upper middle class or upper class backgrounds, then how are they ever gonna help the people that really need support?" To this end, survey respondents emphasized that having a woman in the Oval Office would solve this problem and would be to the benefit of *all* Americans. Alexis and Kim wrote that the election of a female president would "help the country as a whole" and be "in the interest of all women AND men."

At a base level, women also seem excited about the prospect of attaining representation in the nation's highest office. Participants pointed out that it is important for all people to have representation and that it "makes sense" (Natalie) for women—who comprise over half of the U.S. population—to have representation in the presidency. In a particularly telling interview, Sarah explained that she would pay less attention to politics if the U.S. elected a female president because she would naturally assume that a woman would represent and defend her interests. She explained, "I think that if a woman is in there I'm gonna feel more connected to them and therefore feel like they're doing a good job."

Interestingly enough, participants were also keen to discuss strengths that they believe to be unique to female candidates. For example, an interview participant who expressed frustration at the long history of male presidents confessed that she believes a woman would do the job "so much better" (Anna). The most popular shared sentiment among participants, however, was that women are more invested in and understanding of the needs of others than are men. One interview participant, Abigail, even commented,

"Women think differently and think more about the needs of others and having a personality like that in office would be a really good thing." Taking a slightly different approach, a survey respondent wrote, "I think that women are more level-headed and less forceful in policymaking, and so for psychological reasons I think it's important to have more women in leadership" (Mary). Thus, participants seemed to believe that women possess certain qualities—qualities that men, perhaps, lack—that would greatly benefit them in office.

Finally, participants expressed frustration that women's issues are often not prioritized or even understood by male politicians. Due to this, these participants expressed an interest in a electing a female candidate who would prioritize those issues. In what seems to be a contradiction between speech and action, an interview participant who supported Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election stated, "There's a lot of issues that men just simply cannot speak to, but they do. It's mind-blowing that all of these men sit around and make decisions like that about things like women's healthcare and discuss these issues that simply don't apply to [them]" (Natalie). Contradictions aside, several other participants mirrored this sentiment. Lauren even hypothesized that women might feel compelled to take their talents and abilities into non-political realms because of the exclusion of women's issues from politics. This participant suggested the possibility that these women "feel like they might have a bigger impact working on a woman-specific initiative or an initiative that's relevant to them, versus politics."

Risks of female candidacy. Despite listing a myriad of benefits to having women in office, participants also weighed the potential risks of female candidacy. Popular among these was the scrutiny that female candidates might have endure. Whether or not

they liked her, several interview participants commended Hillary Clinton for remaining graceful under intense scrutiny during the 2016 presidential election. Victoria observed that female candidates "have to weather so much more shit" than male candidates do. She said, "It's kind of like sacrificing yourself to the cause and very few people I think are willing to do that." Another participant similarly empathized with women who do not wish to be picked apart in a public sphere, noting that "[when you run for office], you're very exposed publicly" (Caroline). She suggested that this is an important consideration for women looking to enter politics.

Participants also proposed that scrutiny can take the form of name-calling and that women in positions of power are often subject to this poor treatment. For one interview participant, Claire, this hit close to home. She shared that her mother—who at one point held a top positions in her organization—was often written off as a "bitch" by other administrators. This same participant also shared a story of her *own* experiences with name-calling, recalling, "I got called a bossy chicken when I was a child. And [my mom] told me that I wasn't a bossy chicken, I was just a leader." Another participant, Anna, related name-calling directly to women in politics and said that although she admires Elizabeth Warren's tendency to defend her beliefs, she is also aware that "women who do act that way get labeled as 'the bitch' or the one who's trying to be obnoxious."

Participants suggested that an additional risk of female candidacy is a double standard. Simply put, participants appeared to believe that female candidates are held to a higher standard than male candidates. Brianna suggested that the things female candidates are questioned for—such as their family status or whether or not they are being "too aggressive"—are not questions that male candidates also face. Several

interview participants offered up public and media treatment of Hillary Clinton as a case study for this effect. Abigail bitterly proposed that "[Hillary] couldn't have gotten away with half the stuff that Trump did" and Sophia posed the question, "Because she was a woman, don't you think they decided she was a little less trustworthy than if a man?" A survey respondent addressed this double standard directly and wrote that "female political candidates are held to a different standard and looked at through a different lens than male counterparts" (Chelsea).

Contradictory stipulations for female candidates. What is interesting is that although survey and interview respondents were able to identify a double standard between male and female candidates, they unwittingly listed their own contradictory stipulations for female candidates. For example, despite a litany of arguments that "gender should not be a factor" in elections, survey respondents in particular were quick to note that they would only vote for a woman if she were "the right female." Respondents often prefaced further discussion of female candidates with qualifiers that she must be "right" or "qualified." Respondents chimed in with the following sentiments: "I want it to be the *right* first female president" (Nora), "it'd be great if a *qualified* woman ran for president" (Brielle), and "I would love to have a female president but it also needs to be the *right* female" (Rose). That these statements are not transferrable to male candidates ("I would love to have a male president but it needs to be the *right* male") renders gender important.

Similarly, survey and interview participants alike expressed interest in a presidential candidate who can command respect, but survey respondents in particular expressed concerned that a female candidate would be unable to garner respect

domestically and internationally. Regarding the election of a female president, Olivia, a survey respondent, asked, "Would she be respected by other international leaders?" Seemingly in response to this, others wrote, "I worry that she wouldn't be respected by our country and by those also in power because she is a woman" (Rachel) and "I worry that she would not get the respect she deserves based on her gender" (Vanessa). Most sobering was the response that read, "I do not think that people would take a female president seriously as men are looked at as stronger and more fit to lead our country" (Jess). Although respondents emphasized the need for a leader to command respect, they also suggested that there is something inherently not respectable about women as leaders.

In some cases, interview participants became aware of these types of disconnect and caught themselves in their contradictory thinking. For example, a conservative participant, Natalie, shared that she disliked Hillary Clinton as a candidate because Clinton does not align with her idea of feminism. She explained:

> I'm trying really hard, and I was trying the whole election process not to judge her based on her relationship because I also think that that's unfair, I don't think that people would question a man in the same way that they kind of questioned the way that she stayed with Bill and all that (Natalie).

Thus, the participant seemed to be aware that she was judging Clinton in a way that she would not judge a male candidate, but also seemed unable to prevent herself from doing so.

Male and female roles. Despite harboring hazy stipulations for female candidates, participants were able to draw a clear line between traditionally male and female roles. In particular, interview participants suggested that society tends to view a man's primary

role as his job or career, while society views a woman's role as being confined to motherhood and the home. One interview participant, Chloe, suggested that men are able to dominate many professional realms—including politics—because they are expected to prioritize professional life in a way that women are not. Another interview participant, Mia, spoke to this as well and observed that society possesses an idea "that it's a woman's responsibility to take care of the kids while their husband goes off and pursues his career."

To this end, participants also suggested that many male professional roles come embedded with connotations of power. An interview participant, Lauren, shared her belief that men are deeply concerned with both "power and the image of power." She explained, "Politics has a status or level of power attached to it. [Running for office is] just the next way to validate a man's status of power." And to be a politician, it seems, is to wield power. Many participants iterated the that U.S. presidency, a historically masculine role, connotes an immense amount of power. Mia, an interview participant, matter-of-factly commented, "The president obviously has a ton of power." Taking this a step further, a survey respondent wrote that the election of a female president would "send a signal… that women are objectively powerful" (Catherine). This response implies that if a woman were to assume the position of President of the United States—a role that so inherently suggests an enormous amount of power—then the nation would have no choice but to view her as powerful.

Women, on the other hand, are not raised to see themselves in roles that are inherently embedded with power. Abigail, an interview participant, attributed this to archaic views about women as caretakers and homemakers. Another interview participant

even saw this play out in her own life, noting that although her father says she can do anything a man can do, she's "the one that does the dishes after dinner" (Sophia). This same participant, when asked if she ever wanted to become the president when she was growing up, responded that she did not. She wanted to become the First Lady because it was easy to see herself in that role.

Participants also noticed that politics might not be accommodating to women with families. Brianna forwarded the idea that parenthood presents a double standard between women and men. She argued that for women in politics, having a family might be seen as a detriment because a woman might devote more time to her children than to her position. She pointed out this double standard, saying, "But men have kids too and it's not an issue for them." Similarly, Natalie concluded that "men have the advantage of being able to leave their kids and domestic responsibilities on their wife to pursue all of their career advancements… and women don't necessarily have that advantage." As such, participants seemed to suggest that constituents' concept of motherhood could prove detrimental for female candidates.

Gender stereotypes and women's self-view. Many interview participants relied on gender stereotypes to discuss the differences between male and female candidates and how women view themselves. When attempting to explain why women might not run for office as frequently as men do, Natalie suggested that women might not see themselves as being "strong enough" or "aggressive enough." Lauren posited that women do not try to enter politics because they are less aware than men are of their own value and the value that they could bring to a community. And Paige hypothesized that women do not run because they are more afraid than men are of failure. Several participants attributed

the lack of female candidates to a lack of confidence among women. To this end, Caroline referenced a "built-in societal gender confidence thing" that makes women feel "less qualified even though [they're] not." In this fashion, participants continually alluded to women viewing themselves as *less than*.

Interestingly, several participants implied that an effective female political candidate would need to suppress her emotions so as not be coded as "emotional." A few of these participants later cited emotionality as a character flaw they see in themselves. Mia argued that she would not make a good political candidate, noting, "I couldn't remove my emotions enough. I knew from when I was pretty little that I would never be able to detach myself fully from situations." In the same vein, Anna prefaced her views on a policy area with the following statement: "I base my politics off of my feelings, which many people have told me is not good." As such, it appears that although many women consider themselves to be "emotional," they have been conditioned to view that quality as a detriment or hindrance.

Influences on participant. Participants in both the survey and interview components cited a series of influences on themselves, their political ideologies, and their political decisions. These included, but were not limited to their families, their peers, and the media.

Family influence. When explaining how they decided which candidate to support in the 2016 presidential election, many participants stated that their primary consideration was the impact the election would have on their family. Participants spanning the political spectrum referenced the role that their family had—and in many instances, *continues* to have—on the development of their political beliefs. In fact, one participant

stated, “When you’re living in your parents’ house, you adapt their religion and their political views” (Paige). Along with this, several interview participants considered how the election might impact their family financially. A conservative interview participants shared the following sentiments: “I primary based my decision on who I felt would provide a better economic climate for me personally as well as my family” (Natalie). Another conservative participant confessed, “Coming from the upper one percent, there is a certain amount of economic fairness I seek out when looking into candidates” (Brianna). Yet another conservative noted, “I thought about how it would affect my family, in light of the fact that my family sits in the bracket that’s not necessarily normal.” (Sophia). In these ways, concern for the ways in which a potential candidates’ economic policies would influence their own families influenced conservative participants’ political behavior.

Two liberal participants referenced the role that education or access to a global perspective has had in informing their family’s political views. Victoria observed that although her hometown in rural Pennsylvania is the epitome of “Trump’s America,” her dad “teaches at Cornell University, so we are close enough to Cornell that we did get access to international students and higher learning.” Claire shared the following anecdote: “My mom was amazingly educated and spent a lot of time abroad, so she had more of a world-view which she has instilled in me and my sister.” Thus, these participants seemed to view education and global perspective as crucial to the development of their liberal views.

Participant emphasizes own decisions. At the same time, interview participants emphasized the role that they personally have played in the formation of their own

political identity. Interestingly, the participants who most stressed the influence of their families were the ones who also most highly emphasized their own role in making decisions. This phenomenon transcended party lines. A conservative shared, "I think I've thought about all of those things and decided that I agree with my parents—it's not passive… I'm making my own decisions" (Natalie). Similarly, a liberal shared, "I like to think that I have my own views that aren't my parents' but they just align" (Claire).

Peer influence. Interview participants also referenced the influence that their peers have had on their social views. This phenomenon transcended party lines as well. Mia, an independent, noted that while she relies on her family to inform her fiscal views, she relies more on her peers to "develop" her social views. Participants spanning the political spectrum observed this effect in relation to the issue of abortion. Paige, an independent, claimed, "I definitely was raised to be pro-life and I think that switched a little bit the more I experienced women around me." Anna, a Democrat, noted that her parents are "very Catholic people" and that while she is also Catholic and shares many of their beliefs, cannot reconcile her mother's vehemently pro-life stance on abortion. She said that she did not realize her own views on this, or her passion for social justice, until she came to college. Natalie, a Republican, shared that she agreed with her parents' pro-life stance on abortion up until she got to college, at which point her view "totally shifted" as a result of "conversation I was having with my friends and hearing about it and talking about it."

Media influence. Survey and interview participants alike cited the media a a major source of political information. The following media sources were especially popular among survey respondents: online news sources such as MSNBC, CNN, the New York

Times, Politico, Fox News, the Washington Post; social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook; candidate websites and political blogs; the email newsletter The Skimm; televised debates and late night talk shows. Interview participants generally mirrored these favorites, with one admitting that she is "pretty terrible at following politics" (Sarah). She noted that she tries to stay current by "[looking] at media like Twitter, The Skimm, and stuff and see what they're talking about." Another participant, Caroline, concluded that growing up with nearly unlimited access to media influenced her socially-liberal views. She expressed doubt the she would "be as passionate as I am about like equal rights for all different groups and feminist campaigns and things like that" if she had grown up without so much media exposure.

Data Interpretation

Distancing self from gender beliefs. In line with social role theory, survey and interview participants demonstrated a clear conception of what constitutes a "man's role" versus a "woman's role." And as theory shows, this is a common distinction to make. Social role theory mandates that as people observe male and female behavior, they assume that the sexes possess dispositions that correspond to those behaviors (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Because of this, women tend to hold different social roles than men and these roles require different traits and skills than men's roles. Thus, the differentiation between male and female roles has highly-visible and pervasive in our culture.

In particular, participants expressed an awareness of a double standard that exists in differing societal expectations for men and women. Participants noted that while men are expected to pursue and prioritize their careers, women are expected to fulfill the role of "caretaker," either by staying at home to raise children or by pursuing work in fields

that require "motherly" qualities such as compassion and patience. Of course, our society gives them fair reason to believe this. Carli and Eagly (1999) note that women *are* more likely than men to be the primary caretakers of children, which is a role that requires warmth, patience, and a nurturing disposition. Because of this, there exists a greater "need for [women] to display traditional feminine behaviors" (Carli & Eagly, 1999, p. 4). Participants indirectly referenced this as well when discussing how women view themselves as lacking "masculine qualities" such as aggression or confidence.

Participants also considered men's role in society and identified that a man's primary social role is to fulfill and excel in his career. They also identified that many roles that come with connotations of power, such as politician or lawyer or businessman, tend to be male-dominated. Interestingly, Carli and Eagly (1999) note that many male-dominated roles tend to be associated with greater power and status. They claim that the ramification of this is that men feel an increased need to display dominant behaviors to give off an air of power. Participants spoke to this as well. They acknowledged an association between the role of the presidency and connotations of power, and they also highlighted men's need to confirm or validate their own power through excelling in their careers. One participant even labeled men as "power-seeking" and suggested that most women do not possess an equivalent desire to be viewed as powerful. On the whole, participants expressed a clear understanding of distinct male and female social roles and were able to discuss differences in how men and women might view their own attributes.

At the same time, however, participants seemed keen to distance themselves from beliefs about the "proper" role of women or beliefs about women's limitations. They attempted to do this by disagreeing or expressing frustration at belief statements, by

prefacing or appending belief statements with phrases that served to separate themselves from the belief, and by using metaphors that afforded agency to women.

First, participants expressed disagreement and frustration at the gendered beliefs that society holds. The were frustrated about the double standard of parenthood and frustrated about the conception of the presidency as a man's role. They disagreed with the idea that men make better leaders than women and they disagreed that women cannot be "strong enough" or "aggressive enough" to succeed in politics.

Next, participants discussed societal beliefs about women in a way that distanced them from those beliefs. They prefaced statements about these beliefs with phrases like "society has this idea that…" and "there's this commonly held belief that…" They would also append these statements with phrases like "but I don't agree with that" or "that's not right." In this manner, participants demonstrated an awareness of social role ideology at work while at the same time trying to remove or separate themselves from those beliefs.

Finally, while discussing the contemporary or historical role of women in society, participants frequently utilized metaphoric language that afforded women agency. Participants referenced the possibility of women "*shattering* the glass ceiling" and "*breaking* into traditionally male-dominated arenas." These metaphors that evoke sheer force are not at all congruent with the conception of women as "nurturing" or "compassionate." If anything, they are more congruent with the "masculine" attribute of aggression. These metaphors imply that women do not have to fit any one mold and that women *can* make their careers a priority.

Unable to fully distance self from gender beliefs. Despite their efforts, however, there were many clear instances in the data of participants being unable to distance

themselves from certain gender beliefs. This occurred in particular with participants' inevitable use of gender stereotypes and their contradictory stipulations for female candidates.

Use of gender stereotypes. Even the most seemingly progressive participants inevitably relied upon gender stereotypes. As noted in the analysis, many participants suggested that a female president would "do the job so much better" than a male president. The reasons they list for holding this belief, however, all hinge upon gender stereotypes about the social competencies of women. For example, participants stated that they believe women to be more nurturing than men, less aggressive than men, and more concerned for others than men. For these reasons, they believed that a woman would be more equipped for the presidency than a man. And although these might appear to be positive and progressive statements on the surface, they all hinge upon the assumption that women are motherly and nurturing and would therefore behave that way in office.

Referencing contradictory stipulations for female candidates. Participants also seemed to fall back upon gender beliefs when they cited their own contradictory stipulations for female candidates. Many participants suggested that gender should be utterly unimportant in any election and stated that they would definitely vote for a woman, but *only* if she was the "right" woman. This is significant even just on the level of language because the same sentiment cannot be applied to male candidates. Throughout the course of history, voters have undoubtedly cast their votes for male candidates who were not perfectly "right." Other participants expressed interest in a leader who commands respect, but then cited concerns that a woman would be unable to

garner such respect, thus implying that there is something intrinsically not respectable about women. And finally, participants judged female presidential candidates on criteria that would not factor into their judgments of male candidates (such as Clinton's decision to stay with her husband following the Monica Lewinsky scandal). In these examples, we can see Jost and Banaji's system-justification theory at work. These participants possess detrimental gender stereotypes in false consciousness, and this then serves to maintain women's subordinate station in society.

Gender beliefs as deeply ingrained. It is important to iterate that women's system-justifying beliefs are so deeply ingrained and built into our culture that they seem natural and inevitable. To this end, Eagly and Wood (2012) suggest that "because gender roles seem to reflect innate attributes of the sexes, they appear natural and inevitable" (p. 459). Survey and interview participants displayed an astute awareness of this. To begin, they noted that women are socialized to view themselves and their role in a certain way. In addition, they referenced the historical antecedents for such beliefs: women have, of course, faced a long history of oppression.

The role of socialization. According to Eagly's social role theory, the process of socialization is central to informing social role beliefs. Participants alluded to this when they discussed the socialization of young girls. In particular, participants expressed concern and disappointment that young girls are being socialized to believe that they are unfit for the presidential role or any leadership role, for that matter. Eagly and Wood (2012) note that "to equip men and women for their usual family and employment roles, societies undertake extensive socialization to promote personality traits and skills that facilitate role performance" (p. 459). As such, participants were right to be concerned

about how the process of socialization develops young girls' conceptions of what is and is not possible for them. Crucial is that socialization does more than just influence young girls' beliefs. It influences how women behave socially and it influences the types of work they pursue.

In light of this, participants' suggestions that the election of a female president would be empowering for women and young girls might hold a great amount of truth. Presenting both men and women with such a clear and visible example of a woman fulfilling a traditionally "masculine" role might go a long way in countering beliefs about the "proper" role of women. Furthermore, such an example would provide legitimacy for women seeking to pursue roles that are not viewed as "feminine" or are not thought of as requiring "feminine" strengths or traits. If socialization—as Eagly and Wood define it—promotes traits and skills that facilitate role performance, then young girls that are socialized in a society with prominent female authorities might develop traits and skills that are consistent with those roles. Or, in a different direction, it seems equally likely that society's perceptions of which traits and skills are consistent with authoritative roles will shift and change.

The role of history. Participants also acknowledged historical antecedents of today's social role beliefs about men and women. As noted earlier, participants frequently referred to a timeline of the women's movement and noted that women have comprised an oppressed group historically. Naturally, women have had to fight for their rights and equality, and many participants believe that women are *still* have to fight for their rights and equality. Participants mentioned that our society still maintains outdated beliefs about women, which suggests that participants are ready for society to expel such beliefs.

Participants also acknowledged that, in terms of the women's movement, "we are not there yet" or "we still have more work to do." In recognizing this, participants are possibly suggesting that there is more work to do in terms of leveling societal conceptions of men and women's roles and capabilities. Because women are not viewed as equal to men and because women are constricted by the behaviors and roles that society expects from them, there is still equalizing work that needs to be done. Participants are indirectly acknowledging that social role beliefs still permeate and are prevalent in our culture today. The conclusion or "end goal" that they desire seems to be a world in which women are no longer inhibited by expectations about their role.

Cultural perceptions of male/female dispositions. Because our society has always socialized girls and boys differently, we are inclined to view men and women's dispositions as different. Through social role theory, Eagly posits that people view men as agentic and women as communal, and that these labels are not fully arbitrary or inaccurate. As participants noted, we *do* frequently see men acting agentic in leadership roles and women acting communal in caretaker roles. This can, perhaps, help to explain participants' preoccupation with the novelty of female political candidates. It is quite possible that we view female political candidates as novel not solely because they women running for office, but because they are women demonstrating a great deal of *agency*.

Nonetheless, our inability to view women as agentic might help to explain why we find it difficult to imagine a woman as president. The presidential role—as outlined by participants in both the survey and interview components—requires masculine qualities such as the authoritativeness and the ability to command respect. However, the qualities society values in and expects from women contrast with the qualities required

by the presidential role. As social role theory tells us, women are expected to be compassionate, selfless, and nurturing. We expect those in leadership roles to be agentic, but we do not view women as agentic. Carli and Eagly (1999) state that "because gender-stereotypic behaviors become not just expected but demanded, violations of these expectations can lead to negative sanctions" (p. 5). Thus, when a female displays qualities required of leadership roles, such as authoritativeness, it feels incongruent with how we expect a woman to act. This discrepancy makes it difficult to accept or even simply view women as viable leaders. Study participants evidenced this, with one remarking, "I have a hard time picturing a woman running our country."

Prejudice against female leaders. Finally, participants cited prejudice as a concern regarding female presidential candidates. It seems that this is a valid concern, as Eagly and Karau (2002) suggest that women's perceived incongruence with leadership roles can result in prejudice toward them as potential and actual leaders. Specifically, participants cited scrutiny, including name-calling, and the likelihood of female candidates being held to a higher standard than male candidates as possible risks.

Additionally, many participants expressed concern that if the United States elected a woman as president and she made a mistake, people would blame the mistake on her gender rather than her judgment or even just the demands of the job. In this direction, participants even expressed concern that such a mistake might serve as a potential setback to the women's movement. It is quite possible that what participants really meant, on a deeper level, is that if a female president made a mistake, it would serve as proof of what our society already suspects: that a women are simply not compatible with the presidential role. Participants seemed to be concerned that such a

mishap would provide legitimacy to the idea that a female does not belong in the Oval Office.

Introduction of Tension-Belief Theory

The data analyzed in this research project present us with an interesting paradox. It seems that while participants seemed to demonstrate an awareness of limiting and socially-constructed beliefs about women, they often could not fully escape this type of thinking themselves. So, while Eagly's social role theory helps to explain *why* participants might harbor the beliefs that they do, it does not explain why participants wished to distance themselves from such beliefs. Jost and Banaji's system-justification theory falls short in this same regard. While it is true that women do possess limiting beliefs about themselves, they also seem aware on some level that those beliefs are in fact problematic. And because of this, they struggle against those beliefs. Both social role theory and system-justification theory fall short in that they fail to properly consider this tension.

As such, I am arguing for the conceptualization of a new theory that can go further in illuminating the data presented in this thesis. This theory, which I refer to as tension-belief theory, addresses the gaps that emerged when social role theory and system-justification theory were applied to the data. Through tension-belief theory, I posit that individuals—specifically members of historically oppressed or marginalized groups—can, because of the environment that they exist within and have been socialized within, hold beliefs that disadvantage them and/or their group *while at the same time* recognizing and struggling with the problematic nature of those beliefs.

When applied to the data collected through this research project, tension-belief theory explains the tendency of the millennial women who participated in this study to simultaneously harbor problematic gender beliefs while also demonstrating an awareness that those gender beliefs are indeed problematic. As such, tension-belief theory—unlike system-justification theory—does not assume that the oppressed or marginalized individuals are passive. For example, the participants in this study displayed an awareness that certain gender beliefs are highly limiting.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Summary of Findings

With this thesis, I sought to respond to two research questions: 1) In what ways, if any, are millennial women prone to gender bias in their evaluations of female presidential candidates? and 2) What factors, if any, contribute to millennial women's gendered expectations for female presidential candidates?

Millennial women prone to gender bias. In response to my first research question, I found that the millennial women I surveyed and interviewed are in fact prone to gender bias in their evaluations of political candidates.

While participants displayed a sharp awareness of traditional male/female roles and qualities, they often attempted to distance themselves from those ideas. They did this by discussing a double standard that exists between men and women, disagreeing with a societal gender belief, expressing frustration at some state of affairs, utilizing separating language (such as "*society* has this idea that…"), and affording women agency through the use of metaphorical language.

Despite these efforts, however, participants were ultimately unable to fully distance themselves from gender beliefs they identified as frustrating, problematic, or incorrect. For example, participants inevitably relied upon gender stereotypes when discussing the possibility of a female president. In explaining why they believe a woman would fulfill the role of the presidency "so much better" than a man would, even the most seemingly progressive participants invoked the gender assumption that all women are, or should be, motherly and nurturing. Participants also utilized contradictory criteria when discussing how they evaluate female political candidates. In particular, they discussed the ability of

a strong political candidate to command respect, and then questioned the ability of a woman to garner such respect. Additionally, when evaluating female political candidates, participants utilized criteria that they would not have utilized had they been evaluating male political candidates.

Factors contributing to gendered expectations. If millennial women truly are prone to gender bias in their evaluations and perceptions of female presidential candidates, then it is important to consider what factors might contribute to that gender bias and to the gendered expectations that millennial women hold for female presidential candidates.

It is quite possible that women are unable to escape gendered thinking because their system-justifying beliefs are deeply ingrained and embedded into the culture that they exist within. As mentioned earlier, both history and processes of socialization play a role in making gender beliefs appear natural and inevitable. Historically, women have only ever seen themselves in certain roles. This, combined with socialization processes that groom women to think and act in a certain way, show women both what is possible and what types of roles they can and cannot aspire to.

In addition to gender beliefs being deeply ingrained, it seems that women are inclined to view male and female dispositions differently. As Eagly suggests via social role theory, members of a society are socialized to view men as possessing agentic dispositions and women as possessing communal dispositions. Survey and interview participants illustrated this inclination when they noted the frequency of men in leadership roles and women in caretaker roles. It is also worth considering that participants' preoccupation with the novelty of female presidential candidates might have

something to do with the sheer novelty of women acting agentically and pursuing an agentic role.

Discussion

Implications. The results of this study have major implications for the fate of women seeking the nation's highest office. To begin, the amalgamation of women being unable to distance themselves from system-justifying beliefs, gender beliefs being so deeply ingrained, and the tendency of individuals to view male and female dispositions differently results in a great amount of prejudice against female presidential candidates. This prejudice can surface in various ways. For example, as the millennial women who participated in this thesis project noted, prejudice can surface in the form of intense scrutiny, name-calling (specifically in the form of a woman being labeled as a "bitch"), and expectations that female candidates will adhere to a higher standard of behavior than male candidates.

And while participants cited these phenomena as possible forms of prejudice against female political candidates, they also displayed a considerable amount of prejudice themselves. To be sure, this prejudice was largely subconscious. Although participants were able to identify that certain gender beliefs are problematic, they still relied upon many of those gender beliefs themselves when discussing the potential of female presidential candidates. In response to this, I proposed tension-belief theory, which posits that individuals can possess system-justifying beliefs and at the same time struggle with the problematic nature of such beliefs.

Especially interesting is that in many cases, the deeply ingrained nature of gender beliefs causes us to view the female gender role as incompatible with the presidential

role. Because we, as a society, believe that women should be nurturing caretakers and that men should be agentic leaders, we view women as being fundamentally incongruent with the nation's most prestigious and visible leadership role. If a female presidential candidate is motherly and nurturing, we respect that but ultimately reject her as a viable candidate because she is not displaying presidential qualities. And if a female presidential candidate is agentic and assertive, we reject her as well because she is not displaying qualities that we expect to females to possess and display. Thus, there will be no way for women to win so long as we retain our extremely gendered perceptions of male and female roles.

Despite all of this, I believe that there is still hope. To start, the millennial women that participated in this thesis project gave me good reason to believe that perhaps millennials—or at least *female* millennials—are not as politically apathetic as they are made out to be. According to my survey data, 83.10% (59 out of 71 participants) of participants voted in the 2016 presidential election. And out of the 16 women I interviewed, only one had refrained from voting in the election. On the whole, the women I spoke to were politically aware and spoke about their political interests and concerns intelligently and oftentimes passionately.

Additionally, if tension-belief theory holds true and does not assume that the oppressed/marginalized individual is passive, then there might still be hope. Clearly, this study does not account for men. But the fact that women were able to recognize the problematic nature of certain gender beliefs is extremely promising because awareness is the first step. The next (and decidedly more difficult step) will be to change society's perceptions of both male and female roles and male and female qualities. It is imperative

that we change societal perceptions of men and women because, at the present, we are socialized to believe that men need to seek power and status and that women need to be nurturing and motherly. And although these are not entirely arbitrary categories—as Eagly notes, these categories originated in ancient times when they were evolutionarily necessary—they are completely arbitrary in the year 2017. Women *can* be agentic and men *can* be nurturing. But from a very young age, we are all socialized to believe otherwise.

In order to change perceptions, we must socialize future generations to view gender differently than we do. I am by no means suggesting that this will be an easy feat, nor am I suggesting that this can be the work of any one person or group of people. But in order to get a woman into the White House, we need to show future generations that it is within the realm of possibility. We need to show future generations that women can be agentic and that women *are* agentic. And we can start to do this by electing more women to House and Senate seats. We can start to do this by electing more women to political seats, period. And as the realm of politics becomes more balanced in terms of gender, societal perceptions of politics as a "men's club" will start to erode, thus paving the way for the first female president of the United States.

Contributions of thesis. In contrast to poll data and quantitative studies, this thesis contributes to the existing body of research on female politicians and female voters by examining the topic of study through a uniquely qualitative lens. It fills a gap created by the existing quantitative research and explores—via rich survey and interview data—the ways in which millennial women consider the presidential role and the potential of

women to fill that role. It analyzes the vivid, lived experiences of real women as told by those women.

This thesis also contributes a new theory to the existing field of research. As mentioned before, both Eagly's social role theory and Jost and Banaji's system-justification theory fail to adequately address the tension that seems to exist when millennial women simultaneously hold and struggle against problematic and system-justifying beliefs. Due to this failure, I proposed tension-belief theory, which suggests that members of oppressed or marginalized groups can and do possess beliefs that function to maintain their oppressed station in society. At the same time, these individuals on some level recognize the problematic nature of those beliefs and struggle with that tension.

Limitations. There naturally exist limitations to the research presented in this thesis. First and foremost, the population of millennial women that participated in this research project was composed entirely of Boston College undergraduate women. And while the results of the research do provide insight into how *some* millennial women perceive the role of the United States presidency in terms of gender, it is crucial to note that they are by no means generalizable to a larger population of millennial women or even just women in general. Additionally, because the research was conducted using a population of students at an elite university, all of the women who chose to participate in the study are more educated than the average American. Again, the results of this study are not generalizable and only represent a certain subset of the population.

It is also important to consider the potential impact that social desirability bias might have had on the results of this study. While social desirability bias poses more of a

threat to quantitative studies, it is still necessary to consider that even in this qualitative study, individuals might have responded to survey and interview questions with an eye towards appearing likable and agreeable.

Conclusion and directions for future study. With these limitations in mind, there are several ways in which this research project could be expanded upon. To progress this research, a new study could survey and interview millennial women from different regions of the nation and particularly from states that helped to determine the result of the 2016 presidential elections (such as Michigan or New Hampshire). In the same vein, another study could survey and interview women from different generational groups instead of exclusively examining millennial women. Additionally, for the purposes of this particular thesis, surveying and interviewing men in addition to women would have introduced too many variables. But to really take this research a step further, a new study could examine the responses of men in comparison to the responses of women in order to look for key areas of difference and/or similarity. As the population of eligible voters in the United States is obviously not composed entirely of women, this would be a worthwhile direction to consider.

We are still left, however, with the following question: Is the future *really* female? And to that, I would say *no*, not at this moment in history. But if we start to think about gender differently and if we start to raise future generations to think about gender differently, it *can* be. And for what it is worth, I believe that it *will* be.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email: Purposeful Sampling

Hello, my name is Emma Catranis. I am currently a senior at Boston College, and I am working on completing my honors thesis on the topic of women and the United States presidency. I am reaching out because I am looking for politically-aware women to serve as participants in my study, and [organization name's here] seemed like a good place to start.

If it is not too much trouble, I was wondering if you could possibly forward this email to members of your organization who might be interested in completing my research survey. The survey should take no longer than 5 minutes to complete.

Thank you for your time, and please let me know if you have any questions. The link to the survey, along with informed consent information, can be found here: [insert survey link here].

Best regards,
Emma Catranis

Recruitment Email: Snowball Sampling

Hello [insert name here],
My name is Emma Catranis. I am currently a senior at Boston College, and I am working on completing my honors thesis on the topic of women and the United States presidency. I am reaching out because I am looking for politically-aware women to serve as participants in my study, and [insert name here] suggested that you might be interested.

If you are interested and it is not too much trouble, I was wondering if you could possibly complete my research survey. The survey should take no longer than 5 minutes to complete.

Thank you for your time, and please let me know if you have any questions. The link to the survey, along with informed consent information, can be found here: [insert survey link here].

Best,
Emma

Appendix B

Digital Consent Form

Please read and respond to the following consent form.

You are being asked to participate in a research study titled "Millennial Women and the United States Presidency." You were selected to participate in this project because you are a female in the target age demographic. Please note, however, that you should not participate if you are less than 18 years of age.

The purpose of this study is explore the thoughts an opinions of millennial females as pertains to the U.S. presidency.

This study will be conducted through this online survey. The survey should take you approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Participation is not expected to entail risks or discomforts. However, the study may include risks that are unknown at this time.

There are no direct benefits to you, but you may feel gratified knowing that you helped further the scholarly work in this research area. You will not be compensated for the time you take to complete this survey. There are no costs to you associated with your participation.

This Principal Investigator will exert all reasonable efforts to keep your responses and your identity confidential. Your IP address will not be collected, and only the principle researcher will have access to survey responses. Please note that regulatory agencies, the Boston College Institutional Review Board, and Boston College internal auditors may review research records.

You participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate it will not affect your relations with Boston College. You are free to withdraw or skip questions for any reason. There are no penalties for withdrawing or skipping questions.

If you have questions or concerns concerning this research you may contact the Principal Investigator at 732-998-0524 or catranis@bc.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a
research participant, you may contact the Office for Research Protections, Boston College, at 617-552-4778 or irb@bc.edu.

This study was reviewed by the Boston College Institutional Review Board and its approval was granted on September 8th, 2017.

After reading the consent form above, do you consent to participate in this study?

- o Yes, I consent to participate in this study

- o No, I do not consent to participate in this study

Physical Consent Form

Boston College Consent Form

Boston College Department of Communication
Informed Consent to be in study: Millennial Women and Madame President
Researcher: Emma Catranis
Adult Consent Form

Introduction

- You are being asked to be in a research study that investigates the relationship between female presidential candidates and millennial female voters.
- You were selected to be in the study because you indicated on the online survey that you are interested in participating in an interview. Please note, however, that you should not participate if you are less than 18 years of age.
- Please read this form. Ask any questions that you may have before you agree to be in the study.

Purpose of Study:

- The purpose of this study is to explore how millennial females think about women as U.S. presidential candidates.
- The total number of people in this study is expected to be 20.

What will happen in the study:

- If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to complete one in-person interview, which should last for about 25 minutes. The interview would be audio recorded by the researcher.

Risks and Discomforts of Being in the Study:

- If you agree to participate in this study you may experience discomfort or frustration at discussing potentially controversial political topics.
- This study may include risks that are unknown at this time.

Benefits of Being in the Study:

- By participating in this study, you will receive no direct benefit besides knowing that you helped to advance the research in this area.

Payments:

- There will be no payment for participating in this study.

Costs:

- There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Confidentiality:

- The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we may publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file.
- All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password-protected file. Only the researcher and a transcriber will have access to audio recordings of the interviews. If any such transcriber is used, he/she will be made to sign a confidentiality agreement. Audio recordings will be deleted by the researcher after they are transcribed.
- Mainly just the researcher will have access to information; however, please note that a few other key people may also have access. These might include government agencies. Also, the Institutional Review Board at Boston College and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records.

Choosing to be in the study and choosing to quit the study:

- Choosing to be in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to be in this study, it will not affect your current or future relations with the University.
- You are free to quit at any time, for whatever reason.
- There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for quitting. If you stop being a part of the study, it will not have any effect with your current or future relationship with Boston College.

Getting Dismissed from the study:

- The researcher may dismiss you from the study at any time for the following reasons: (1) it is in your best interests (e.g. side effects or distress have resulted), or (2) you have failed to comply with the study rules.

Contacts and Questions:

- The researcher conducting this study is Emma Catranis. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact her at 732-998-0524 or catranis@bc.edu
- If you have any questions about your rights as a person in this research study, you may contact: Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu

Copy of Consent Form:

- You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:

- I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form. I have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to be in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form. I confirm that I am 18 years of age or older.

Signatures/Dates

Study Participant (Print Name): _____ Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Survey Questions

- Are you a female student at Boston College? (Yes / No)
- Did you vote in the 2016 Presidential election? (Yes / No / Prefer not to say)
- What is your political affiliation? (Democrat / Republican / Other / Prefer not to say)
- Please list the issues that were most important to you in the 2016 presidential election. (Open-ended)
- How do you seek out information about political candidates? (Open-ended)
- Would you like to see a woman elected as president in your lifetime? Why or why not? (Open-ended)
- Would you be interested in participating in an in-person interview at your greatest convenience? (Yes/No)
- If yes, please enter:
  - First name
  - Phone number
  - Email address (I will contact you at this email address to schedule a convenient interview time with you)

Interview Questions

1. How do you form evaluations of specific political candidates?
2. Can you name a political figure you greatly admire? Why do you admire them?
3. (If answer to previous question is not a female): Can you think of any female political candidate, from any point in time, who you admire? And if yes, why do you admire her?
4. Please explain, in as much or as little detail as you wish, how you decided which candidate to support in the 2016 presidential election. You do not have to disclose who you voted for if you do not wish.
5. Do you think that other people evaluate male and female candidates at all differently? If yes, how so?
6. Do you think that you evaluate male and female candidates at all differently? If yes, how so?
7. Do you believe that gender bias played a role in the 2016 presidential election?