

ABSTRACT

What Does it All Meme?: A Look into Gender Stereotypes and Traits in the 2016 Presidential Primary Campaign

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This content analysis examines how social media memes portrayed presidential primary candidates during the 2016 United States presidential election. In the wake of Internet and social media evolutions in communications, memes of candidates have been added to the new paradigm of American political news consumption. Along with framing theory, the researcher used feminist communications and media theories to analyze the 2016 presidential election and Democratic primary candidates, Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton, as well Republican primary candidates, Carly Fiorina and Ted Cruz. This thesis seeks to find how political memes used common gender biases and stereotypes to frame the politicians. The researcher gained results from $N = 550$ memes collected from Google and Facebook groups.

Key Words: feminist theory, framing, female politicians, gender studies, stereotypes, independent t-test

What Does it All Meme?: A Look into Gender Stereotypes and Traits in the 2016
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DEDICATION

To my Sweet Pea, and to my loving family and friends that supported me throughout the entire process.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Throughout the United States' history, presidential campaigns and candidates have used propaganda and speeches to win the support of voters of all ages. The 1930s brought the introduction of the radio, enabling major politicians to reach mass audiences like never before; Franklin Delano Roosevelt used this new medium to his advantage with his overwhelmingly popular Fireside Chats (Ryan, 1989). The presidential races of the 1960s led to a heavy campaign presence on national television; most American families had one in their home, and the average citizen could now see the president's face while he addressed the public (Hwang, 2016).

However, with the rise of the Internet and social media, presidential candidates of the past several elections have increasingly used these mediums to gain more support (Leonardi, 2013). Barack Obama's 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns further revolutionized how politicians began to reach their audiences in subsequent elections; Obama's social media use mobilized the previously untapped new generation of voters with unprecedented success (Hamilton, 2011).

While the way in which presidential hopefuls attempt to reach their potential voters has progressed dramatically over the decades, it cannot be said that the way in which gender affects these candidates has progressed at the same rate. Generally, society still tends to focus more on a male politician's skills and policies instead of aspects of their sex in office (Ross, 2004). Further still, a 2013 Utah study concluded female

politicians' character and behavior in politics is described overwhelmingly more than their skill and policy in newspapers and articles. Male politicians' skills and policies were more discussed in popular newspapers than their actual morals or character traits (Dunaway, 2013). Female presidential hopefuls still appear to hold back from aggressive campaigning because they feel they are unqualified, and are more risk-averse and less confident than their male competitors (Lawless, 2012).

For this study, the primary researcher looked at the framing of candidates in social media memes, and the ways in which these memes supported current stereotypes on gender in politics. Specifically, this study focuses on politicians Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton, Carly Fiorina and Ted Cruz.

According to a June 2014 study (Veinberg, 2014), the youngest consciously news-consuming generation garners their main news intake from the Internet and social media. While this is nothing new to the current generation of Millennials, the Internet and social media as news platforms is a phenomenon popularized in the past 30 years. That being said, the popularity of online memes is a fairly new occurrence that has the potential to contribute to further effects on social media and framing theory.

Within communication methods and society, public opinions and beliefs are rarely formed from an individual's sole opinion (Zaller, 1992). Rather, public opinions are usually formed by leading communications firms and outlets they follow. Framing theory is useful in exploring media trends. Framing theory can be defined as the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue (Chong, 2007). These frames are established and molded by the

leading sources from which society receives their news (whether that be major news channels, websites, social media, etc.).

Feminist theory is still widely debated in communications research, and a clear definition of the theory has yet to be accepted by researchers on a mass scale. Since the 1970s and the introduction of feminist theory, many accomplishments and advancements have been made; these include establishing the importance of gender within research agendas, advocating feminist methodologies, and pushing forward women's voices and testimonies of personal experience (Hedge, 1998).

Richard Dawkins gave the earliest known definition of meme in 1976 as "a gene-like infectious unit of culture that spreads from person to person" (Shifman, 2013, p. 362). However, the most common and modern idea of the meme is centered around humor, and is usually a viral picture with a formatted text message (Gil, 2016).

While many studies have focused on previous presidential campaigns, social media using the lens of framing and feminist theories, a review of the literature revealed none have combined these concepts with the effect memes may have had on the 2016 candidate hopefuls. This study uses a content analysis to examine the social gender stereotypes in memes used to portray Democratic and Republican candidates in the 2016 presidential primaries. Based on study findings and a review of the literature, this study offers best practices and guidelines on how memes may be used in the future to advance gender relations in politicians. The quantitative data used in the results for this study were found through a purposive search through online search engines and Facebook groups targeting the four different politicians. These data were then processed through the statistical program, SPSS.

This study contains literature from previous studies on framing and feminist theories, social media studies, and most importantly, memes. It further expands the literature on the affect memes had on the 2016 presidency hopefuls, the way these memes could shape future public opinions, and whether or not prevailing gender stereotypes will help or hinder future politicians.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

To help guide this study on memes and the 2016 presidential race, the researcher looked to four streams of knowledge in the literature: (1) social media (2) memes (3) elections, and (4) media framing, stereotypes and gender.

Social Media

While there are many societal uses for social media, it is well known that social media users also collect news content from their peers on these sites. It is also well known that young Internet users have become more politically involved through new platforms like social media, though this political participation looks different from the participation of young people of past generations (Bakker, 2011). Unlike the generations before them, Millennials often prefer the immediacy and convenience of social media, especially Twitter and Facebook, for their breaking news, over the journalistic portrayals on major news sites (Bivens, 2015). In 2010, a study indicated 65 percent of individuals ages 18 to 29 received their news from online news sources, not specifying between social media and hard news sites (Netzley, 2012).

According to a 2011 study by Lee and Ma, social media can be defined as “Internet-based services that allow individuals to create, share and seek content, as well as to communicate and collaborate with each other.” The foundation of social media came with the introduction of BBSes (Bulletin Board Systems), in the late 1970s. Independently produced, BBSes allowed users to post codes for messages, games, and

more in order to share with other users. These were accessed via telephone line (Liu, 2014). Fast forward to the year 2004, when Facebook made its introduction into the society courtesy of creator Mark Zuckerberg. With the advent of Facebook, a revolution of news intake was presented to the current college-aged generation.

Individuals now have access to many forms of media at any time and place; mobile devices have enabled accessibility of media like never before, and unprecedented connectedness. The Millennial generation was the first to fully adopt the smartphone, and in 2011, over 50 percent of American college students owned a smartphone (Lee, 2013). One 2014 study predicts that by the end of 2016, the number of mobile subscribers in the world will reach 8.5 billion people; in other words, there will be almost as many mobile subscribers in the world as there are people (Avidar, 2014). Although there's no way of knowing what the future of social media may look like in the next decade, or even 100 years from now, it is clear that it will exist in some form for the duration of human existence (Hendricks, 2013).

Memes

While a key component of the Digital Age is social media platforms, the inner detail of these platforms is equally important. Coined by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, memes can consist of songs, fads, catchphrases, or images, and are described as “minimal cultural information units transferred between individuals, and/or generations, through processes of replication or transmission” (Dawkins 2006). Internet users have now adopted these themes to describe the rapid spread and duplication of digital content (Howley, 2016). Memes are generally most effective when they are infectious/viral. Memes can be characterized as infectious when they are appealing, satirical, humorous or

universal (Huntington, 2013). Memes are replicated if they are effective or useful at portraying an opinion, and die out if they are not (Rushkoff, 2010). These memes have the potential to create a chain of creative feedback amongst the viewers, whether through comments, response, regeneration or a mixture of the above.

Two popular schools of thought have built themselves from the memetic foundation: one being that memes are *mentalist-driven*, and one being that memes are *behavior-driven* (Shifman, 2013). According to the mentalist-driven school of thought, represented by Dawkins himself, memes are ideas or pieces of information residing in the brain, that are then passed along to others by “various vehicles,” images, texts, artifacts or rituals (Dennett, 1995). On the other hand, according to the behavior-driven school of thought, memes are seen directly as behaviors and artifacts rather than ideas; the meme has no existence outside the events, practices, and texts in which it appears (Gatherer, 1998). However, it is important to recognize that the behavior-driven school of thought fails to incorporate the full depth and complexities of the overall meme; it does not take into account the complexities of transmission through the human mind (Dennett, 1995).

Whichever school of thought a scholar has chosen, it is undeniable that memes have the potential for profound, powerful effects on political discourse in the new political sphere of communications . They can display a condensed, complex political statement in a brief, powerful, effective container that engages people through various emotions (Re, 2014). These images are no longer just images, but *ideas* (Xavier-Rolan, 2015). Two reoccurring themes have been used throughout political memes: 1) photo shopped reactions and 2) images characterized by super-imposed text.

It is suggested that, due to the web-savvy requirements of making memes, Caucasian individuals of a higher socioeconomic status are doing the generating (Hargittai, 2008). It should also be considered that women are less likely to content online (Hargittai, 2008), meaning that the majority of meme creations come from men. This could be because most women believe their content would not be taken seriously (Bosman, 2005), or because overall user skill of computers and the Web is less proficient in females (Hargittai, 2008). User-generated memes are also a common activity amongst individuals ages 18 to 29, making them of the Millennial generation (Wunsch-Vincent, 2007). All of these factors would put various implications on the nature of the memes created.

The introduction of online meme generators 2009, with www.memegenerator.net, gave all social media users the tools to create memes of whatever they chose without discrimination. Websites such as Know Your Meme, 4chan, Reddit and Tumblr allow users to produce, view and upload new memes with their own desktops, laptops or smartphones at alarming rates (Howley, 2016). Unlike other types of digital publications, they do not attribute authorship; this trait gives memes the advantage of anonymity (Canning, 2010). These user-generated memes further the dominant 'tabloid culture' in American news consumption, with bold headlines, fantastic imagery and sensational subjects (Glynn, 2000).

2008 and 2012: Presidential Social Media Use

With the advent of social media, and their value to modern politics, came the introduction of “Politics 2.0;” derived from Web 2.0, Politics 2.0 describes the relationship between the government and the governed in the context of the public sphere (Martinez-Rolan, 2015). Barack Obama was the first presidential candidate to effectively use social media, especially Facebook, in his 2008 campaign. At the time, the iPhone was new, and Twitter had recently laid down its fragile foundation in 2006. The idea of social media activism and peer-to-peer public discourse is key in the elections of the future, and Obama truly understood this, unlike his competitors McCain and Romney (Rutledge, 2013). The 2012 presidential race quickly became known as the “Twitter election” (Houston, 2013), with more than 6.5 million tweets sent out during the final presidential debate (Sharp, 2012). According to a study by the Pew Research Center, the Obama campaign used and posted to social media nearly four times as much content as the Romney campaign and was used twice as many platforms (Rosensteil, 2012).

Obama has been dubbed the *memecrat* by some social media studies and researchers, due to his excellent use of the social media tools throughout his two terms in office (Xavier-Rolan, 2015). A key example of his expert teams’ meme use throughout his campaigns was the *Situation Room* meme, created at the moment Bin Laden was captured.

Obama’s two campaigns set high precedents for future presidential candidates; the public now expects a level of social media involvement from its presidential hopefuls that was previously not thought of. In 2016, about nine-in-ten Americans learned about the 2016 election campaigns from Facebook, and about one-third of 18- to 29-year-olds

named social media as the most helpful source of learning about presidential candidates (Gottfried, 2016). These statistics prove that presidential candidates now have more expectations to connect with their voters through social media than believed possible before the 2008 campaign.

It can be assumed from the data received from the 2008 and 2012 campaigns that social media generates an unprecedented amount of awareness and attention to presidential candidates. However, one area that needs further exploration is social media's role in their overall image.

Framing

Framing theory is often defined as a process in which some aspects of reality are selected, and given greater emphasis or importance, so that the problem is defined, its causes are diagnosed, moral judgments are suggested and appropriate solutions and actions are proposed (Entman, 2007). Through the concept of framing, this study examines the effects of social media on the portrayals of previously-determined presidential primary candidates of the 2016 election. Framing theory is related to the agenda-setting theory in mass media, but expands focus from a particular topic to the meat of what that particular topic contains; in agenda-setting, the media tells you what to think about, whereas in framing, the media gives you their own interpretation and meaning to understand those given topics (McCombs, 2006). It is also important to note that while what is left in and added to intentional frames is important, it is equally as important to note what is left out of the frame; these intentional cuts in a perception can form new opinions as well (Canning, 2010).

According to Cissel's 2012 study, framing is described as "a schema of interpretation, collection of anecdotes, and stereotypes that individuals rely on to understand and respond to events" (p. 68). It defines how news media shapes public opinion. Framing in social media comes in many forms, whether through memes, individual posts, Facebook groups dedicated to one purpose, and more; however, framing and bias is the overarching theme that connects all mediums. Framing in social media actively projects and predicts behaviors and opinions in the general public (Scheufele, 1999).

While framing from peers in social media is not a new concept, it is important to also consider framing within memes, and the effects these viral frames have on popular opinion. The meme-generator's individual opinions framed their meme, and can consequently give a new outlook to someone previously unknowledgeable to the subject (Canning, 2010). As a meme spreads, it carries a specific message, and this message can provide "understanding" to those it encounters along its viral path (Burgess, 2008).

Gender Stereotypes in Politics and Feminist Theory

Gender studies and feminist theory are important concepts in this study, as previous studies indicate American media outlets have stereotypically framed male politicians differently than female politicians throughout history (Dunaway, 2013; McLaren, 2005; Rosenbluth, 2015; Ross, 2004). Stereotypes can best be described as a cognitive structure that contains a set of expectations about a certain group or category. Stereotypes have been used far more often in individuals' personal judgments rather than judgments made off of new and personal experience alone (Fiske, 1990). The salience of

a stereotype may also determine how affective its frame and influence are (Fridkin, 1996).

In reference to politics, studies indicate that the public holds basic beliefs and judgments for female politicians; they are general seen as warmer, more liberal, and more compassionate (Alexander, 1993). However, they are also seen as liberal in focus, less rational, and weaker in leadership than males (Kahn, 1994). Male politicians are generally stereotyped as more capable of handling crime and foreign policy, and more capable of strongly leading a government (Sanbonmatsu, 2002). Male politicians are also seen as more trustworthy and dominant (Chiao, 2008).

Generally, society tends to focus more on a male politician's skills and policies instead of aspects of their sex in office (Ross, 2004). In the 2016 primary campaign, many Millennials clung to Bernie Sanders because of his push for Universal Healthcare and free college tuition; his Socialist-leaning policies drew in a younger sect (Wagner, 2015). However, social media, focusing on Facebook, has also used memes and series of viral articles to portray Bernie Sanders as a more paternal, likeable figure; they have used characteristics like his background in Civil Rights Movement, his advocacy for the young adult, and even his age to portray him as a grandfatherly figure (Perdomo, 2015). He went from "obscure in the campaign" and "ignored" (Meet the Press, 2015) to jumping in the polls in a matter of one month, and "viewed more often favorably than unfavorably" (Naureckas, 2015). Through framing Sanders as the older underdog, memes, specifically on Facebook, have given him a more relatable image. His popularity weighs most significantly with the younger generation, ages 17 to 29; coincidentally the age group

with the most social media users. Sanders overpowered Clinton 84 percent to 14 percent in ages 17 to 29 in February 2016's Iowa caucus (Silver, 2016).

However much social media improved Sanders image among the younger portion of the population, the use of social media in the 2000s has not seemed to advocate for the modern female politician. Carly Fiorina was mostly portrayed in the media and memes alike by her business skills, specifically as her time as CEO of Hewlett-Packard; however, this portrayal of her skills as a business leader were significantly more negative. Fortune Magazine described Fiorina as an “underperformer” (2016), and Politico Magazine depicted Fiorina as a “colossal business failure” (2015). Many publications related her “lack of a strong business record” to her consequential lack of being able to lead the American people as president (Soni, 2015).

Female politicians such as Wendy Davis, Sarah Palin, and Hillary Clinton, are often portrayed in a colder, more robotic, less intelligent light. Men dominate the American political sphere, with only two female primary vice-presidential candidates in the history of the United States, and no female presidents. Women in power are often depicted as cold, or mean, or only depicted in the media at all for their clothing choices. In 2008, Michelle Obama was unfairly labeled as an “angry black woman” due to her political views, and White House Counsel Kathryn Ruemmler's shoe collection was described in a magazine in 2013 (Khan, 2014). Women's presumed “morally superior standing” has not seemed to benefit female politicians in the media, and this superior standing has even been described as “hindering” females in the political sphere by exposing a clear gap in the expectations of women versus men in media politics (McLaren, 2005).

In contrast, male politicians are typically portrayed in the media for their skills, accomplishments and failures (Ross, 2004). Chiao, Bowman and Gill's 2008 study on female and male politicians' appearances further demonstrates how the two sexes are judged in the political limelight; the study concluded that male politicians' appearances seem more dominant and competent to the average voter. Yet another study indicates that when communicating the exact same message, male politicians were seen as more trustworthy, convincing and knowledgeable than their female counterparts (Aalberg, 2007). More recently, a 2013 Utah study concluded female politicians' character and behavior in politics is described overwhelmingly more than their skill and policy in newspapers and articles. The same article also described a trend that male politicians' skills and policies were more discussed in popular newspapers than their actual morals or character traits (Dunaway, 2013).

Female representation in major offices appears to be on the rise in many countries around the world, but the United States has not kept up this pace; 90 nations now exceed the United States in the percentage of women in national legislature (Lawless, 2012). Some leaders may see a woman candidate to be a greater electoral risk than a man because of the relative newness of women representatives. Indeed, the parties have arguably hindered the descriptive representation of women by not recruiting or supporting women representatives (Sanbonmatsu, 2002). However, over time, there is hope that exposure to female politicians may reduce the use of gender stereotypes when evaluating leadership effectiveness as well as negative biases and stereotypes in female leaders (Ambady, 2002). Recruiting more female leaders for political roles and

disseminating more information to the female public about legislative positions and tasks could help narrow the gender gap and increase women's representation (Lawless, 2012).

When discussing feminism and feminist theory, scholars first must define the difference between gender and sex. According to the American Psychological Association, *gender* refers to “the attitudes, feelings and behaviors a given culture associates with a person's biological sex.” This in contrast to *sex* being described as a person's biological status. Gender can also be described as something fluid, negotiable and complex, where sex is something predetermined by nature (Kamler, 1999). The feminist theory operates with a set of “transdisciplinary concepts,” including sex and gender, but also woman, sexuality and sexual difference (Sandford, 2015).

Westernized feminist theory is believed to have moved from the 1970s' liberal, socialist and radical version, to the modern 2000s' post-modern gender theory (Hemmings, 2005). Along with this movement into a “more-modern” feminist theory, there is believed to have been more of a fragmentation and less unification amongst proclaimed feminists (Stacey, 1993). However, whatever fragmentation there is, it is agreed that feminist theory of mass communication challenges the role of power in relations between men and women, exposes sexism and socialization, and will helpfully shed light on the inequalities of political campaigning between the sexes in this study (Dow & Condit, 2005). Throughout the thousands of articles dedicated to feminist study, it is also agreed that one of the main goals of feminist theory is to push women's lives and many meanings from the marginalized outsides to the center of social inquiry (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Within this study, feminist theory was used to look at positions of power and the influence female gender and identity has on these positions' portrayal.

The Glass Ceiling

The “glass ceiling” is a metaphor for studying the gender disparities between men and women in the workplace; the “glass ceiling” describes the invisible, but prevalent, roadblocks that limit the advancement of women within the workplace (Galloway, 2012). The glass ceiling can also contain the lack of representation of women in certain administrative positions of leadership (Stockdale, 2004).

In reference to the political world, the metaphorical glass ceiling potentially means that women are obviously few and far between; women represent only 7.8 percent of the world’s heads of government (Folke, 2016), and only 5.9 percent of the world’s heads of state (UN Women, 2014). It can be noted that there is a much higher inequality in representation of women vs. men within higher and more influential political positions than in lower positions (Baxter, 2000). The glass ceiling also seems to be cyclical in that women are less likely to run for office because they feel they are unqualified, and are more risk-averse and less confident than their male competitors (Lawless, 2012).

Female politicians are also severely underrepresented in the news sphere (Vos, 2013), causing their speeches and political values to be virtually unheard by the public. Even if the female politician can make it through the news-coverage barrier, the glass ceiling exists for their campaign trail; while both men and women express concern about the many roadblocks of campaigning, women tend to be more worried overall, particularly about gender discrimination, the difficulty of fundraising, negative advertising, the loss of privacy, and not being taken seriously (Rosenbluth, 2015).

Importance of Media in Politics

The media in politics is important for several reasons: Politics and the political process are complex, most voters do not take a lot of time to research their favored candidates, and because it is impossible for the political candidates to meet every individual voter to persuade them of their character (Golder, 2012). Social media is slowly taking the place of major news outlets in breaking news and political news, especially among the youngest generation of voters.

While it is not certain what the future of social media will consist of, it is theorized that social media will continue to be an integral part of society's lives and feeling of connectedness (Milbourne, 2015). It is vital that presidential candidates continue to use social media as a medium to campaign with, and recognize the frames being portrayed of their individual personalities and policies.

CHAPTER THREE

Hypotheses

Building on this review of the literature, this study uses framing and feminist theories to answer six hypotheses:

H1: Popular American memes are more likely to depict female politicians' appearance more negatively than their male counterparts.

H2: Popular American memes are more likely to depict female politicians' gender more negatively than male politicians.

H3: Popular American memes are more likely to depict female politicians' character more negatively than male politicians.

H4: Popular American memes are more likely to depict female politicians' behavior more negatively than male politicians.

H5: Popular American memes are more likely to depict female politicians' skills more negatively than male politicians.

H6: Popular American memes are more likely to depict female politicians' policies more negatively than male politicians.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

This content analysis uses a series of coding schemes and analyses of Facebook and Google popular memes portraying candidate stereotypes and characteristics. The researcher studied the memes for tone and themes.

Coding Scheme and Model Studies

Building on studies by Chiao, Bowman & Gill (2008) and Dunaway (2013), the researcher developed themes to examine depictions of males and females in leadership roles. Specific themes used in coding the following sample of memes were broken into six platforms: *skill*-focused themes, *policy*-focused themes, *character*-focused themes, *behavior*-focused memes, *gender*-focused themes, and *appearance*-focused themes. The memes were further coded into *negative*, *neutral* and *positive* tone.

Chiao, Bowman and Gill's 2008 study on gender and facial appearance in politics delves into the judgements and stereotypes voters placed on different female and male candidates. The study's final outcomes revealed voters saw chosen male candidates' facial features as competent and dominant, whereas voters saw female candidates' facial features as attractive or approachable. The study further implies that voters may seek gender biases when voting for candidates, stereotyping male candidates as abler to do the job based on facial features (Table A.1).

Dunaway's 2013 study followed the senate and gubernatorial races, and analyzed leading stories based on whether they were horse race/strategy stories, issue stores, or candidate-trait-focused stories. The study concluded that most female candidates were evaluated solely on their character and personal traits instead of their skills or policy issues. This study used over 10,000 newspapers articles covering statewide elections (Table A.2).

Pilot Study and Candidate Choice

A pilot study was conducted in spring of 2016 using the coding method listed above. The main purposes of the pilot study were to 1) discern if the coding instrument accurately assessed the themes explored in the study, 2) predict how many memes would be needed to glean well-represented data, 3) and to discover any further limitations to be noted in the main study. The primary researcher collected n=162 memes and n=165 memes pertaining to Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton, respectively, from Google, Yahoo, and Facebook searches. The primary researcher then used a series of t-tests to garner data from the resulting memes. After coding and recording the pilot study's memes, it was deemed necessary to include two other candidates of the opposite sexes, from the Republican primary candidates; adding two more politicians would provide more examples and clarity of potential gender stereotypes from a different angle with political representation.

Sanders and Clinton were chosen for the main portion of the study because of their roles within the Democratic Party; they were the leading candidates for the primary campaign with the most relevance, and Clinton was the female politician with the most

notoriety running for the candidacy within the party. Cruz and Fiorina representing the Republican Party were chosen to present more variety within the sample data. This study's hypotheses were not focused on political parties, however, having members of the opposing presidential party was thought to present more views and ideals from a variety of meme-creators. While there were many presidential hopefuls running within the 2016 Republican primary campaign, Cruz and Fiorina were chosen because they represented longevity and gender requirements for this study. Donald Trump was not chosen as a sample candidate within this study because of his previous celebrity in the entertainment sector throughout the decades; previous celebrity might have muddled the sample memes and data collected, in relevance to the presidential campaign.

Task Procedure and Data Analyses

For the main study, when collecting Bernie Sanders memes, a convenience search using Google.com was used, along with the search terms, "Pro Bernie Sanders memes" and "Anti Bernie Sanders memes." A convenience search was also executed using Facebook, with the keywords "Bernie Sanders memes." When collecting Clinton memes, a convenience search was used on Google.com with the search terms "anti-Hillary Clinton memes" and "Pro Hillary Clinton memes." A convenience Facebook search was also conducted using the keywords "Hillary Clinton memes." When collecting Carly Fiorina memes, Google and Facebook searches were conducted using the keywords "Carly Fiorina memes," "Pro Carly Fiorina memes," and "anti-Carly Fiorina memes." When collecting Ted Cruz memes, the same keywords were used as when searching for Fiorina's memes on Google. Facebook searches used "Ted Cruz memes." These search

terms were chosen for simplicity: each search phrase including “pro” and “anti” could be used on each of the candidates, keeping the searches uniform. See Appendix B, Figures B.1-4 for examples of memes collected on this study.

Facebook and search engines such as Google were used for the platforms in collecting memes, as they are a pivotal and key component to any president’s campaign through social media. They are also known as the two main resources for searching for specific news events for the youngest voting generation; digital media analytics company Parse.ly released Facebook and Google at 43 and 38 percent (respectively) of all news trafficking and sharing online.

Twitter was not used as a data source when conducting this study because of the nature of tweets and the way images are posted; when collecting memes on Twitter feeds, the caption of the post surrounding the meme from the user would change the overall coding scheme. When collecting data on Facebook, the primary researcher was able to find Facebook groups and pages dedicated to memes of the candidate hopefuls alone, with no texts or captions from their creators. For the convenience of the study, and to keep the coding scheme simplistic, Twitter was not used.

In analyzing the collected data, this study used the IBM program SPSS, a widely used statistical analysis program for the social sciences. The collected memes were coded using the before-mentioned themes from the literature review, and then the results were assimilated into the program; candidates were characterized as Ted Cruz (1), Hillary Clinton (2), Carly Fiorina (3), and Bernie Sanders (4). The frequency and cross tabulation tables in Appendix D were produced. For the main study, an independent t-test was used, due to the categorical nature of the study; candidates were further grouped into male

candidates (marked as “1”), and female candidates (marked as “2”). This allowed the researcher to conduct data analyses based on the hypotheses’ specifications; the study looked at the traits and stereotypes of the gender of the candidates in general, and not the traits and stereotypes of the individual candidates listed.

For more accurate coding and data results, an intercoder-reliability process was used; intercoder reliability was 92.0 percent for Bernie Sanders, 87.0 percent for Hillary Clinton, 90.2 percent for Ted Cruz, and 88.6 percent for Carly Fiorina memes. These percentages were calculated after two separate graduate students coded 20 percent of all memes in the sample.

CHAPTER FIVE

Results/Discussion

SPSS Testing

SPSS was chosen as the statistical analysis program for this study because of its specialization in the social science. For this study, an independent t-test was conducted to compare scores of appearance, gender, skills, policies, character and behavior amongst memes of female and male politicians; the four sampled candidates were grouped by gender (1 for Male, 2 for Female), and then tested by the six nominal variables. The study used a p-value $< .05$ to find the significance in male and female political stereotypes.

While a total of $n=550$ memes were used for the four primary candidates, a total of $n=129$ memes were discarded. These memes were discarded due to irrelevance; for instance, in the data sample collected for Hillary Clinton, some memes were discarded that only included subject matter on her controversial husband, Bill Clinton. Some of the memes in all four of the sample sets did not pertain to the designated candidates at all, and were also discarded. A total of $n=139$ memes for Ted Cruz (1), $n=137$ memes for Hillary Clinton (2), $n=134$ memes for Carly Fiorina (3), and $n=140$ memes for Bernie Sanders (4) were used for analysis in this study.

Means and Significance

The first hypothesis states popular American memes focus more negatively on female politicians' appearance than in male politicians. This hypothesis was marginally

supported by the results of the independent t-test. There was a marginally significant difference ($p = .051$) in the scores for appearance amongst male politicians ($M = -.56$, $SD = .550$) and female politicians ($M = -.81$, $SD = .477$).

The second hypothesis states popular American memes focus more negatively on female politicians' gender than in male politicians. However, this hypothesis was not supported by the test results. There was no significant difference ($p = .387$) in the scores for gender amongst male politicians ($M = .00$, $SD = .000$) and female politicians ($M = -.52$, $SD = .836$).

The third hypothesis states popular American memes focus more negatively on female politicians' character than in male politicians. The third hypothesis was supported by test results. There was a significant difference ($p = .000$) in the scores of character amongst male politicians ($M = .06$, $SD = .952$) and female politicians ($M = -.77$, $SD = .602$).

The fourth hypothesis predicted that popular American memes focus more negatively on female politicians' behavior than in male politicians. This hypothesis was not supported by the researcher's test results. There was no significant difference ($p = .817$) in the scores of behavior amongst male politicians ($M = -.82$, $SD = .495$) and female politicians ($M = -.79$, $SD = .561$).

The fifth hypothesis predicted that popular American memes focus more negatively on female politicians' skills than in male politicians. This hypothesis was supported by the results, with a significant difference ($p = .000$) in the scores of skills amongst male politicians ($M = -.22$, $SD = .998$) and female politicians ($M = -.97$, $SD = .174$).

The sixth and final hypothesis states that popular American memes focus more negatively on female politicians' policies than in male politicians. Likewise, this hypothesis was supported by the data, with a significant difference ($p = .000$) in the scores of policies amongst male politicians ($M = -.14$, $SD = .965$) and female politicians ($M = -.71$, $SD = .600$)

The data presented within the text can be seen in Appendix D, Table D.1 and Table D.2.

Frequency of Negative Variables

While there was no statistical significance reported within the gender and behavior variables between male and female politicians for this study, it should be noted that the vast majority of all coded memes mentioning female memes resulted in negative means for female politicians in all six variable categories. In fact, in every variable category, female politicians scored more negatively than male politicians (Appendix D, Table D.1).

When coding the memes, in scores of appearance, male politicians had an overall negative mean ($M = -.56$), but female politicians had a lower overall mean still ($M = -.81$). While scores in gender were not significant, no memes focused on gender for male politicians ($M = 0.00$), but female politicians' scores tended to be negative ($M = -.52$). In scores of character when coding the political memes, the sample describing male politicians was actually positive ($M = .06$), while the sample describing female politicians was negative ($M = -.77$). While results were not significant in scores of behavior, this was the only category in which females actually rang in higher in mean ($M = -.79$) than in male politicians ($M = -.82$), though still negative. In skills and policy, female politicians,

yet again, came in with much more negative mean scores than males; male politicians had a skills variable mean of ($M = -.22$), and females had a mean of ($M = -.97$). In terms of the policy variable, the male politicians' sample came in with a mean of ($M = -.14$), and the female politicians' sample had a mean of ($M = -.71$).

The results may not have supported two of the six stated hypotheses specifically, but the results are still meaningful to future research; male politicians, while pervading a negative light in most tested categories, were still negatively overshadowed by their female counterparts.

Suggestions

Results in the significant differences of scores within multiple tested variables suggest candidate gender *does* have an effect on the role of stereotypes portrayed within the collected memes. Specifically, the study results suggest that *appearance, character, skills and policies* are still more negatively judged in female candidates than in males.

However, the results in the lack of significant differences of scores in two of the variables suggests that candidate gender *does not* have an effect on the portrayal of stereotypes within the collected memes in reference to *gender and behavior*. While there were negative portrayals present in each variable category of the sample data, these results specifically suggest that the above scores do not relate to a *more* negative portrayal in each aforementioned category for female politicians than in males.

Hypothesis 2, in reference to gender, was proven incorrect in reference to this study, in that female candidates did not have a more negative portrayal in terms of gender than males in the collected memes. Likewise, hypothesis 4, in reference to behavior, was

proven incorrect in that female politicians were not more negatively judged than males in behavior while campaigning in the collected memes for this study.

CHAPTER SIX

Limitations/Implications

In general, previous research has suggested negative gender stereotypes are prominent in the political paradigm toward female politicians (Chiao, 2008; Dunaway, 2006; Lawless, 2012). However, no previous research discusses memes and the major implications these tiny platforms demonstrate.

The results of this study were somewhat anticipated, with four of the six hypotheses proven true. However, unexpected results led to two rejected hypotheses, giving potential insight on young and future voter patterns and thoughts.

A series of limitations should be noted before discussing this study's impact on the literature: a large number of the memes used in the sample were discarded because of lack of credibility or relevance. That being said, the most significant limitation within the study pertains to the sample size of the memes: a larger meme sample size would prevent the use of repetitive memes and fewer discarded memes. A larger sample size also would have given more examples within each variable of memes, which would have demonstrated more significant results in all categories; with the sample size used for the study, research was not able to glean fully representative results.

While previous studies have focused on the media's dissemination of gender-related stereotypes and traits of political characters (Chiao, 2008; Dunaway, 2013), it should be noted that this study does not consider a media gatekeeper; opinions, posts and shared content come from social media users themselves, with no gatekeeper in between.

It should also be observed that the Republican and Democratic political parties tend to view feminism and antifeminism in a different light; by the end of the 20th century, feminism has been highly identified with the Democratic Party (Freeman, 2008). The different viewpoints of women as leaders within the two parties could possibly have a major effect on the views of those who have created political memes. In some instances, gender and party are even believed to be in competition with each other; many may feel in conflict with their party, if the representative of the competing party, or of their own, is a woman. Gender has the power to influence voter patterns within partisan politics (Sanbonmatsu, 2002). Future studies could focus on the effects the two parties' general perceptions have on potential voters and their gender views, and the effects competing gender and political views have on each other.

There is a clear difference in the representation of female politicians in other countries versus the United States: 90 nations now exceed the United States in the percentage of women in national legislature (Lawless, 2012). There have been many other countries with female leaders, such as German Angela Merkel, Argentinian Cristina Kirchner and Lithuanian Dalia Grybauskaitė. Future studies could focus on gender stereotypes within these countries, and how those stereotypes have culminated into social media and meme-generation.

It should be noted that feminist theory has not been fully cultivated since its beginnings in the 1970s; this study can help further the understanding of the feminist theory through its penetration into every facet of social media and the Internet (Hamilton, 2009). Feminism treats gender as a “question that inflects power relations throughout all contexts, in turn making it a critique that is important to all research” (Shaw, 2014).

Many studies have been done on gender relations in the workplace and in society; however, there have not been many American, female presidential hopefuls to study within the political arena. The 2016 primary election has the potential to pave the way for many future studies; even though Hillary Clinton was not elected as the first female president in American history, the 2016 race to the White House gave scholars the opportunity to further cultivate definitions of feminist theory within communications.

So, what does it all mean? After the results and findings of the study are reviewed, it is more important to remember who is generating political memes. It is suggested that, due to the web-savvy requirements of making memes, individuals of a higher socioeconomic status are doing the generating. It should also be considered that women are less likely to create content online (Hargittai, 2008), meaning that the majority of meme creations come from men. User-generated memes are also a common activity among individuals ages 18 to 29, making them a platform of the Millennial generation (Wunsch-Vincent, 2007). These factors put various implications on the nature of the memes gathered. Memes generated by older, lower socioeconomically individuals might contain different messages or satire against male and female politicians.

While memes and their messages are not necessarily representative of the voting population as a whole, it is important to consider the breadth and reach of this group. According to a 2016 analysis conducted by Tufts University's Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, an estimated 24 million individuals between the ages of 18 – 29 voted in the 2016 election; these young people made up a vast percentage of voters, making their opinions and views something to be taken seriously (Boys, 2010).

The results of this study indicate that the same stereotypes that have trickled down to American culture throughout the decades have indeed landed on the youngest voting age bracket. However, over time, exposure to female politicians may reduce the use of gender stereotypes when evaluating leadership effectiveness as well as negative biases and stereotypes in female leaders (Ambady, 2002). While current studies demonstrate gender biases that affect voter decisions, as women become more visible within electoral politics and government, voters may learn to reduce their reliance on gender stereotypes and intuitive heuristics when electing leaders (Eagly, 1987). Recruiting more female leaders for political roles and disseminating more information to the female public about legislative positions and tasks could help narrow the gender gap and increase women's representation (Lawless, 2012).

This study attempted to decipher how social media memes, especially memes provided through Facebook and search engines, play into election campaigns and candidate portrayals through gender; it indicates what the future will look like for future campaigning female politicians, and the effects social media portrayals will have on their campaigns.

Women in politics have been scrutinized by media gatekeepers for decades, and this study puts new perspective on the ways in which the average individual maintains these stereotypes and obstacles through simple images and social media accounts. By the 2020 election cycle, it is possible that another female presidential candidate will show interest or enter into the presidential race, giving the study at hand a second chance at life with new subjects and potentially advanced stereotypes on gender in politics. Future studies may build on this study by perhaps focusing on the next election in 2020. A study

of this nature might further assess if gender stereotypes are still prevalent within the youngest voting age bracket. A study utilizing a larger sample, of at least 500 or more memes per candidate, would provide more variety.

A future study might also involve more researchers, in order to collect and code memes. In studying the 2020 election process, Twitter might be a primary focus in collecting memes; Twitter brings together pundits, candidates, scholars and the average citizen (Bekafigo, 2012). A meme collection through Twitter might also allow for more variety in the study sample and a more accurate depiction of the average voter's judgments.

Even after certain limitations, the study is important when considering future voter patterns and views. This study adds to the literature on memes, and previously identified social media tactics (such as Twitter, Facebook alone, emails and Instagram). More importantly, this study gives an outlook on the ability of memes to perpetuate gender stereotypes and traits that continue to ripple through the metaphorical glass ceiling of the political world.

Whether memes present a positive or negative tone, those shared with the American population have the power to influence and sway public opinion on candidates. Candidates must be aware of this tendency and the different characteristics and portrayals being pushed through memes and social media platforms in order to use them to their advantage. It is hoped that this study provides more definition and example of feminist theory and gender relations in politics for 21st century, and a foundation for a 2020 study.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Model Studies and Examples for Coding

Table A.1. *The Political Gender Gap: Gender Bias in Facial Inferences that Predict Voting Behavior**

Variables	Female candidates	Male Candidates	Difference Scores	<i>P</i> value
<i>All voters</i> (<i>n</i> = 73)				
Competent	4.50 (1.15)	4.70 (0.96)	-0.21	<0.05
Dominant	4.17 (0.84)	4.43 (0.74)	-0.26	<0.0001
Attractive	3.60 (0.89)	3.11 (0.95)	0.49	<0.0001
Approachable	4.83 (0.77)	4.41 (0.78)	0.43	<0.0001
<i>Female voters</i> (<i>n</i> = 38)				
Competent	4.48 (1.38)	4.73 (1.09)	-0.25	Ns
Dominant	3.98 (0.71)	4.40 (0.75)	-0.42	<0.0001
Attractive	3.64 (0.91)	3.22 (1.01)	0.43	<0.01
Approachable	4.66 (0.77)	4.17 (0.64)	0.63	<0.002
<i>Male voters</i> (<i>n</i> = 35)				
Competent	4.51 (0.86)	4.67 (0.81)	-0.16	<0.05
Dominant	4.37 (0.93)	4.48 (0.73)	-0.11	ns
Attractive	3.57 (0.87)	3.00 (0.88)	0.56	<0.0001
Approachable	5.02 (0.74)	4.66 (0.88)	0.86	<0.0001

*Revised from Chiao, Bowman, and Gill's 2008 study, *The Political Gender Gap: Gender Bias in Facial Inferences that Predict Voting Behavior*

Participants in the 2008 study completed two questions with accompanying pictures: First, the participant was shown the face of a political candidate for one second, and asked to judge how competent, dominant, approachable, and attractive the candidate was, based on a 7-point Likert scale. Second, the participants were asked which of the two candidates they would vote for in a presidential election (one being a male, one being a female).

Gender of voter affected the types of facial inferences that predicted voting preferences. Candidates that appeared more competent were more likely to win votes of male [$r(106)=0.60, p<0.0001$], and female [$r(106)=0.61, p<0.0001$] voters. In addition, male voters were significantly more likely to vote for candidates that appeared attractive [$r(106)=0.56, p<0.007$], while female voters were significantly more likely to vote for candidates that seemed approachable [$r(106)=0.46, p<0.03$].

Table A.2. *Traits versus Issues: How Female Candidates Shape Coverage of Senate and Gubernatorial Races**

Categories	Traits	Issue	Horse Race
<i>Male vs. Male Race</i>			
Frequency	307	2,821	1,966
Total (%)	3.25	29.98	20.79
Row (%)	6.03	55.38	38.59
<i>Male vs. Female Race</i>			
Frequency	414	2,028	1,377
Total (%)	4.38	21.44	14.56
Row (%)	10.84	53.10	36.06
<i>Female vs. Female Race</i>			
Frequency	51	282	212
Total (%)	0.54	2.98	2.24
Row (%)	9.36	51.74	38.90

*Revised from Dunaway, Lawrence, & Rose's 2013 study, *Traits versus Issues: How Female Candidates Shape Coverage of Senate and Gubernatorial Races*

Frequency indicates the total number of observations. Total (%) is the percentage of each story type relative to the total; Row (%) is the percentage of each story type relative to the row totals.

The study's sample includes 15 Senate and gubernatorial contests across eleven different states in 2006, and 15 contests across 13 states in 2008. The sample of senate and gubernatorial races, spanning multiple states and including male and female candidates, and the approximately 10,000 analyzed news stories these races generated arguably provides an accurate snapshot of contemporary American campaigns. Findings within the study concluded that races with a female candidate lead to news that is more focused on the personal traits and characteristics of the candidates, and this finding is especially stark for gubernatorial campaigns.

APPENDIX B

Examples of Memes Used in Coding

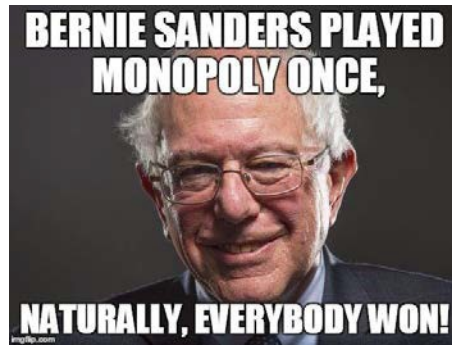


Figure B.1 An example of Bernie Sanders meme collected in data

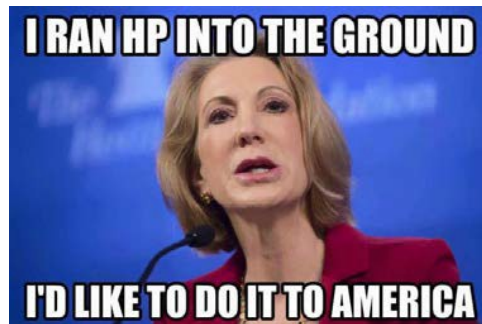


Figure B.2 An example of Carly Fiorina meme collected in data

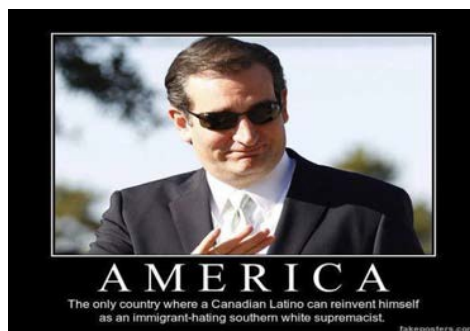


Figure B.3 An example of Ted Cruz meme collected in data



Figure B.4 An example of Hillary Clinton meme collected in data

APPENDIX C

Frequency Tables

Table C.1. *Statistics*

Memes	Appearance	Gender	Character	Behavior	Skills	Policies
Valid	72	48	133	112	56	130
Missing (99)	478	502	417	438	494	420
Mean	-.67	-.50	-.35	-.80	-.66	-.26
Std. Deviation	.531	.825	.898	.534	.745	.928
Sum	-48	-24	-47	-90	-37	-34

Table C.2. *Appearance Variable Frequency*

Tones	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Negative	50	9.1	69.4	69.4
Neutral	20	3.6	27.8	97.2
Positive	2	.4	2.8	100.0
Total	72	13.1	100.0	
Missing (99)	478	86.9		
Total	550	100.0		

Table C.3. *Gender Variable Frequency*

Tones	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Negative	34	6.2	70.8	70.8
Neutral	4	.7	8.3	79.2
Positive	10	1.8	20.8	100.0
Total	48	8.7	100.0	
Missing (99)	502	91.3		
Total	550	100.0		

Table C.4. *Character Variable Frequency*

Tones	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Negative	85	15.5	63.9	63.9
Neutral	10	1.8	7.5	71.4
Positive	38	6.9	28.6	100.0
Total	133	24.2	100.0	
Missing (99)	417	75.8		
Total	550	100.0		

Table C.5. *Behavior Variable Frequency*

Tones	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Negative	97	17.6	86.6	86.6
Neutral	8	1.5	7.1	93.8
Positive	7	1.3	6.3	100.0
Total	112	20.4	100.0	
Missing (99)	438	79.6		
Total	550	100.0		

Table C.6. *Skills Variable Frequency*

Tones	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Negative	46	8.4	82.1	82.1
Neutral	1	.2	1.8	83.9
Positive	9	1.6	16.1	100.0
Total	56	10.2	100.0	
Missing (99)	494	89.8		
Total	550	100.0		

Table C.7. *Policy Variable Frequency*

Tones	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Negative	77	14.0	59.2	59.2
Neutral	10	1.8	7.7	66.9
Positive	43	7.8	33.1	100.0
Total	130	23.6	100.0	
Missing (99)	420	76.4		
Total	550	100.0		

APPENDIX D

Group Statistics and Independent T-Test

Table D.1. *Group statistics*

Variables	Candidate Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
appearance	Male	41	-.56	.550	.086
	Female	31	-.81	.477	.086
gender	Male	2	.00	.000	.000
	Female	46	-.52	.836	.123
character	Male	67	.06	.952	.116
	Female	66	-.77	.602	.074
behavior	Male	44	-.82	.495	.075
	Female	68	-.79	.561	.068
skills	Male	23	-.22	.998	.208
	Female	33	-.97	.174	.030
policy	Male	102	-.14	.965	.096
	Female	28	-.71	.600	.113

Table D.2. Means and SD's of Dependent Variables for Stereotypes of Observed Political Memes

Study	Memes Categories	Appearance (H1)	Gender (H2)	Character (H3)	Behavior (H4)	Skills (H5)	Policy (H6)
Observed Stereotypes in Political Memes	Male (n=279)	-.56 (.550)	.00 (.000)	.06 (.952)	-.82 (.495)	-.22 (.998)	-.14 (.965)
	Female (n=271)	-.81 (.477)	-.52 (.836)	-.77 (.602)	-.79 (.561)	-.97 (.174)	-.71 (.600)
	<i>p</i> -value	.051*	.387	.000***	.817	.000***	.000***

Note: Numeric values are means in each condition (standard deviation in parentheses).

* Significant at the .05 level

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