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Electoral Politics

Still a Man's World?

Cheryl Perry made partner at a prestigious law firm in Hartford, Connecticut, when she was only thirty-three years old. She is active professionally, holding positions with the city's bar association and the Connecticut Trial Lawyers' Association. In addition, Ms. Perry served on the coordinating committee for the 1996 Olympics. Several of her peers in the legal community have repeatedly urged her to consider running for elective office. But when asked if she considers herself qualified to run, Ms. Perry replies, "Absolutely not. I'd never run."[1]

Tricia Moniz also looks like an excellent candidate for public office. A sociology professor at a large university, she has won four campus-wide teaching awards, is an authority in the areas of juvenile justice and diversity, and finds her expertise sought by numerous state and city agencies. Because of her professional experience, Professor Moniz works closely with community and political party leaders who regularly consult her on several public policy issues. When asked if she feels qualified to serve as an elected official, she laughs and says, "Lord no," elaborating that she would not feel qualified to serve even at the local level.

Randall White also seems to fit the bill for entering the electoral arena. A college professor in Pennsylvania, he has published numerous works on biblical interpretation. A dedicated teacher with a strong interest in local politics, he frequently attends and speaks at city council meetings.

[1] To protect anonymity, we changed the names and modified identifying references of the men and women we surveyed and interviewed for this book. The backgrounds and credentials we describe, as well as the specific quotes we use, are taken directly from the surveys we administered and interviews we conducted.

When asked if he feels qualified to seek elective office, Professor White immediately responds, "Yes; I am much smarter and a lot more honest than the people currently in office." He confidently asserts his qualifications to run for a position situated even at the state or national level.

Kevin Kendall lives outside of Seattle, Washington, and began practicing law in 1990. Over the course of the last fifteen years, he has become a partner in his law firm. In addition to working as a full-time litigator, Mr. Kendall is active in several professional associations and nonprofit community organizations in and around Seattle. When asked whether he feels qualified to pursue an elective position, Mr. Kendall states, "I am a quick study. People tell me I should run all the time." Asked to name the level of office for which he thinks he is most suited, Mr. Kendall responds, "I could run for office at any level. I've thought about it a lot and, one day, probably will."

The sentiments of these four individuals exemplify the dramatic gender gap we uncovered throughout the course of investigating eligible candidates' ambition to seek public office. These four women and men all possess excellent qualifications and credentials to run for office. They are well educated, have risen to the top of their professions, serve as active members in their communities, and express high levels of political interest. Yet despite these similarities, the two women express little desire to move into the electoral arena. The two men confidently assert the ease with which they could occupy almost any elective position. Although the factors that lead an individual first to consider running for office and then to decide to seek an actual position are complex and multifaceted, we find that gender exerts one of the strongest influences on who ultimately launches a political career.

The critical importance gender plays in the initial decision to run for office suggests that prospects for gender parity in our political institutions are bleak. This conclusion stands in contrast to the conventional wisdom of much political science scholarship. Because extensive investigations of women's electoral performance find no discernable, systematic biases against women candidates, many scholars conclude that, as open seats emerge and women continue to move into the professions that precede political candidacies, more women will seek and occupy positions of political power. These circumstances are certainly prerequisites for women to increase their presence in elective offices. We argue, however, that it is misleading to gauge prospects for gender parity in our electoral system without considering whether well-positioned women and men are equally interested and willing to run for office.

As fundamental as political ambition is to women's emergence as candidates, a glaring lack of empirical research focuses on gender and the decision to run for office.[2] This may be a result of scholarship following history; men have dominated the political sphere and our political institutions throughout time. Writing in the late 1950s, for example, Robert Lane (1959, 97) remarked that political scientists have "always had to come to terms with the nature of man, the political animal." Fifteen years later, another prominent political scientist, David Mayhew (1974, 6), described politics as "a struggle among men to gain and maintain power." It is not surprising, therefore, that of the sixteen published academic books that concentrate predominantly on political ambition, none focuses on gender.[3] A search of scholarly journals in the disciplines of political science, sociology, and psychology reveals a similar pattern. The only national study of the interaction between gender and political ambition appeared in 1982, when Virginia Sapiro (1982) reported that female delegates to the 1972 national party conventions were less politically ambitious than their male counterparts. Over the course of the two decades since Sapiro's article appeared, eight articles have investigated gender and the candidate emergence process.[4] Six of these articles

[2] Consistent with its traditional use in most political science research, our definition of "political ambition" is synonymous with the desire to acquire and hold political power through electoral means. Some scholars offer a broader conception of political ambition; it can manifest itself in forms other than running for office, such as serving as a community activist, organizing letter writing campaigns and protests, or volunteering for candidates or issue advocacy groups (e.g., Burrell 1996). Because holding elective office is the key to increasing women's numeric representation, we focus on the conventional definition of the term and examine the reasons women are less likely than men to enter the electoral arena as candidates.

[3] Of the sixteen books, one includes a case study of a woman's decision to run for office (Fowler and McClure 1989), one includes a chapter that addresses the roles race and gender might play in the candidate emergence process (Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell 2001), and one includes a chapter that elaborates on the manner in which the scholarship has not sufficiently addressed the intersection between gender and political ambition (Williams and Lascher 1993). We conducted this search with Worldcat, which includes all books cataloged in the Library of Congress. We used "political ambition," "candidate emergence," and "decision to run for office" as the initial search terms and then narrowed the list to include only those books that focused on interest in pursuing elective office. We excluded single-person political biographies.

[4] A search of articles using PAIS International (1972–present), Sociological Abstracts (1974–present), PsycINFO (1887–present), and JSTOR (including all volumes and issues of political science journal articles published after JSTOR's "moving walls") yielded more than two hundred results for "political ambition," "candidate emergence," and "decision to run for office." When we narrowed the list to articles that focused on interest in pursuing elective office, sixty-three remained.

are based on samples of actual candidates and officeholders, all of whom, by definition, exhibited political ambition when they entered political contests. Further, they rely on data from the 1970s and 1980s, when women's candidacies were extraordinarily rare and cultural acceptance of women in politics was far less widespread than it is today. The two more recent articles, both of which focus on individuals who have not yet run for office, rely on data from the single-state investigation that served as the pilot study for this book.[5] Several case studies and historical analyses chronicle women officeholders' decisions to run for office (e.g., Witt, Paget, and Matthews 1994; Kirkpatrick 1974). And political biographies written by women who have held elective office also shed light on the process by which they became candidates (Clinton 2003; Schroeder 1999; Boxer 1994). But no systematic, nationwide empirical accounts attempt to explain the role gender plays in the candidate emergence process. We simply do not know how gender interacts with political ambition in contemporary society.

At long last, this book explores the role gender plays in the initial decision to run for elective office. We examine the factors that lead people to make the move from politically minded citizen to candidate for public office. We seek to understand why accomplished, professional women like Cheryl Perry and Tricia Moniz view themselves as unsuited for holding elective office, whereas their male counterparts, men like Randall White and Kevin Kendall, voice no such hesitation. Our analysis is based on data from the Citizen Political Ambition Study, a national survey we conducted of almost 3,800 "eligible candidates" – successful women and men who occupy the four professions that most often precede a career in politics. This study provides a significant methodological advance in exploring candidate emergence and presents the first opportunity to examine broadly the manner in which gender influences the inclination to seek elective office. At its core, this book is about political ambition: why men have it, and why women don't.

Representation, Equality, and the Study of Gender in Electoral Politics

Investigators who study women and electoral politics have fought to convince the political science community to take the women and politics

[5] The pilot study was based on data collected from roughly two hundred eligible candidates from the state of New York. For a more elaborate description of the sample and a summary and analysis of the findings, see Fox and Lawless 2003; Fox, Lawless, and Feeley 2001.

subfield seriously.[6] Nearly all of the research that addresses gender and U.S. politics, therefore, tends to begin with a justification for studying women and elections. Invariably, the normative underpinning to which scholars refer is women's underrepresentation. Although this justification has become almost cliché, it remains a potent reflection of reality; women's presence in our political institutions bears directly on issues of substantive and symbolic representation.

Most empirical research in the area of representation focuses on the different issues men and women bring to the forefront of the legislative agenda and the degree to which gender affects legislators' abilities to represent female constituents' substantive interests. At both the national and state levels, male and female legislators' priorities and preferences differ. Controlling for party, region, and constituency characteristics, Barbara Burrell (1996) finds that women in the U.S. House of Representatives are more likely than men to support "women's issues," such as gender equity, day care, flex time, reproductive freedom, minimum wage increases, and the extension of the food stamp program.[7] Further, both Democratic and moderate Republican women in Congress are more likely than men to use their bill sponsorship and co-sponsorship activity to focus on "women's issues" (Swers 2002). Debra Dodson (1998) highlights such behavior in her discussion of the Women's Health Initiative, which she explains was enacted only because women in Congress appealed to the General Accounting Office to fund the research. Before this initiative, even though women were twice as likely as men to suffer from heart disease, the majority of the medical research was conducted on male subjects. Two relatively recent studies of state legislative behavior also uncover female legislators' greater likelihood to champion women's interests (Thomas 1994; Berkman and O'Connor 1993).[8]

[6] For a compelling analysis of the theoretical, methodological, and empirical difficulties involved in fully integrating gender politics into the political science discipline, see Flammang 1997.

[7] For competing evidence, see Leslie Schwindt-Bayer and Renato Corbetta (2004), who argue that, controlling for party and constituency influences, member sex does not predict the "liberalness" of representatives' roll call behavior in the 103rd–105th Congresses.

[8] Investigators have produced a wide array of empirical research that highlights the unique policy agenda women bring to elective office. For evidence of substantive representation at the congressional level, see Swers 1998; Paolino 1995. At the state level, see Carroll, Dodson, and Mandel 1991; Kathlene, Clarke, and Fox 1991; Thomas and Welch 1991; Saint-Germain 1989. And for a theoretical discussion of women's substantive representation, see Susan Moller Okin (1989), who argues that the presence of female legislators

Substantive representation pertains not only to policy priorities and voting records; women's presence in the top tier of political accomplishment also infuses into the legislative system a distinct style of leadership. Sue Tolleson Rinehart's (1991) study of mayors finds that women tend to adopt an approach to governing that emphasizes congeniality and cooperation, whereas men tend to emphasize hierarchy. Lyn Kathlene (1994) uncovers significant differences in the manner in which male and female state legislature committee chairs conduct themselves at hearings; women are more likely to act as facilitators, whereas men tend to use their power to control the direction of the hearings. Women's likelihood to conduct business in a manner that is more cooperative, communicative, and based on coalition-building than men's can directly affect policy outcomes. Because they are more concerned with context and environmental factors when deliberating on crime and punishment, for example, women state assembly members are more likely than men to advocate for rehabilitation programs and less likely than men to support punitive policies (Kathlene 1995).[9]

Political theorists point to symbolic representation and the role model effects that women's presence in positions of political power confers to women citizens (Pitkin 1967). Symbolic effects are quite difficult to quantify, so this literature is much less developed empirically. In most cases, these studies do little more than assume a powerful and positive relation between women's presence in elective office and their female constituents' political attitudes and behavior.[10] But the logic underlying

has finally allowed issues such as marital rape, domestic violence, and child custody – all of which have traditionally been deemed private matters – to receive public attention and debate.

[9] Cindy Simon Rosenthal's (1998) study of state legislative chairs serves as the most recent and thorough description and analysis of the policy consequences of gender differences in leadership styles. For other studies pertaining to gendered political styles and the public policy ramifications that ensue, see Thomas 1994; Alexander and Andersen 1993; Eagley and Johnson 1990; Flammang 1985. Not all studies uncover such gender differences, though (see, for instance, Duerst-Lahti and Johnson 1992; Blair and Stanley 1991; Dodson and Carroll 1991). According to Beth Reingold (1996, 468), the one factor that distinguishes the studies that find differences in leadership styles from those that do not is the presence of strong institutional norms of behavior. The successful rational actor is aware of the dangers of "ruffling feathers, stepping on toes, and burning bridges" (1996, 483; see also Reingold 2000).

[10] Several political scientists have attempted to demonstrate empirically the effects of symbolic representation (Atkeson 2003; Rosenthal 1995; Tolleson Rinehart 1994). Isolating symbolic from substantive representation, however, is wrought with methodological difficulties. For a discussion of the difficulties involved in uncovering the potentially nuanced effects of symbolic representation, see Lawless 2004a.

symbolic representation is compelling. Barbara Burrell (1996, 151) captures the argument well:

> Women in public office stand as symbols for other women, both enhancing their identification with the system and their ability to have influence within it. This subjective sense of being involved and heard for women, in general, alone makes the election of women to public office important because, for so many years, they were excluded from power.

Together, the literatures on substantive and symbolic representation suggest that the inclusion of more women in positions of political power would change the nature of political representation in the United States. Electing more women would substantially reduce the possibility that politicians will overlook gender-salient issues. Moreover, the government would gain a greater sense of political legitimacy, simply because it would be more reflective of the gender breakdown of the national population. As political theorist Jane Mansbridge (1999, 651) explains:

> Easier communication with one's representative, awareness that one's interests are being represented with sensitivity, and knowledge that certain features of one's identity do not mark one as less able to govern all contribute to making one feel more included in the polity. This feeling of inclusion in turn makes the polity democratically more legitimate in one's eyes.

Because concerns surrounding representation are so fundamental, we situate our analysis on this foundation. If women are not as willing as men to enter the electoral arena, then large gender disparities in office holding will persist and continue to carry serious implications for the quality of political representation. Further, the degree of comfort women articulate regarding their entry into electoral politics serves as an important barometer of women's full integration into all aspects of life in the United States. Many enclaves of male dominance crumbled across the last half of the twentieth century, but high-level electoral politics was not one of them.

Traditional Gender Socialization in the Context of U.S. Politics: The Central Argument and Its Implications

This study provides the first broad-based empirical documentation that women are less politically ambitious than men to seek elective office. We advance the central argument that the gender gap in political ambition results from longstanding patterns of traditional socialization that

persist in U.S. culture. Gender politics scholars Pamela Conover and Virginia Gray (1983, 2–3) define traditional sex-role socialization as the "division of activities into the public extra-familial jobs done by the male and the private intra-familial ones performed by the female." These different roles and social expectations for women and men have permeated the landscape of human civilization throughout time. Historian Gerda Lerner (1986) persuasively links the origins of the gendered division of labor to tribal hunter-gatherer societies. She explains that the division was a "necessity" because women had to produce enough children (many of whom died in infancy) to maintain the very existence of the tribe. Political theorist Jean Bethke Elshtain (1981) attributes the first enunciation of separate spheres for men and women as a political concept to Aristotle, who delineated between the public world of the *polis* and the nonpublic world of the *oikos*. Not surprisingly, the gendered division of labor has historically resulted in men's entry into, and dominance of, the public world of politics, and women's almost total exclusion from the political sphere. By harkening back to tribal societies and the writings of Aristotle, we do not mean to diminish dramatic social and cultural change, especially that which has transpired during the last fifty years in the United States. But centuries – or even millennia – of socialized norms do die hard. It was not until 1975, for instance, that the U.S. Supreme Court discarded state laws that excused women from jury service on the grounds that it would interfere with their domestic duties (Kerber 1998).

Throughout this book, we employ the term "traditional gender socialization" within the context of U.S. politics to refer to the greater complexities of women's lives, both in terms of how society perceives them, and the manner in which they perceive themselves, as eligible candidates. More specifically, we propose three manifestations of traditional gender socialization to explain the gender gap in levels of political ambition.

Traditional Family Role Orientations

Gender-specific family roles and responsibilities serve as perhaps the most obvious manifestation of traditional gender socialization. Up through the mid-twentieth century, the notion of women serving in positions of high political power was anathema, in large part because of the expectation that women should prioritize housework and child care. The women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s advocated greater gender equity in household management, but the promise of egalitarian

household dynamics never fully materialized. A 1995 United Nations study of two-career families in developed countries, for example, found that women continue to perform almost three times as much of the unpaid household labor as men (Freedman 2002). Even in the current era, the primary institutions of social and cultural life in the United States continue to impress upon women and men that traditional gender roles constitute a "normal," "appropriate," and desirable set of life circumstances. Summarized well by feminist historian Estelle Freedman (2002, 131), "Women's domestic identities have proven to be quite tenacious."

Not only do women continue to bear the responsibility for a majority of household tasks and child care, but they also face a more complicated balancing of these responsibilities with their professions than do men. As a result, an increasing number of highly successful professional women are "opting out" of their careers to fulfill traditional gender roles. A 2003 *New York Times Magazine* exposé highlights this trend (Belkin 2003). The piece focuses on eight women graduates of Princeton University, most of whom are in their thirties. Some earned law degrees from top universities, such as Harvard and Columbia. Others garnered MBAs, started businesses, or launched careers in journalism. All of these women found the "balancing act" of career and family obligations too difficult; so, all chose to leave their careers.[11] Women's dual roles also carry implications for their involvement in politics. The traditional division of household labor and family responsibilities means that, for many women, a political career would be a "third job." Because men tend not to be equal partners on the home front, entering politics does not interfere as directly with their ability to fulfill their personal and professional obligations.

Masculinized Ethos

When individuals consider running for office and launching successful campaigns, they must rely on the support of numerous political institutions. Most of these institutions are dominated by men and ultimately embody a perpetually ingrained ethos of masculinity. International relations and feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe (2004, 4–5) explains:

> Patriarchy is the structural and ideological system that perpetuates the privileging of masculinity . . . legislatures, political parties, museums, newspapers, theater

[11] Kathleen Hall Jamieson (1995) provides a broader historical discussion of how women struggle to strike a balance between their competing private and public sphere roles.

companies, television networks, religious organizations, corporations, and courts . . . derive from the presumption that what is masculine is most deserving of reward, promotion, admiration, [and] emulation.

In-depth analyses of the United States' central political institutions confirm Enloe's claim. Scholars have identified, to varying degrees, a type of masculinized ethos within the various components of the national government.[12] Further, state legislatures have been very slow to include women and their distinct policy agendas (Thomas 1994). Women's full integration into the Democratic and Republican parties has also been a long and difficult road; no woman has led either of the national party organizations in the last thirty years (Freeman 2000). Men are more likely than women to participate actively in political fund-raising networks (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Brown, Powell, and Wilcox 1995). And when we turn to television, men comprise the leading faces of broadcast news. In fact, no woman has ever served as the lead anchor for any of the three major news networks.[13]

Even if we assume that the men who occupy positions in these institutions no longer exhibit overt signs of bias against eligible women candidates (and this is a substantial assumption), years of traditional conceptions about candidate quality, electability, and background persist. The organs of governance were designed by men, are operated by men, and continue to be controlled by men; even if they want to be more inclusive of women, they often do not know how.[14] As a result, women and men have different experiences and develop different impressions when dealing with the various arms of the political process. Whereas political institutions overtly and subtly facilitate and encourage men's emergence into politics, they often continue to suppress women's willingness to launch political careers.

Gendered Psyche

The presence of traditional gender role expectations and the dominance of a masculinized ethos culminate to create and sustain the gendered

[12] For insights into the gendered institution of the presidency, see Borelli and Martin 1997; for Congress, see O'Connor 2002; and for the judiciary, see Mezey 2003.

[13] For an amusing recounting of the masculine face of broadcast journalism, see Maureen Dowd, "It's Still a Man's World on the Idiot Box," *New York Times*, December 2, 2004, A39.

[14] An edited collection by Georgia Duerst-Lahti and Rita Mae Kelly (1995) builds on this theme and offers a broad collection of articles that consider the relationships among power, institutions, and gender.