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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 campuswide teaching awards, is an authority in the areas of juvenile justice and diversity, and finds her expertise sought out by many state and city agencies. Because of her professional experience, Professor Moniz works closely with community and political party leaders who regularly consult her on public policy issues. When asked if she feels qualified to serve as an elected official, she laughs and says, "Lord no," elaborating that she does 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. When

[1] To protect anonymity, we changed the names and modified identifying references of the women and men 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.

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. Since then, 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 discernible, 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, there is a glaring lack of empirical research that 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 U.S. 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 when we wrote the first edition of this book, none of the sixteen published academic books that concentrated predominantly on political ambition focused on gender.[3] A 2004 search of scholarly journals in the disciplines of political science, sociology, and psychology revealed a similar pattern. The only national study of the interaction between gender and political ambition appeared in 1982, when Virginia Sapiro 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 following Sapiro's study, eight articles have investigated gender and the candidate emergence process.[4] Six of the articles are based on samples of actual candidates and

[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 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 role that 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 (1972–2004), Sociological Abstracts (1974–2004), PsycINFO (1887–2004), 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

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 articles that 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 (Kunin 2005; Clinton 2003; Schroeder 1999; Boxer 1994). But no systematic, nationwide empirical accounts had attempted to explain the role gender plays in the candidate emergence process. We simply did not know the manner in which gender interacts with political ambition in contemporary society.

The first edition of this book went a long way in exploring the role gender plays in the initial decision to run for elective office. And now, in this revised and expanded edition, we add greater depth to our examination of the factors that lead people to make the move from politically minded citizens to candidates for public office. Beyond its more detailed account of the manner in which gender shapes political ambition, this edition allows us to examine these gender dynamics at a crucial point in time. Nancy Pelosi's rise to the position of Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hillary Clinton's push for the presidency, and Sarah Palin's emergence as a vice presidential nominee mark major advances for women in politics.

Our analysis is based on data from the Citizen Political Ambition Panel Study. The panel consists of national surveys we conducted in 2001 and 2008 with "eligible" candidates – successful women and men who occupy the four professions that most often precede a career in politics. We base much of our analysis on the survey responses of the nearly 3,800 women and men who completed the original survey in 2001. But throughout

for office." When we narrowed the list to articles that focused on interest in pursuing elective office, sixty-three remained. Since the first edition of this book was published in 2005, two articles related to women's candidate emergence appeared in political science journals (Deckman 2007; Fulton et al. 2006). Neither of the articles focuses on women and men who have not yet run for office.

[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 that sample and a summary and analysis of the findings, see Fox and Lawless 2003; Fox, Lawless, and Feeley 2001.

each chapter, we supplement our analysis with data from the more than two thousand respondents who completed the 2008 survey; the second wave allows us to expand on and explicate many of the findings from the first edition of the book. 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 decision to run for 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 subfield of women and politics 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 women and men 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 the state level, male and female legislators' priorities and preferences differ. Jessica C. Gerrity, Tracy Osborn, and Jeanette Morehouse Mendez's (2007) analysis of bill sponsorship and floor remarks in the 104th through 107th Congresses, for example, reveals that women who replace men in the same district are more likely to focus on "women's issues," such as gender equity, day care, flex time, abortion, minimum wage increases, and the extension of the food stamp program (see also Burrell 1996).[7] Further, both Democratic and moderate Republican women in Congress are more likely than men to use their bill sponsorship and cosponsorship

[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.

activity to focus on women's issues (Swers 2002).[8] 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. A recent study of state legislative behavior also uncovers female legislators' greater likelihood to champion women's interests (Bratton 2005).[9]

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. Because women mayors are more likely than men to seek broad participation and inclusion in the budget process, they tend to be more likely than men to admit to and address the fiscal problems facing their cities (Weikart et al. 2007).[10] A

[8] With the growth of party polarization, however, fewer moderate Republican women serve in Congress. Indeed, Brian Frederick's (2009) analysis of roll-call votes in the 108th and 109th Congresses reveals that Republican women are ideologically indistinguishable from their male counterparts. This finding holds even when the analysis focuses strictly on women's issues.

[9] Investigators have produced a wide array of empirical research that highlights the unique policy agenda women bring to elective office. For additional evidence of substantive representation at the congressional level, see Swers 1998; Paolino 1995. At the state level, see Thomas 1994; Berkman and O'Connor 1993; 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 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.

[10] For more recent nonacademic accounts of how women's leadership styles affect process and deliberation, see Marie C. Wilson's (2004) *Closing the Leadership Gap* and Dee Dee Myers's (2008) *Why Women Should Rule the World*. For additional political science studies pertaining to gendered political styles and the public policy ramifications that ensue, see Fox and Schuhmann 1999; Rosenthal 1998; Thomas 1994; Alexander and Andersen 1993; Eagly and Johnson 1990; Flammang 1985. Not all studies uncover such gender differences, though (see, e.g., 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" (Reingold 1996, 483; see also Reingold 2000).

similar set of findings applies at the state legislative level. 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 instance, 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).

Political scientists also point to symbolic representation and the role model effects that women's presence in positions of political power confers to women citizens (Pitkin 1967). Lonna Rae Atkeson and Nancy Carrillo (2007), for example, find that, as the percentage of a state's female legislators increases, so do female citizens' levels of external efficacy (see also Atkeson 2003). David Campbell and Christina Wolbrecht's (2006) cross-national study also uncovers a positive relationship between the presence of highly visible female politicians and adolescent girls' expectations of political engagement.[11] Although symbolic effects are quite difficult to quantify – and, accordingly, this literature is much less developed empirically – the logic underlying 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

[11] By contrast, Kathleen Dolan (2006) and Jennifer Lawless (2004a) find little empirical evidence – based on National Elections Studies data – to support the assumption that the presence of women candidates translates into any systematic change in women's political attitudes or behaviors. For a discussion of the difficulties involved in studying the potentially nuanced effects of symbolic representation, see also Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005.

politicians overlook gender-salient issues. Moreover, the government would gain a greater sense of political legitimacy, simply by virtue of the fact that 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 long-standing 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 women and men 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 hearkening 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 past 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, in terms of both 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 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 UN 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 on 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 highlighted this trend. The piece focused on eight women graduates of Princeton University, most of whom were 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.[12] Pamela Stone's 2007 book, *Opting Out: Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home*, provides a more authoritative account of this phenomenon. She concludes that many of the women who opt out are actually responding to significant private and professional pressures that ultimately force them out of the workplace.[13]

Debates about whether women can and/or should attempt to balance their careers with their families, as well as the steps workplaces can take to minimize women's departures, will likely continue into the foreseeable future (Eagly and Carli 2007).[14] In the meantime, however, women's dual roles carry important 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 companies, television networks, religious organizations,

[12] Lisa Belkin, "Why Don't More Women Get to the Top?" *New York Times Magazine*, October 26, 2003, 43.

[13] See Kathleen Hall Jamieson (1995) for a broader historical discussion of the manner in which women struggle to strike a balance between their competing private and public sphere roles.

[14] For a somewhat controversial account of the extent to which women benefit by leaving the workforce and staying home with their children, see Linda Hirshman's (2006) *Get to Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World*. For a response to Hirshman, see Katha Pollitt, "Mommy Wars, Round 587," *Nation*, July 17, 2006.