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**“Donald the Dove, Hillary the Hawk”:
Gender in the 2016 Presidential Election
Brandon Sanchez**

“Nobody has more respect for women than I do,” assured Donald Trump, then the Republican nominee for president, during his third and final debate with the Democratic nominee, former secretary of state Hillary Rodham Clinton, in late October 2016. “Nobody.” Over the scoffs and howls issued by the audience, moderator Chris Wallace tried to keep order—“Please, everybody!”¹ In the weeks after the October 7th release of the “Access Hollywood” tape, on which Trump discussed grabbing women’s genitals against their will, a slew of harassment accusations had shaken the Trump campaign. Fighting fire with fire, on October 10th, before the second televised presidential debate, Trump held a press conference with a panel of women that included Paula Jones and Juanita Broaddrick, both of whom had years earlier accused Bill Clinton of sexual misconduct.² Trump had invited them to the debate in an effort to reframe public discourse and to spook Hillary Clinton.

This battle, waged between the two campaigns throughout the election cycle, was intimately tied to a larger war over not just policy but representation—what would the next occupant of the Oval Office convey about American identity? What did it mean that Donald Trump, an evident chauvinist, had secured the Republican nomination? How would the Democratic Party contend with the Clintons’ silencing of such victims as Monica Lewinsky in the nineties? And how would American voters reshape the American presidency? Would they opt for a candidate who

¹ Peter Allen Clark, “Not even the audience can take Trump seriously when he says he respects women,” *Mashable*, 19 October 2016, <https://mashable.com/2016/10/19/donald-trump-women-laughing/#pAYC.04UpqqT>.

² Dylan Matthews, “The rape allegation against Bill Clinton, explained,” *Vox*, 14 November 2017, <https://www.vox.com/2016/1/6/10722580/bill-clinton-juanita-broadrick>.

affected ostentatiousness, unapologetic bravado, and appealed to a certain lone-wolf machismo (“I alone can fix it”)? Or would they choose their first woman head-of-state, a diplomat whose comparative calm relied on a message of unity (“Stronger Together”)? During the campaign, the Trump and Clinton teams presented through rhetoric and marketing these respective messages. However, such gendered messaging was but one element of a larger, knotty matrix of expectations, stereotypes, and contradictions.

This election had a unique relationship with gender; integral to that relationship was its historic nature. Hillary Clinton was the first woman to be nominated for president by a major political party. On June 7, 2016, banners reading “Herstory” hung behind her as she addressed an audience of hundreds. Though women gained the franchise (and were allowed to exercise that privilege) with the passage of the nineteenth amendment in 1920,³ their exclusion from the nation’s highest office has been a source of scholarship for decades. The Eagleton Institute at Rutgers University in New Jersey and its Center for American Women and Politics “worked for 21 months to further public understanding of how gender influences candidate strategy, voter engagement and expectations, media coverage, and electoral outcomes in campaigns for the nation’s highest executive office.”⁴ Because presidential politics have served as a site for performative masculinity, the ways in which candidates have felt obligated to portray themselves—and subsequent reactions to those portrayals—have orbited around certain masculine expectations. In preparing for her 2008 presidential bid, for example, Clinton was told by a strategist that “voters ‘do not want someone who would be the first mama.’”⁵ Consequently, she spent that primary

³ U.S. Constitution Amend. 19.

⁴ Center for American Women and Politics, “Finding Gender in Election 2016,” 2017, http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/presidential-gender-gap_report_Final.pdf.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

campaign adhering to a set of pre-existing norms and attempting to overcome stereotypes that ascribed leadership abilities to men more than to women. However, for women candidates, performance has been a double-edged sword: not only must they fulfill the masculinity rubric, they must also exhibit femininity—the Center for American Women and Politics calls this the conundrum of “pantsuits and pearls.”⁶ Throughout the campaign, Trump would comment that Clinton did not have a “presidential look,”⁷ alluding to her gender. Reflective of hegemonic masculinity (first conceptualized in the early 1980s and re-interrogated by R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt in 2005), these obstacles revealed the underlying cyclical nature of men’s leadership—the reproduction of patriarchy through socialization perpetuated such imbalances.⁸

Ellen Fitzpatrick explores “the highest glass ceiling” in her book of the same title, analyzing the gender dynamics at play in previous bids by women, including excessive moral scrutiny and notions of “naturalness.” For instance, Victoria Woodhull, the Equal Rights Party’s nominee for president in 1872, was subjected to scrutiny over a number of personal issues, among them her second husband’s sketchy financial dealings and her advocacy for “free love,” which drew ire at the time and made her into an icon of “immorality and unchastity.”⁹ She was also accused in the press of living with two different men in one house.¹⁰ However, central to the construction of Woodhull as unnatural and unfit for polite society was her self-possessed engagement in politics. These questions about naturalness would persist in the national discourse for over a century—and, in forms both covert and overt, would remain. Fitzpatrick’s chapter on Shirley Chisholm underscores

⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁸ R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society*, 19, No. 6 (2005): 829-859.

⁹ Ellen Fitzpatrick, *The Highest Glass Ceiling: Women’s Quest for the American Presidency* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 62.

¹⁰ Ibid., 57.

some of these motifs. During the 1972 primary campaign, the Nixon administration fabricated and circulated a phony press release that sought to humiliate and delegitimize Chisholm. It claimed that she “dressed as a transvestite in men’s clothing” and that she was “diagnosed as schizophrenic” in the early 1950s.¹¹ Here, again, appeals to some basic sense of gender norms were deployed. Women who dare to enter the political arena become “unwomanly”—somehow twisted, wrong, deranged. Opponents of Margaret Chase Smith, the senator from Maine, used a combination of these tactics against her. Critics spread rumors about her “loose morals,”¹² and her pro-labor stances became fodder in the post-World War II period for anticommunist crusaders, who suggested that Smith herself might be a communist sympathizer (despite her membership in the Republican Party). Also, important to note about Smith is her route to political office. Urged by her ill husband to follow in his footsteps and run for his seat in the House of Representatives, Smith followed what was for women at the time a common path.

Of central import to scholarship on the 2016 election are analyses and media portrayals of the respective candidates’ personalities, both of which adhered to traditional gender roles while also subverting them. Since changing her name to “Hillary Rodham Clinton” to appease Arkansans during her husband’s 1982 gubernatorial race, Clinton had grappled with the media’s gendered depictions of her. In 2016, this manifested itself in the adoption of a relational identity. The first items in her Twitter biography were, and remain, “wife, mother, grandmother.” Even after the election, Clinton’s tendency toward relational conceptualizations has been evident. In *What Happened*, her 2017 memoir, she writes of her defeat by contextualizing it, placing into the story of her life, work, and ambitions the people she sought to please most. Of her father, the late Hugh Rodham, she writes, “As

¹¹ Ibid., 221.

¹² Ibid., 98.

a kid, I would come up with elaborate hypotheses to test him. 'What if I robbed a store or murdered somebody? Would you still love me then?' He'd say, 'Absolutely! I'd be disappointed and sad, but I will always love you.'"¹³ After the election, she thought to herself, "Well, Dad, what if I lose an election I should have won and let an unqualified bully become President of the United States? Would you still love me then?"¹⁴ Yet these relationships would, throughout the course of the campaign, be tempered by other gendered tropes. Most enduring was the sense among her critics that Clinton had for the past quarter-century been a "Lady Macbeth" figure, concerned only with her own advancement. This proved to be perhaps the most insidiously sexist roadblock that she came up against: when she demonstrated ambition, that most stereotypically masculine of traits, she was met with criticism.

Trump's personality, at once easier and harder to pin down, required for many writers the ability to hold multiple ideas in mind at one time. *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd, in her May 2016 column, "Donald the Dove, Hillary the Hawk," commented on Trump's many contradictions, citing both his tendency toward braggadocio and his "tender ego, pouty tweets, needy temperament, and obsession with hand sanitizer."¹⁵ Clinton, by contrast, was "so tough and combat-hardened, she's known by her staff as 'the Warrior.'"¹⁶ Trump's obsession with health manifested itself in a number of unconventional regimens. In *Trump Revealed*, Mike Kranisch and Marc Fisher of the *Washington Post* write that Trump "believed the human body was like a battery, with a finite amount of energy, which exercise only depleted. So he didn't work out."¹⁷ A draft dodger allergic to

¹³ Hillary Rodham Clinton, *What Happened* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵ Maureen Dowd, "Donald the Dove, Hillary the Hawk." *The New York Times*, 30 April 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/01/opinion/sunday/donald-the-dove-hillary-the-hawk.html>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Marc Fisher and Michael Kranish, *Trump Revealed: An American Journey of Ambition, Ego, Money, and Power* (New York: Scribner, 2016), 181.

athleticism, Trump would nevertheless become the darling of his beer-swilling, sports-watching, red-white-and-blue-donning crowds. In other ways, too, he was far from the hyper-masculine ideal prized by his supporters. The decor in New York's Trump Tower has been described as reminiscent of Versailles, as well as "bright, brassy, loud...gaudy and fake."¹⁸

Buttressed by that twenty-first-century culture factory, the Internet, these personalities took on lives of their own; however, the proliferation of caricatures and "fake news" resulted in real-life animus. Trump rallies became known during the summer of 2016 as sites of eruptive anger, playgrounds for the id. On display was a kind of animalistic righteousness, fostered by the candidate himself. A clash between rally-goers and anti-Trump protesters at one San Jose, Calif., rally prompted myriad threats and telephone calls by Trump supporters to the Office of the Mayor of San Jose the next day.¹⁹ To the Left, he was a bigoted ignoramus; to the Right, an acid-tongued pot-stirrer. George Saunders, in a July 2016 piece for the *New Yorker*, reported from Trump rallies across the country. As a nondescript fly on the wall, Saunders recorded with sardonic perceptiveness the back-and-forth between flabbergasted liberal protesters and defiant Trumpist attendees. One shouting match went like this: "'Go back to California,' Trumpie A shouts at Green Shirt. 'Bitch!'"²⁰ Also noted in Saunders's article was the frequency with which brawls broke out, and the often gendered dimensions of such violence: "Rebecca LaStrap, an African-American woman, twenty years old, wearing a 'FUCK TRUMP' T-shirt, was grabbed by the breast, thrown to the ground, slapped

¹⁸ Peter York, "Trump's Dictator Chic," *Politico*, March/April 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/03/trump-style-dictator-autocrats-design-214877>.

¹⁹ As an intern in the mayor's office, I was tasked with listening to and cataloguing voicemail.

²⁰ George Saunders, "Who Are All These Trump Supporters?" *The New Yorker*, 4 July 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/07/11/george-saunders-goes-to-trump-rallies>.

in the face.”²¹ In these interactions, Trump supporters appeared to find freedom, according to Saunders, a sort of liberation from the shackles of feminine “political correctness.”²²

If discourse about violence followed the Trump campaign, then the Clinton campaign faced questions about its candidate’s health and strength. After a smartphone captured footage of Clinton collapsing while leaving a ceremony commemorating the fifteenth anniversary of the September 11th attacks, Trump pounced, saying that Clinton lacked the fortitude necessary to serve in the nation’s highest office. In light of the incident, he appealed again to the idea that he could be a “protector” in a way that Clinton could not. This “masculinist protection,” delineated in the Eagleton report, is predicated on the notion of male dominance—physically, politically, and socially.²³ Conspiracy theories about Clinton’s health began to proliferate; bound up with this was another thread that contributed to the campaign’s historic nature: age. The winner of the general election would become either the oldest (Trump) or second-oldest (Clinton) person ever to ascend to the presidency. After a debate with Clinton, Trump said in a stump speech to his supporters, “The other day I’m standing at my podium, and she walks in front of me, right? She walks in front of me, and when she walked in front of me...believe me, I wasn’t impressed, but she walks in front of me.”²⁴ Implicit in this statement were criticisms of Clinton’s health and beauty. Here, again, the double standard was applied with brute force—Clinton looked frail, according to Trump, but the Republican nominee himself was exempted from such criticisms.

The looming presence of sex on the campaign trail speaks to a division that was rooted in partisan ideas about men’s and

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Center for American Women and Politics, “Finding Gender in Election 2016,” 30.

²⁴ Daniella Diaz, “Trump: I ‘wasn’t impressed’ when Clinton walked in front of me at debate,” *CNN*, 15 October 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/10/14/politics/donald-trump-hillary-clinton-appearance-debate/index.html>.

women's "natural" roles. Though the first summer of his campaign would be defined by his comments about Mexican immigrants, by the fall of 2015, increased attention was paid to Trump's misogyny. In the aftermath of his "unfair" treatment by Megyn Kelly during the first televised Republican debate, in August 2015, Trump tweeted that there was blood "coming out of her wherever" and incited a media frenzy.²⁵ This was the first widely publicized instance during the campaign of gendered innuendo. In spring 2016, Trump said during another debate that "[Marco Rubio] referred to my hands— 'If they're small, something else must be small.' I guarantee you there's no problem. I guarantee."²⁶ Invoked during a debate with Hillary Clinton was the comedian and television personality Rosie O'Donnell, whom Trump has called a "slob" and with whom he engaged in a very public feud in 2006. O'Donnell represented for Trump the antithesis of "womanhood." Opinionated, brash, and unwilling to cater to the male gaze, O'Donnell has for years posed a threat to Trump's brand of masculinity. The bidirectional effects of this misogyny have not yet been measured; that is, the attraction of misogynists to a misogynist has not been extricated from its potential influence on his misogyny. However, by the second quarter of 2016, "50% of Trump supporters said that it benefits society for men and women to stick to the roles for which they are naturally suited."²⁷ Additionally, "58% of Trump supporters surveyed in fall 2016 agreed that 'these days society seems to punish men just for acting like men.'"²⁸

Since the election, hypotheses about voter turnout have implicated seemingly everyone: the Obama coalition, the Rust

²⁵ Holly Yan, "Donald Trump's 'blood' comment about Megyn Kelly draws outrage," *CNN*, 8 August 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/08/08/politics/donald-trump-cnn-megyn-kelly-comment/index.html>.

²⁶ Gregory Krieg, "Donald Trump defends size of his penis," *CNN*, 4 March 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/03/03/politics/donald-trump-small-hands-marco-rubio/index.html>.

²⁷ Center for American Women and Politics, "Finding Gender in Election 2016," 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Belt, sexists, misogynists, white women, "Bernie Bros." Whether these explanations hold up upon further review has been the subject of much debate. Sanders supporters have criticized the "Bernie Bro" archetype for being reductive and not representative of the diverse coalition Sanders assembled. Still, the angry, "brawl[ing]"²⁹ persona projected by Sanders was more palatable than Clinton's "yelling," which drew criticism throughout the campaign.³⁰ Despite the fact that "Sanders espouses the same liberal-feminine beliefs Clinton does, they are set into a hypermasculine frame that makes these ideals much more appealing."³¹ As for the general election, the Center for American Women and Politics cites in its report one statistic that counters the "women lost it for Hillary" narrative— "Clinton won 82% of black men's votes in 2016 compared to Obama's 87% in 2012" as well as "31% of white men's votes" to Obama's 35%.³² Dips in support among men would prove consequential.

Yet questions about white women voters remain salient, especially as the anti-Trump Resistance faces infighting over representation and who ought to lead the movement. In 2017, this question dominated the literature on Clinton's loss. One study of gender-linked fate interrogates why married white women are less progressive than their single and WOC (women of color) counterparts. Linked fate, or "one's identification with a group and the perception that one's life chances are tied to the success of that group"³³ has proven a useful way of conceptualizing constituents' interests. The authors of the 2017 study postulate that married women will generally demonstrate less gender-linked fate, due to

²⁹ Kelly Wilz, "Bernie Bros and Woman Cards: Rhetorics of Sexism, Misogyny, and Constructed Masculinity in the 2016 Election," *Women's Studies in Communication*, 39, No. 4 (2016): 357.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 358.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 359.

³² Center for American Women and Politics, "Finding Gender in Election 2016," 27.

³³ Christopher Stout, Kelsy Kretschmer, and Leah Ruppanner, "Gender Linked Fate, Race/Ethnicity, and the Marriage Gap in American Politics," *Political Research Quarterly*, 70, No. 3 (2017).

their identification with their husbands' economic interests. They also hypothesize that married black women, who more often serve as breadwinners than white women, will show greater gender-linked fate. The results found that among the white, Latina, and black women surveyed, gender-linked fate decreased precipitously with marriage. Single women of all races were more likely to view gender as an important part of their identity. It seems, then, that perhaps sheer partisanship is the source of white women's voting patterns, as the Eagleton Institute studies suggest.³⁴

Furthermore, in the sixteen months since the election, a veritable subfield of scholarship, journalism, and Internet think-pieces (not to mention "hot takes") have sprung up to explain the result. Most instructive when it comes to conceptualizing the immediate post-election reaction of the Obama/Clinton coalition, though, is Rebecca Traister's piece for *New York Magazine*. Published on November 12, 2016, Traister opens the piece on Sunday, November 6, two days before the election. Clinton was preaching to a black church in Philadelphia, where she said, "Our Founders said all men are created equal...[But] they left out African-Americans. They left out women. They left out a lot of us."³⁵ The next day, Clinton, her husband, daughter, and the Obamas campaigned together outside Independence Hall; this joint appearance painted a picture of America's more inclusive future. But on November 8th, this coalition would be defeated. As Traister writes:

The enormity of the upset came at the end of what had already been a traumatic election for the women and immigrants and people of color to whom Clinton was trying to appeal, and who had spent months being derided, threatened, groped,

³⁴ Center for American Women and Politics, "Finding Gender in Election 2016," 59.

³⁵ Rebecca Traister, "Shattered," *New York Magazine*, 12 November 2016, <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2016/11/hillary-clinton-didnt-shatter-the-glass-ceiling.html>.

caricatured, insulted, and humiliated by Donald Trump and his supporters.

Arguments against the centrality of gender to the campaign often cite Clintonian neoliberalism as a principal driver of the election result, a bugbear that could not be overcome in the face of a populist groundswell; often sidelined in these discussions are related ruptures in the women's movement. Morris Fiorina looks at identity politics, class, and culture to explain the result, integrating ethnocentrism and the "populism thesis" to relate the 2016 election to other recent phenomena in the West, like the Brexit vote and Marine le Pen's candidacy for president of France.³⁶ However, these analyses neglect a widespread sense among progressives, and particularly among millennial feminists, that Clinton was the peddler of a manufactured, corporate feminism, undergirded by deregulation, globalization, and imperialism. In this sense, the standard to which she was held—the intersectional, vaguely socialistic feminism by which voters expected her to abide—became a focal point of the campaign; to represent the Establishment was, to many Democratic voters, to be a hypocrite, to betray the revolutionary underpinnings of feminism itself. For example, feminist writer bell hooks, in 2014, announced that she could no longer align herself with a feminism like Hillary's, as it had enabled militarism, imperialism, American exceptionalism, and white supremacy.³⁷ Hooks's view spoke to a narrative that would eventually gain traction and result in squabbling within the Democratic Party in 2016. Such ideas no doubt dampened enthusiasm for the Clinton campaign, even if they did not aid Trump's directly. Additionally, the fury of the populist movement

³⁶ Morris P. Fiorina, "The 2016 Election—Identities, Class, and Culture," *Hoover Institution*, 22 June 2017, <https://www.hoover.org/research/2016-presidential-election-identities-class-and-culture>.

³⁷ The New School, "Man Enough: Theory and Practice In and Outside the Classroom," *YouTube*, 10 October 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-u3jyZ1c7s>.

was, as analyses of Sanders have indicated, framed in overtly masculine terms.

Then came the #MeToo Movement of 2017, which echoed and built on the campaign. The Women's March, held in cities around the world after Trump's inauguration, heralded a period of heightened awareness in the mainstream media of women's lives. Allegations of sexual misconduct against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, in late 2017, appeared to open the floodgates, giving many women the confidence they needed to speak out publicly about their own experiences with harassment and assault. On a November 10, 2017, episode of her Crooked Media podcast *With Friends Like These*, commentator Ana Marie Cox discusses Hillary and Bill Clinton with Rebecca Traister in light of the movement, illuminating campaign residue: to what extent did the nineties follow Clinton's campaign and political career? In what ways did the Clinton mythology interact with and alter the gendered dimension of this campaign? Would things have turned out differently had Clinton not had such "baggage"? The answer, say Cox and Traister, is complicated. Clinton's tendency to shield herself from scrutiny and to keep the media at arm's length was rooted in a long history of gendered coverage.³⁸ Thus, questions about why Hillary Clinton is "evasive" or, as critics might say, "paranoid," when it comes to the press, are intimately tied to over twenty-five years of gendered treatment.

Both the subtle and overt ways in which gender manifested itself during the 2015-2016 election cycle will likely remain a source of scholarship, especially given rumors about potential runs for the presidency in 2020 by Senators Elizabeth Warren, Kirsten Gillibrand, and Kamala Harris, among other women. The blend of criticism about ethics, appearance, shrillness, and political purity Clinton faced had also ensnared her predecessors, like Margaret Chase Smith and Shirley Chisholm. Still, the campaign was a

³⁸ Ana Marie Cox, "What About Bill?" *With Friends Like These*, Crooked Media (podcast), 10 November 2017.

tangle of contradictions and departures from “traditional” gender roles. Trump, id-made-flesh, encouraged violence and salacious sex talk, but also whined incessantly about his hurt feelings. Clinton, by contrast, spoke about unity and argued that Americans were “stronger together,” but was often “tight-lipped” and austere. Thus, questions about “naturalness” dogged the match-up. The competitive nature of the race indicates that a number of factors coalesced, but the ardent and consistent manner in which Trump characterized Hillary (through appeals to her health, stamina, and appearance) suggests the presence of a darker, misogynistic undercurrent. Trump took it upon himself to define who possessed the presidential “look,” and with that the faculties necessary to govern the country.