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## A Woman's Place is in the House: A Sociological Analysis of the Political Campaigns of Newcomer and Incumbent Women in the 2018 House of Representatives Elections

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**A Woman's Place is in the House:**  
A Sociological Analysis of the Political Campaigns of Newcomer and  
Incumbent Women in the 2018 House of Representatives Elections

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from  
The College of William & Mary

by

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## Introduction

The midterm elections of 2018 represent a significant moment in American politics. Elections for offices ranging from Senator to Governor to House Representative to local positions saw a more diverse range of candidates than ever before. Women especially were incredibly well represented this year, with 53 women running for the Senate and 476 running for the House of Representatives. Of the women running for the House of Representatives, 235 won their primaries, breaking the previous record of 167 in 2016 (Shalby 2018). Not only did women run in unprecedented numbers, but they also broke records with the number of victories they achieved. 118 women will serve in Congress over the next years, the highest number ever, and 31 of these women are political newcomers.

Previous to this year, 1992 was the last election cycle dubbed the “Year of the Woman” in American politics, with record-breaking numbers of female candidates vying for spots in Congress and other political offices. Many of these women were inspired to run by the Anita Hill hearings. Today’s historical moment for women was prompted by similar forces. Rampant sexism in our country’s highest office, rhetoric that demeans and degrades women, and policies that are downright dangerous for women have prompted a major cultural backlash, including the political campaigns of many of the 2018 candidates. Women have been empowered in this moment to make their voices heard, both through informal measures such as protests and social media movements, and through more formal routes, such as running for political office.

A diverse array of women entered into the political sphere last year in significant ways. Women from both major parties and with varying degrees of political experience ran interesting and important campaigns. My study examines the campaigns of four categories of women: Republican newcomers, Republican incumbents, Democratic newcomers, and Democratic

incumbents. Given that this was a record year for both women and, more specifically, women with little to no previous political experience, the different techniques and tactics used within these categories offer indications of the way female candidates wish to present themselves to the world and what they think their constituents expect of them. Given the toxic nature of our current political atmosphere, it is important now more than ever to understand not only what differentiates the political parties, but also what unites them, especially in view of minority and underrepresented populations such as women. Looking at aspects of gender performance and presentation of women's issues among female candidates can provide a greater understanding of the differences and similarities between political parties and the expectations placed on the women within them.

### **Literature Review**

Historically, female candidates have employed several strategies when it comes to their presentations of self. Women, especially in 1992, were able to position themselves as outsiders, untouched by the traditional politics of Washington and thus primed to effect real social change. Feminism has been used strategically to influence campaigns and gain votes, but feminist issues in such environments are often reduced to just sound bites, and the substance of the feminist agenda is left unfulfilled. Vavrus (1998) argues that feminism became an empty signifier in the 1992 campaigns, used opportunistically for campaigning, leaving the more significant structural problems and material inequalities unaddressed. This phenomenon was evidenced especially by the fact that abortion became the only specific issue addressed as pertaining to women.

Although women may emphasize their femininity and female-ness to aid in their campaigns, Palmer and Simon (2005) find that there are significant challenges that women face when they consider how to present themselves. They define presentation of self as the most

basic and fundamental element of campaigning wherein candidates make a presentation of themselves and their platforms to constituents. This process is both verbal and nonverbal, and they note that if women run as women, their tactics can be used against them because they may limit the strategic choices and types of responses they can effectively use. Stereotypes are often applied to female candidates, so they must be careful to not overplay, or underplay, their positions as women. Jamieson (1995) posits that this difficulty represents the double bind faced by all female candidates, who must prove that they are “man enough” to do the job but, at the same time, not too aggressive, angry, or tough that they cease to be feminine.

Hillary Clinton provides an especially good example of the contradictions and nuances present in campaigns run by women. Dubriwny (2013) notes that Clinton is a classic example of the double bind that women face in political campaigns. Women, including Clinton, use a variety of tactics to navigate this tension, including deploying feminine style, carefully selecting campaign issues and themes, and managing their sartorial image. A tactic that Clinton specifically used was recalling public memories of the history of feminist social movements, mainly the first wave, to draw attention to America’s promise as a democracy and her place in realizing that promise. Her rhetoric of American feminism became a rhetoric of American exceptionalism. Additionally, she used themes of journey, battle, and construction to support a larger narrative of progress that depicts American exceptionalism as necessarily related to the struggle of women and other disadvantaged groups. She herself represents a more authentic perspective given that her life was shaped by issues of inequality, and she played this up when discussing all areas of discrimination. However, in linking feminism with exceptionalism, Clinton glossed over the complicated history of the social movement and the tensions between the movements for gender and racial equalities. Her relationship with feminism was firmly

patriotic, as opposed to threatening. In order to situate feminism in this way, Clinton domesticated the movement, erasing its radical edge and emphasizing its similarities to other movements for equal rights. Dubriwny's research on Clinton provides a good example of the phenomenon other scholars, such as Vavrus (1998), describe of the reductive treatment of feminism by many political candidates. While this is a more specific case study than the research I conducted, it does offer, in conjunction with the other scholarly research, some insight into the behavior of female candidates more broadly, specifically in terms of evidence that candidates actively navigate a double bind and/or de-radicalize feminism in their approach to women's issues and their own identities as women.

We are in a specific historical and political moment where gender is emphasized, but Dolan and Lynch (2017) make some important points about the nature of womanhood in modern society. They say that contemporary women may be operating in a world where their sex is not the primary identity for which they hope to be known. The primacy of political party and diversity among women candidates may move women beyond a need to play to female stereotypes. Given the number of women who ran in this election cycle, emphasizing femaleness did not offer the same level of outsider status as previous elections. However, given the priority of feminist issues in this election, female candidates could still benefit from embracing their identities as women and play up gendered issues.

Historically, relatively little attention has been paid by candidates to issues we think of as specifically feminine, that impact women in different ways and more significantly than they impact men, such as abortion, sexual harassment, family leave, and childcare. According to Dolan (2008), this applies to both male and female candidates. Dolan and Lynch (2017) similarly find that candidates are driven more by party than by sex in the issues that they present.

They found that the main differences between Democratic and Republican women's platforms centered on the primary issues of the election cycle, and that when it came to lower visibility female issues, there was no difference in focus. However, given the emphasis being placed on women's issues in the past few years and the increasingly partisan nature of American politics, more emphasis was placed on women's issues in this campaign, and Democratic and Republican women began to differ in their approaches to these issues. Wolbrecht (2000) showed that the links we have created between party and gender are not static. Party positions are determined by the perceived utility of specific issue positions for maintaining and expanding the party's base of support. Positions on any issues are determined by party elites and coalitions. Issue equilibrium says that the stability and salience of issues are usually fixed, but this equilibrium can be disturbed from time to time and issues can make their way to the larger political agenda. In this case, issue redefinition is likely and the alignments of the interests around the issue shift and develop. Party elites are forced to examine and reevaluate their previous positions. This election cycle had the potential to be one of issue redefinition, especially given the degree to which women's issues were brought to the forefront.

In accordance with this, Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes (2003) found that in 1992, a growing number of female candidates emphasized female stereotypical strengths and adopted campaign strategies that emphasized "feminine" competencies. Women who ran on these issues and targeted female voters gained a strategic advantage. Turning voters' dispositions towards gender into an asset rather than a liability was the key to success for these female candidates, and potentially for the candidates of this election as well.

Although it can be advantageous for candidates to emphasize their femininity and status as women, it is less likely for candidates to explicitly address feminist issues. The relationship



between feminism and politics in the United States has been a rocky one. Vavrus (1998) argues that a social consensus about feminist beliefs must exist for women-oriented campaigns to be successful. It is possible that such a social consensus existed this year, allowing for the vast increases in female candidates. Loke, Bachmann, and Harp (2017) point out that female politicians are often linked to feminism and perceived as representatives of the movement, no matter their political stances. This has resulted in a conflict over who gets to define feminism and the reduction of feminism to an identity. Conservative voices are creating definitions of feminism that fit their beliefs, and liberals are doing the same, simplifying feminism into dichotomous terms and neglecting a richer discussion of the diversity of the movement. More specifically, feminism in the media is often reduced to personal stances of candidates regarding abortion. It is clear that female candidates must engage in concerted and conscious efforts to portray very specific versions of feminism in order to avoid alienating voters.

All of this conflict and debate brings up a major question: what constitutes a feminist or women's issue? Issue ownership, or, more specifically, gender issue ownership, is seen as the issues on which women are expected to be more competent. They include education, health care, the environment, and welfare. Men are seen as more competent with issues like taxes, budgets, crime, national defense, and foreign policy. The "compassion" issues linked with women are largely associated with the Democratic Party, and female candidates must adapt their campaign strategies to account for public ideas about issue ownership (Fridkin and Kenney, 2009, Palmer and Simon, 2005, Hernnson, Lay, and Stokes, 2003). While previous female political candidates have felt comfortable linking themselves with "compassion" issues, Suzanne Daughton (1994) finds that politicians tend to avoid publicly linking themselves with women's issues or feminist issues for fear of being viewed as extremist or radical.

Historically, voters have used gender as a cue when evaluating competing candidates for electoral office. They hold distinct stereotypes based on gender about candidates' ideological leanings, character traits, and ability to deal with certain issues (Fridkin and Kenney 2009). Additionally, the main characteristics that define emphasized femininity, including nurturance, emotionality, and passivity, do not lend to the masculine styles of leadership expected of political candidates (Dubriwny 2013). These female-specific difficulties are reflected in the findings of Fox and Lawless (2014) regarding the significant gender gap in political ambition. Due to a variety of reasons, including family socialization, the political contexts of one's childhood, exposure to competitive experiences, and self-confidence, women are less likely to express desire to run for political office. This disparity means that voters do not associate women with political campaigns and positions as much as they do men. My research addresses how female candidates approach their own identities as women and thus provides some insight into what these candidates believe their voters expect of them.

There has been much research regarding issues that voters link with men versus women, and how candidates navigate constituents' expectations, but there is not much literature looking at how female candidates address women's issues when they do bring them up. My research, instead of focusing on these "compassion" issues, which are linked to women through stereotypes about feminine competencies, looks mainly at how women address concerns that are explicitly female, things like reproductive rights and pay equity. The candidates' approaches to these issues vary based on party and on their level of experience, but a major goal of this study was to add to the literature by looking not at how women respond to stereotypes about themselves but how they respond to more substantive issues that affect themselves and their constituents.

Since 1992, candidates and their issue positions have become more accessible than ever. Ads produced for the internet and Twitter accounts that create a 24/7 direct communication link between voters and candidates allow campaigns to publicize their platforms in a prompter way than the last “Year of the Woman.” I examine such platforms using these new social media sources, such as Twitter, the candidates’ websites, and advertisements. Social media resources such as these provide an interesting and revealing look at how candidates wish to present themselves. Dolan (2008) finds that resources such as campaign websites and social media accounts allow candidates to reach a relatively representative sample of the public. The voters who interact with these interfaces can understand in a direct way the choices candidates and their staffs make when it comes to self-presentation. Twitter specifically serves a variety of functions for political candidates, ranging from promoting campaign events to sharing personal information to recruiting volunteers and raising money to attacking political opponents (Cozma and Chen 2011). As early as 1998, well before the age of social media, theorists were positing that the most common way voters come to know anything about political candidates and events is through mediated constructions (Vavrus 1998). Now that the media is increasingly controlled by the candidates themselves, it is important to understand the messages that candidates are putting out and that voters are receiving.

In the modern age, social media and the internet have fundamentally shifted the political strategies and environments in the United States by changing who controls information, who consumes information, and how information is distributed. This shift has the power to create equality in politics or to reinforce traditional power arrangements. The true value of social media is that it allows nontraditional and disadvantaged candidates to reach voters and fundraise in a way that more formal, traditional politics would not (Wagner, Gainous, and Holman 2017).

Especially in this “Year of the Woman,” the way that different candidates utilize their social media accounts can illuminate the way power functions in political campaigns and the way disadvantaged groups gain access to more traditional forms of authority.

A final element that significantly affects each and every campaign, including the 2018 midterms, is the incumbency effect. Once candidates win elections, they gain advantages such as name recognition and wider access to campaign funds. This results in incumbents being virtually assured reelection. As a result, open seats are one of the principle avenues through which women can increase their numbers in Congress. Additionally, in many cases, female incumbents encourage other women to run in their own districts, so the actual gender makeup of Congress doesn’t end up shifting much. The incumbency effect continues to act as a political glass ceiling (Palmer and Simon 2005). Previous research has even found that the stereotypes so often applied to female candidates are less strong for incumbents as compared to non-incumbents (Fridkin and Kenney 2009). This phenomenon gives incumbent women more freedom when it comes to running their campaigns. Their experiences with the double bind, the expectations placed on them, and the gender performances they put on are all affected by this decrease in pressure from stereotypes. Whereas newcomer women may not feel this pressure given their lack of experience with political campaigning, incumbent women recognize the significance of the diminished strength of stereotypes applied to them and use it to their advantage. Additionally, given the sheer number of women who ran for election this year, and the fact that so many of them are new to politics, my research examines how the newcomers challenge the significant effects of incumbency.

All of these elements converge in interesting and important ways in the 2018 elections, making it an especially promising year to study women in politics. Dolan (2008) notes that

candidates use their websites and other platforms to talk about major issues specific to their time, and Palmer and Simon (2005) add that female candidates in particular must account for the “political mood,” both nationally and locally when considering their campaigns. They add that there are times when the political mood is especially against current politicians, and women can take advantage of their perceived status as outsiders. It is clear that women’s issues were a major topic of this election cycle, and that there was and continues to be much frustration with our current politicians. My research examines female candidates’ reactions to this frustration and to the current political atmosphere through an analysis of their campaigns, taking into account the effect of party and incumbency and keeping in mind the complex history of women navigating the process of campaigning for political office.

### **Research Methodology**

When creating my sample for this research, I used purposive sampling based on the following characteristics: I chose female candidates running for the House of Representatives in 2018 from both the Republican and Democratic parties. I selected Democratic incumbents who have served in the House for more than 10 years, yielding 26 women, and Republican incumbents who have served in the House for more than 5 years, yielding 11 women (Appendix A).<sup>1</sup> In terms of newcomers, I found 22 Democratic women who have never run for public office before and have no official, traditional political experience. I found 5 Republican women who matched these same criteria. With the newcomers, I was able to limit cases to races that were competitive, where the new candidates have a chance of winning. Given the effect incumbency has on elections, I was not able to meet the same standard with the races including

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<sup>1</sup> It was necessary to lessen the amount of time served by Republican Representatives given that there are many fewer female Republicans in office than female Democrats.

incumbent women, many of whom were predicted to win handily. I chose to examine only candidates for the House of Representatives because the elections are more comparable than those for Senate or Governor positions given that every seat was up for reelection and that the districts are more uniform.

In order to discern the various campaign methods used by each of these groups, I created a coding schema (Appendix B) and analyzed three of the primary media forms used by candidates: Twitter, campaign websites, and advertisements. Each of these media forms is important because they are all crafted by the candidates themselves (or by people working closely with the candidates). The messages are controlled by the candidates, not interpreted or analyzed by any third party, and as such, allow voters to understand more directly the choices made by candidates and their staffs when it comes to presenting themselves (Dolan, 2008). I analyzed campaign websites as they were before the November 6<sup>th</sup> election day, and I looked at one month of Twitter history for each candidate, from September 15<sup>th</sup> to October 15<sup>th</sup>. I chose this month because it encompassed the Kavanaugh hearings, an event that shaped campaign tactics in important ways, but also contained time before and after the proceedings when the candidates had the opportunity to emphasize different issues or behave in different ways.

I coded each of these sources with three general categories in mind: references to women's issues, displays of femininity, and displays of masculinity. In terms of defining women's issues, I considered all issues that affect women disproportionately to men. These issues ranged from things like breast or ovarian cancer to equal pay, reproductive rights, and sexual harassment and assault. In terms of displays of femininity, I looked for instances where the candidates made reference to more traditional feminine interests, their families, for instance, or where they exhibit stereotypical feminine traits, which Huddy and Terkildesen (1993) define as warmth, gentleness,

kindness, and passivity. Finally, I looked for candidate displays of masculine traits, defined as toughness, aggression, and assertiveness, or discussion of issues such as the military, sports, or business, which voters link with men (Huddy and Terkildesen 1993). These two categories demonstrate what kinds of gender identities and performances candidates believe are more accessible and appealing to their constituents.

In terms of a coding schema, I took a different approach to each form of media I analyzed. I coded tweets for mentions of specific women's issues, references to children, husbands or other stereotypically feminine interests, and/or discussions of masculine traits and endeavors such as business or sports. For example, I coded a tweet (Appendix C) from Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers (Republican for Washington's 5<sup>th</sup> District) as referencing women's issues. She speaks directly about the sexual assault allegations against Brett Kavanaugh, saying that women's voices deserve to be heard. However, she treats the issue very differently than Representative Maxine Waters (Democrat for California's 43<sup>rd</sup> District) who tweeted eight times about the issue, explicitly supporting Dr. Ford and challenging Brett Kavanaugh and politicians such as Mitch McConnell and Jeff Flake (Appendix D). Despite the difference in tone displayed in these two sets of tweets, I coded both as discussing women's issues.

I coded advertisements similarly, but my schema included elements like whether the videos show the candidates' families, if the candidates are in military uniform or speaking about military experience, if the candidates are displaying typically masculine or feminine characteristics as defined in previous research studies, etc. The advertisements put out by Lena Epstein's campaign (Republican for Michigan's 11<sup>th</sup> District) offer a prime example of how I coded for appeals to masculinity. Many of her ads mention her business experience, and describe her as strong and tough. One ad in particular states that Epstein is "running for

Congress to fight for Michigan jobs. As a business leader, she owns and operates one of the largest women-owned businesses” in the state of Michigan (Appendix E). Referencing her success in the field of business, using words such as fight, and showing Epstein at work in both offices and on factory floors, make clear appeals to stereotypical ideas of masculinity. By specifying that Epstein runs one of the largest “women-owned businesses” in Michigan, the ad also points out her success as an outsider in a typically masculine field, and assures voters that Epstein can be equally successful in the masculine world of politics.

Finally, in terms of websites, I looked for similar themes presented in different ways. I was especially focused on the bio and issue pages of the candidates’ websites in terms of my examinations of how the candidates present themselves and what their priorities are. Ann Wagner’s website (Republican for Missouri’s 2<sup>nd</sup> District) is a prime example of how I coded for stereotypical femininity. In her bio, the website says, “Ann’s most important job has always been as a wife and mother,” emphasizing her femininity through reference to traditional ideas about the roles of women (Appendix F).

Much of the previous research concerning women running for office has focused on how female candidates are portrayed by the media, which issues are linked with women, or how women deal with the stereotypes projected on them by voters, often in contrast with male candidates. My research instead focuses exclusively on women, how they choose to present themselves, how they deal with issues that directly affect them as women, and how these two behaviors change given the effect of party and incumbency, offering a new approach to studying women in politics.



## Results

The women who make up this study are a diverse group. They come from both major American political parties and have varying degrees of political experience, ranging from never having run a campaign to prestigious decades-long careers. They are from various racial backgrounds, represent an array of sexual orientations, and span generations. Additionally, they serve twenty-seven different states that span the country and the spectrum from liberal to conservative. Given the immense diversity of these candidates, there are many variables and factors that I was unable to account for in the following results. However, I was able to track patterns and trends that I believe will act as valuable contributions to future studies of media and political sociology. As of yet, there have been very few studies done on the social media contributions of political candidates. Even candidate websites have not been widely analyzed. As such, a study that links advertisements, websites, and especially Twitter accounts, forges a new path in the field. Also, as this election was one where greater numbers of women ran than ever before, a study that compares Republican and Democrat women is a new endeavor in sociology. Finally, given that this election saw so many women running who were completely new to politics, this year offered a unique opportunity to study the efforts of incumbent women versus newcomer women on these various platforms. This kind of comparison between very experienced politicians and women running for the first time yields important results about the effect of incumbency on women politicians and the effects of the current political and historical moment on female politicians with varied degrees of experience.

Candidates use different forms of media to achieve different objectives and promote different messages. In general, advertisements were used primarily for presentations of self, Twitter accounts were used to comment on important issues, and websites offered a mix of both.

Advertisements often gave brief introductions to the candidates and their values whereas tweets tended to reference specific issues. Websites had pages that addressed both categories: biography and priorities. These trends were consistent across varied candidates. Newcomers and incumbents, Republicans and Democrats used each media source to accomplish broadly similar goals. Although the goals of each candidate on each media platform were broadly similar, the specific messages being conveyed and the methods used to express said messages varied widely across the different categories of candidate. Below I describe the differences my analysis revealed of the advertisements, websites, and Twitter accounts of these newcomer and incumbent Republicans and Democrats.

### ***Presentations of Self – Gender Identities***

#### *Advertisements*

Contradictory to previous research, which claimed that contemporary women politicians may find that sex is not the primary identity for which they hope to be known (Dolan and Lynch 2017), presentations of gender factored heavily into much of the media I analyzed. An initial major dissimilarity became apparent in the candidates' presentations of gender identity evidenced first through advertisements.<sup>2</sup> Although each group showed similar performances of gender in terms of numbers (Table 1), the way the candidates operated within the categories of masculinity, femininity, and their references to women's issues were very different.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The advertisements I analyzed come only from Newcomer Democrats and Newcomer Republicans. Incumbent candidates from both parties had not reliably posted advertisements online and thus this form of media was not available to me for either incumbent Republicans or incumbent Democrats.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that the advertisements of Democratic candidates achieved more recognition than those of Republican candidates. I selected advertisements to analyze based on which ones had the most views, and the average number of views across all the ads for Republicans was 18,054, much lower than the average 45,527 views that Democratic ads garnered.

Table 1

## Percent of Candidates Who Utilized Themes in Advertisements

	<b>Masculinity</b>	<b>Femininity</b>	<b>References to Women's Issues</b>
<b>Newcomer Republicans</b>	100%	80%	20%
<b>Newcomer Democrats</b>	95%	70%	30%

New Republicans tend to use a more distinct and separate version of masculinity and femininity. The candidates attempt to appeal to voters by showing that they can be both masculine and feminine, but the different gender performances do not overlap. Four of the five of the ads emphasize the candidate's experience as a business leader, use words such as "fight," and depict the candidate as tough and strong. At the same time, four of the five ads mention the candidate's children or identify the candidate as a mother. These two stereotypical gender performances indicate separate, divergent elements of the candidate's personality.

For example, Lea Marquez Peterson, a candidate from Arizona's 2<sup>nd</sup> District, begins her advertisement by saying, "I'm Lea Marquez Peterson and I'm not a politician. I'm a small business owner, a mom, and a proud Tucsonon." Many of the camera shots of her in the advertisement are set in a warehouse and feature the candidate speaking to a variety of men. However, when she says that she is a mother, the image changes to a more stereotypically feminine depiction of the candidate standing with her children and husband. Young Kim, from California's 39<sup>th</sup> District, follows a similar pattern in one of her advertisements. The ad opens on

a photo of the candidate with her family with the words, “She’s raised a family here,” spoken by an anonymous male voice. Then the shot changes to the candidate speaking to a female employee in a warehouse with a description of how Kim grew a small business and fought to create jobs in her district. Maria Elvira Salazar from Florida’s 27<sup>th</sup> District aired an advertisement that begins with the candidate saying, “I have raised two daughters, and as a news anchor, I’ve gone toe-to-toe with tyrants.” When she is speaking about her daughters, the video shows the candidate cooking with them in a bright, cheerful kitchen, but when she speaks about her news experience the image shifts to photos of her interviewing men like Fidel Castro projected on a dark background.

As a final example, Katie Arrington from South Carolina’s 1<sup>st</sup> District begins an ad by noting that she owns a business that provides cyber security to the troops to protect them. Her use of the word “protect” as well as the emphasis on her experience as a business owner and the associated image of her standing and speaking to a group of seated volunteers are all examples of masculine traits. However, later in the ad she assures voters that she is not a politician. The image accompanying this claim is the candidate sitting at a dining room table with two other women, each of them holding coffee cups, with a high chair in the background. This is a clear example of stereotypical femininity, especially when combined with the emphasis placed on the candidate’s lack of political experience. Each of these women is demonstrating both masculinity and femininity in their advertisements, but the themes are never correlated or linked.

It might be that the women are using these tactics to appeal to different camps of voters, both those who expect their political leaders to be tough and intense despite their gender, and those who have stereotypical ideas of womanhood to which they want female candidates to adhere. The candidates also might be trying to manage voter reactions to their female-ness by

emphasizing their masculine traits, but not overemphasizing these traits by still displaying some stereotypical femininity. Whatever the intent of the candidates, these ads clearly exhibit the navigation of the classic double bind faced by female politicians and described by Jamieson (1995): how to be masculine enough for the world of politics while retaining the femininity expected of women.

While some of the newcomer Democrats also engaged in presentations of gender defined by separateness, there was much more variety when it came to their gendered identity creation. It appears that the women of the Democratic party have more freedom to present themselves in diverse ways when compared to the women of the Republican party. There were ads that were mainly masculine, mainly feminine, and that had a strong distinction between femininity and masculinity. However, an interesting trend emerged with almost half of the advertisements I analyzed. Eight of the twenty ads displayed a complex presentation of gender where candidates used stereotypically masculine traits to access their femininity. They presented themselves as tough *because* of their feminine attributes, or as strong and hardworking *because* of their positions as mothers. The two stereotypical gender categories became intertwined in new ways.

Lucy McBath, from Georgia's 6<sup>th</sup> District, in one of her ads, links her activism and decision to run for office to the experience of losing her son to gun violence. She says, "When my son was murdered, I vowed to make a difference. I'm a mom who flew with Delta for 30 years. I will fight to protect women's healthcare and middle class tax cuts." Her strength and drive to fight comes from being a mother. Cindy Axne (Iowa's 3<sup>rd</sup> District) similarly links her strength to her experiences as a woman and her desire to make a better world for young girls. Over a montage of footage of girls playing on playgrounds and getting books from their lockers in schools, the candidate says, "We've broken glass ceilings so they won't face them. We've

fought for our rights so they have brighter futures.” She presented herself as someone who is no stranger to tough fights and who will work hard for women. Each of these competencies is framed from the perspective of her womanhood.

In an advertisement from Debra Haaland, from New Mexico’s 1<sup>st</sup> District, the candidate is shown climbing a mountain and describing the challenges she has faced and overcome in her life. She says, “I don’t look like most people in Congress. My life is different too. I pushed through college and law school as a single mom and I’m 30 years sober. But struggle made me fierce.” She describes herself as possessing a typically masculine characteristic, ferocity, because of her experiences as a woman and single mother.

Taking this approach in a new direction, candidate Elaine Luria, from Virginia’s 2<sup>nd</sup> District, details in her advertisement how she learned stereotypically feminine work techniques from an incredibly masculine environment. She describes how she was one of the first women to spend her entire Navy career on combatant ships, and how this experience taught her the importance of cooperation and communication, stereotypically feminine approaches to work. As opposed to emphasizing the strong and tough nature of her time in the Navy, she chooses to accentuate the lessons she learned about collaboration and teamwork.

Abigail Spanberger, from Virginia’s 7<sup>th</sup> District, also approaches a stereotypically masculine environment, the CIA, with a more feminine perspective. One of her advertisements consists of her daughters describing their mother as a superhero who works for the CIA and starts Girl Scout troops. In the end of the advertisement, Spanberger says, “I approve this message, because service to country makes us strong.” The focus on service and the connection made between motherhood and the candidate’s career in the CIA demonstrate the new and inventive interplay of masculinity and femininity utilized by some of the newcomer Democratic

women. These candidates reject stereotypical ideas of femininity and instead position themselves as strong, independent, hardworking leaders because of their female-ness. Instead of navigating the double bind in a way that appeals to potential fears voters may hold about the capabilities of women politicians, these women present genuine and realistic gender identities. Instead of dividing their gender into two discrete camps, the Democratic women create gender identities that are complex and nuanced and which exist on a spectrum from masculine to feminine.

In addition to navigating and/or rejecting the double bind, the candidates also make specific appeals to voters and claims about their gender identities through who appears in their advertisements with them (Table 2). Republican women were much more likely to appear in their advertisements alongside men. In the shots where the candidates appeared with another person, two-thirds of those people were adult men. In Democratic advertisements, only roughly one-third of those individuals were men. And, whereas around one-third of those who appeared opposite Republican candidates in advertisements were women, in Democratic ads this number grows to just over half. As one final point of comparison, no visuals in Republican ads featured children<sup>4</sup> compared to 18% of the visuals in Democratic ads.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Republican ads did feature candidates with their own children, but not with children who represented the general populace.

<sup>5</sup> In the Republican advertisements, none of the people with whom candidates appear are people of color. In the Democratic advertisements, 21% of visuals where the candidate is speaking to another person include people of color.

Table 2

## Gendered Aspects of Advertisement Visuals and Scripts

	<b>Visuals with Adult Men</b>	<b>Visuals with Adult Women</b>	<b>Visuals with Children</b>	<b>Family Shown in Visuals</b>	<b>Family Discussed in Script</b>	<b>Non- Candidate Narrator</b>
<b>Newcomer Republicans</b>	66%	34%	0%	60%	80%	40%
<b>Newcomer Democrats</b>	30%	52%	18%	40%	45%	10%

All of these trends demonstrate that Democratic candidates are more willing to emphasize their position as women and appeal directly to women voters. By showing themselves more often with women, they are indicating that the female vote is important to their campaigns, where Republican women are making the opposite claim by attempting to appeal more to men than to women. At the same time, Democrats visually emphasize their femininity more than do Republican candidates by appearing more often with children. However, Republicans do emphasize their femininity in a different way, through references to their family. 60% of the Republican advertisements showed the candidates with their children and husbands, and 80% mentioned their families in the script. These numbers are much lower for Democratic women, with only 40% of advertisements showing families and 45% mentioning them. This difference occurs even though the vast majority of candidates from both categories do have children and



partners. When it comes to personal presentations of self, the role of wife and mother is more important among Republican candidates than it is among Democratic candidates.

Finally, Democratic candidates were more likely to represent themselves using their own voices as compared to Republican candidates. 40% of Republican advertisements were narrated by someone other than the candidate, as compared to 10% of Democratic ads. And, while these Republican ads were narrated by an anonymous male or female voice, the Democratic ads featured the voices of well-known political figures, including Barack Obama, Kamala Harris, and Elizabeth Warren. Democratic women by and large chose to present their identities by themselves and for themselves in their advertisements, while Republican women occasionally delegated this task to an anonymous secondary source. By not using their own voice, or even a recognizable voice, these women are making a statement about who they are. Instead of speaking for themselves, even when it comes to presenting themselves to voters, they defer to the voices of others.

### *Websites*

In addition to advertisements, websites also acted as a site for the creation of gendered identities of candidates. Specifically, the bio pages of many of the websites I analyzed offered explicit and conscious examples of candidate identity creation, indicating how the women hoped to be perceived by voters (Table 3).

Table 3

## Percent of Candidates Who Utilized Themes in Websites

	<b>Masculinity</b>	<b>Femininity</b>	<b>References to Women's Issues</b>
<b>Newcomer Republicans</b>	100%	80%	80%
<b>Incumbent Republicans</b>	100%	100%	73%
<b>Newcomer Democrats</b>	95%	100%	100%
<b>Incumbent Democrats</b>	100%	83%	69%

As with the advertisements, newcomer Republican women demonstrated a more separate and stereotypical version of gender identity. They displayed both masculinity and femininity, but there was no connection between the two. For example, Lea Marquez Peterson (Arizona's 2<sup>nd</sup> District), in her bio page, heavily emphasizes her experience in business. She mentions the many awards she has received in the field of business and her extensive tenure as a businesswoman. She places herself strongly in this masculine world, demonstrating stereotypical femininity only in the last sentence by mentioning her children. However, the photograph at the top of the bio page is of the candidate with her family. She begins and ends her bio page with femininity while the middle section is strongly masculine. Her gender identity falls into two discrete camps that do not overlap.

Maria Elvira Salazar (Florida's 27<sup>th</sup> District) utilizes similar methods. She talks at length about her leadership in the world of news reporting in her bio page, but also emphasizes her family roots in Miami. Salazar brings up her mother and her two daughters, emphasizing her position as a mother and a daughter as well. Accompanying this page is a picture of the candidate with her family. While her bio page is mostly feminine, her issues page becomes entirely masculine. Her priorities fall into three categories, entitled "Protect," "Prosper," and "Strengthen." Instead of clearly outlining her position on specific policy issues, as was the method of most other candidates, Salazar continues her presentation of self in this section of her website. She is claiming that she will protect and strengthen her district and help them prosper. The choice of these words is not an accident. They are meant to stress her masculinity as a contrast to the femininity she displays on her bio page as a mother and daughter.

Katie Arrington (South Carolina's 1<sup>st</sup> District) engages in the same kind of distinction between masculinity and femininity. Her bio page mentions some of her business experience, but the photo preceding these mentions is of the candidate with her husband, emphasizing her position as a wife. The last paragraph of her bio describes her as a wife, mother, and woman of faith. Similar to the two other candidates, femininity comes first, usually with a photograph, and then masculinity follows, usually in the area of previous job experience, and the final emphasis returns to femininity. The two categories never overlap and the highly formatted and consistent presentations of gender make apparent the conscious approach these newcomer Republican candidates take to their gender identity. It is possible that they are anticipating the fears and concerns of their potential constituents in regards to their gender and have formulated a method to deal with these perceived apprehensions.

Incumbent Republican women operate in similar ways on their websites. Martha Roby, the representative from Alabama's 2<sup>nd</sup> District, also takes a formulated approach to gender presentation. Her bio page opens with descriptions of the candidate fighting and building for Alabama. The first sentence of this page reads, "Martha Roby is a conservative fighter who puts Alabama first with every vote she casts in Washington." She is portrayed as strong, especially in relation to her support for the military. The end of her bio switches from masculine to feminine in mentioning her husband and children, writing "Martha is married to Riley Roby and they have two children, Margaret and George. They are members of Trinity Presbyterian Church, where they were married, their children baptized and where they are involved in various ministries."

Jackie Walorski, from Indiana's 2<sup>nd</sup> District, also exhibits distinct stereotypical masculinity and femininity. Her bio opens by saying, "Jackie Walorski, a lifelong Hoosier, is grateful to serve the people of Indiana's Second District and bring common sense Hoosier solutions to Congress." Her gratitude at the chance to serve her district is a distinctly feminine understanding of a political position. However, later in her bio she is described in a more masculine way, as a fighter and a protector, someone who stands up for the issues that are important to her and to her community. Ann Wagner, from Missouri's 2<sup>nd</sup> District, offers another concrete example of this disparate demonstration of masculinity and femininity. She discusses her previous business experience, but also says that her "most important job has always been as a wife and mother."

Barbara Comstock, the former representative from Virginia's 10<sup>th</sup> District, also frames her identity in motherhood while providing some small references to more stereotypical masculinity. Her bio page begins, "As a young married couple looking for the best place to work and raise a family, the Comstocks first came to McLean in 1981...They raised their three

children in McLean.” The page continues, “As an at-home mom, Barbara was fortunate that her husband could work two jobs so she could be home with their young, growing family while she attended and graduated from Georgetown Law Center.” Her entire biography is framed from the perspective of motherhood, except her experience operating a small business.

Similar to the newcomer Republican women, these incumbent women emphasize stereotypical masculinity and femininity as two separate and distinct aspects of their personalities. The balance between the two varies from candidate to candidate, but there is always an aspect of qualification, as if the candidates are imploring their voters not to worry about them being too masculine or too feminine by offering up qualities they possess in both camps. In this way they are able to appeal to voters who expect more stereotypical femininity from the candidates as women as well as to voters who expect some degree of masculinity from their politicians.

While the Republican women behaved in similar ways despite incumbency, newcomer Democratic women and incumbent Democratic women showed different approaches to their presentation of gender identity on their websites (see Table 3 above). There were women from each group who engaged in similar practices of gender identity, accessing femininity through masculinity, however, the incumbent women were more likely to achieve this through references to previous fights with which they had struggled whereas the newcomer women more often referred to personal traits. Incumbent women reminded voters of their competencies whereas newcomer women more explicitly engaged in a presentation of identity.

Nancy Pelosi, from the 12<sup>th</sup> District of California, displays the incumbent approach by emphasizing her place as the highest-ranking female politician in American history, saying that she “shattered the marble ceiling.” Her website also mentions her children as well as describing

her as a fighter and a protector, but her place as a woman is framed in her struggle as a politician. Barbara Lee, from California's 13<sup>th</sup> District, discusses the particular challenges of being a black woman. Her bio begins, "Growing up in the segregated Southwest, Barbara learned at an early age the importance of standing up for one's beliefs and of fighting for equality for all." She goes on to describe herself as courageous and firm. She is strong because of her marginalized identities and is better able to be a politician because of her experiences as a black woman. Another California Representative, Jackie Speier from the 14<sup>th</sup> District, describes her experiences of leading a team to investigate a cult in Jonestown, Guyana and her plane being attacked, resulting in Speier being shot. She later says that the greatest fights of her career have been for women's rights and mentions that, in 2012, she was named to Newsweek's list of 150 Fearless Women in the world.

Debbie Wasserman Schultz, from Florida's 23<sup>rd</sup> District, describes being criticized by a reporter and by her opponent for taking notes at a candidate forum in crayon during her first Congressional campaign. She goes on to explain that, as a mother, she is sometimes without a pen but never without a crayon. She argues that this feminine understanding of the world makes her a strong advocate and a hard worker. She also talks about having breast cancer but keeping it secret so that she could continue the important work she was doing. Her bio notes, "In 2008, while campaigning for then Senator Barack Obama, Wasserman Schultz quietly faced her own personal battle with breast cancer. After seven surgeries, winning her own reelection, and electing the first African American President to the White House, she told the world her cancer story." She emphasizes her femininity while at the same time pointing out how it makes her strong, tough, and hardworking. Jan Schakowsky from Illinois' 9<sup>th</sup> District presents herself in much the same way. She talks about having begun "her advocacy as a young housewife,"

fighting for expiration dates to be required on food products including baby formula. She describes herself as “at the forefront of the resistance movement,” a position she first embraced as a homemaker. Her masculine stance as a fighter comes from her feminine position as a mother and wife.

These incumbent Democratic women follow a somewhat formulaic model for presenting a gendered identity in which a previous masculine fight lead to feminine lessons learned or a feminine experience lead to masculine lessons. The emphasis on fights and then positive outcomes underlines the capacity of these women to continue doing their jobs in Congress, getting legislation passed and acting as a voice for their constituents. They work actively to convince potential voters that they are good at the jobs they hold and have been building the necessary skills to continue doing these jobs for a long time.

In a very different approach, newcomer Democratic women engage in more explicit presentations of themselves, referencing how aspects of their personalities shape their perspectives. Instead of trying to sway voters based on their professional capabilities, they try to do so based on their personal lives. Katie Porter (California’s 45<sup>th</sup> District), for example, mentions her children and husband in her bio, but also mentions the fact that she is a Cubmaster in her son’s Scout pack. Sharice Davids (Kansas’s 3<sup>rd</sup> District) writes, “As the daughter of a single mother Army veteran, I know the importance of determination and service to country.” Being the daughter of a single mother taught her how to stand up and fight.

Amy McGrath (Kentucky 6) describes how her love of jets started at the age of 12 and grew and grew until she became the first female Marine to fly in an F-18 on a combat mission. Instead of emphasizing the more masculine elements of her military experience, McGrath focuses on the love of flying that lead her into the career in the first place. Mikie Sherrill (New

Jersey's 11<sup>th</sup> District) takes a similar approach, detailing how her military experience taught her to work with everyone as well as the importance of service. She also notes her position as an engaged and involved mother, writing that she "coached her daughter's lacrosse team and managed her son's soccer team."

Finally, Gina Ortiz Jones (Texas's 23<sup>rd</sup> District) explains how going to college on an ROTC scholarship allowed her to serve. She also notes that her experience as the daughter of a woman who graduated college and then had to work as a domestic helper taught her humility but, at the same time, the importance of hard work. Her bio says, "Her mother's example and sacrifices instilled in Gina the importance of humility, hard work, and willingness to step-up and take risks in order to create and seize opportunities for herself and others when needed."

These women link femininity and masculinity in inextricable ways, but, unlike the incumbent women, their gender identity is not tied to previous political fights they have faced. It is more personal. It could be that this is because they are all newcomers to politics and as such do not have previous political fights to reference, but the effect is a more personal and intimate understanding of the candidates' identities.

Overall, newcomer and incumbent candidates engaged in presentations of gender consistent with other female members of their parties. Across advertisements and websites, Republican women emphasized both their femininity and their masculinity, but kept these two elements of their presentations of self distinct. They navigated the double bind faced by women politicians by including elements from both stereotypical gender ideals, but they maintained some distance between the elements, which would allow voters to focus on whichever aspects of the presentations that appealed to them most. Democratic women, on the other hand, incorporated elements of masculinity and femininity into their presentations of self in ways that



were inextricable. Although incumbents and newcomers approached this aspect of campaigning in somewhat different ways, overall Democratic women intertwined their femininity and their masculinity, accessing one through the other, so that voters have no choice but to acknowledge both aspects of their identities.

### *Presentations of Women's Issues – Feminism Online*

Previous research has found that platforms from candidates of different parties varied most significantly in regards to non-women's issues, and that focus on lower visibility, female issues did not differ from Democrat to Republican (Dolan and Lynch 2017). However, my research has produced evidence that directly contradicts this study. I found that Democratic and Republican candidates differed considerably in their discussion of women's issues. This could be because women's issues were made a priority in this election cycle, but it also could be evidence of increasing partisan divides, even on issues that are considered less important in any given election cycle.

### *Websites*

In addition to demonstrating personal gender identities, candidate websites also illuminated the various ways women's issues were approached (or not approached) in the 2018 campaigns. While women's issues were consistently and reliably mentioned on campaign websites across categories of candidates (Table 3), similar to gender presentation, the types of issues addressed and the methods for addressing them varied significantly.

Republicans, both newcomer and incumbent, were much more likely to mention abortion as the sole women's issue that was a priority to their campaign. Across all fifteen websites of the Republican candidates, eight women's issues were brought up, abortion most consistently (Table 4). Of the four newcomer Republican woman who mentioned women's issues, two discussed

abortion exclusively, and three of the eight incumbent women who addressed women's issues included only abortion. Three of these women begin their issue sections on abortion with the phrase, "as a mother." They frame their understanding of the issue in terms of a stereotypically feminine identity. Only Martha Roby (Alabama's 2<sup>nd</sup> District) approaches this issue from a masculine perspective, recounting her fight to speak out and expose the brutality of the abortion industry. Jackie Walorski (Indiana's 2<sup>nd</sup> District) takes another approach. In her issue section titled, "Defending Life," it is written that Jackie "has been recognized nationally for her support of women and unborn children." Walorski is the only one of these five to approach abortion even partially from a women's rights perspective.

There are a few other Republican women who mention abortion along with other women's issues. Ann Wagner (Missouri's 2<sup>nd</sup> District) mentions abortion as well as human trafficking and sexual assault. Vicky Hartzler (Missouri's 4<sup>th</sup> District) discusses abortion and women's economic issues. Abortion was, however, the only widely agreed-upon women's issue mentioned by Republicans, mentioned by seven of the candidates. The only other issue discussed by more than one candidate is human trafficking, prioritized by two candidates.

The Republican candidates who discuss women's issues other than abortion tend to either remain vague or keep to relatively widely agreed upon issues. For example, Jaime Herrera Beutler (Washington's 3<sup>rd</sup> District) discusses the need for better maternity care to lower the maternal mortality rate. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (Washington's 5<sup>th</sup> District) emphasizes that she is a member of the Women's Caucus, but does not specify what this means in terms of concrete issues. Lena Epstein (Michigan's 11<sup>th</sup> District) discusses a somewhat controversial issue, women in business, but almost exclusively from the perspective of her own experiences as a businesswoman, not from the point of view of trying to change the culture of the masculine-

dominated world. Barbara Comstock (Virginia's 10<sup>th</sup> District) also addresses a few more controversial issues, including anti-sexual-harassment legislation. It is important to note that Comstock is one of the few incumbents who was not reelected.

Table 4

Women's Issues Represented on Republican Websites

Issue	Number of Mentions
Abortion	7
Human Trafficking	2
Domestic Violence	1
Women in Business	1
Sexual Assault	1
Women's Economic Opportunities	1
Sexual Harassment	1
Maternity Care	1

Democrats, on the other hand, discuss women's issues extensively, in great detail, and with great variety (Tables 5 and 6). Newcomer Democrats mentioned women's issues more on their websites than did incumbent women, and, in general, there was more consensus among newcomer women than incumbent women, so, more newcomer candidates mentioned each priority than incumbent candidates. Newcomers discussed eighteen different women's issues across all their websites, with an average of four women mentioning each issue. Incumbent women mentioned seventeen issues across all websites with an average of three candidates

mentioning each issue.<sup>6</sup> The top issues for newcomer women were pay equity (twelve mentions), the right to choose (ten mentions), protecting funding for Planned Parenthood (nine mentions), and access to birth control and reproductive healthcare (eight mentions). For incumbent women, the top issue, discussed by ten candidates, were reproductive rights, followed by pay equity (seven mentions), followed by sexual assault awareness and prevention and access to birth control and other forms reproductive healthcare (five mentions each).

It is important to note the different ways that Democratic women deal with reproductive rights as compared to Republican women. As mentioned previously, abortion was the main issue discussed by Republicans on their webpages, and always from the perspective of protecting life. Interestingly, Democratic women divided this topic into multiple subcategories, revealing that it is possible for them to explore the complexities and nuances of the subject without alienating voters. Three of the top four issues for newcomer Democrats relate to women's reproductive healthcare and freedoms. The candidates divide the issue into categories that include a woman's right to choose, a philosophical stance on a moral issue, as well as access to birth control, a concrete goal. Additionally, Planned Parenthood ranks as a top priority for these women, demonstrating a commitment to protecting reproductive rights as well as women's healthcare more broadly. The same goes for incumbent Democrats, whose top priority is the philosophical idea of reproductive rights, followed by access to birth control and other forms of reproductive healthcare. If we combine all of these issues together into one category, the remaining top issues for newcomer Democrats would be paid family leave (six mentions) and workplace harassment

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<sup>6</sup> There were more incumbent Democratic candidates (26) than newcomer Democratic candidates (22) in this study. So, the higher average number of mentions per issue for newcomers indicates a much greater degree of consensus amongst those women than amongst incumbents when considering which issues are the most important.

(four mentions). For incumbent Democrats the main priority after reproductive rights would be workplace equality, which includes goals such as parent sick leave, protections for pregnant women, and breaking the glass ceiling. Workplace equality is mentioned on four candidate websites.

Table 5

## Women's Issues Represented on Newcomer Democrat Websites

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Number of Mentions</b>
Equal Pay	12
Right to Choose	10
Protect Planned Parent Funding	9
Access to Birth Control	8
General Women's Healthcare	6
Paid Family Leave	6
Workplace Harassment	4
Gun Control in Domestic Violence Cases	2
Maternal Mortality	2
Violence Against Women Act	2
Affordable Childcare	1
Equal Pay for Women of Color	1
Global Gag Rule	1
Homelessness Among Domestic Violence Victims	1
Justice for Sexual Assault Survivors	1

Maternity Care	1
Women in the Military	1
Workplace Equality	1

Table 6

## Issues Mentioned on Incumbent Democrat Websites

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Number of Mentions</b>
Reproductive Rights	10
Equal Pay	7
Access to Birth Control	5
Sexual Assault	5
General Women's Healthcare	4
Workplace Equality	4
Protect Planned Parenthood Funding	2
Affordable Childcare	1
Equal Rights Amendment	1
Global Gag Rule	1
Human Trafficking	1
Maternal Mortality	1
Maternity Care	1
Paid Family Leave	1
Pink Tax	1
Violence Against Women Act	1

Women in Business	1
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When compared to the most important issues for Republican women and given the newness of these issues to the political mainstream, these priorities are significantly more controversial. While abortion has been a prevalent women's issue in politics since *Roe vs. Wade* and has been widely discussed by many politicians (Vavrus 1998), a lot of the issues discussed by Democratic women are newer. Taking a stand on these issues represents a potential risk for these candidates, many of whom were running in more conservative or moderate districts. These issues, typically thought of as liberal, could ostracize potential voters and reinforce the stereotype that female candidates are more liberal and feminist than their male counterparts (Loke, Bachmann, and Harp 2017). The fact that so many of these women, especially the newcomers, made women's issues a priority in their campaigns signals that this election is one of issue redefinition, at least for Democratic candidates. Wolbrecht (2000), notes that issue redefinition occurs when a cultural shift allows priorities that have been less mainstream to be brought into the national political conversation, meaning that candidates can discuss them without the kinds of risks that would have been present in a different election cycle. Diverse women's issues have historically not played a significant role in many political campaigns (Daughton 1994), but this election marks a significant shift from that trend, especially for Democratic candidates.

Another interesting difference between Republican and Democratic women when it comes to women's issues discussed on websites is the way the candidates presented and grouped their priority issues. Only one of the Republican candidates had a section that included the word women in the title. Barbara Comstock (Virginia's 10<sup>th</sup> District) had an issue titled "Inspiring the

Next Generation of Young Women.” She also had sections about fighting sexual harassment and human trafficking. Ann Wagner (Missouri’s 2<sup>nd</sup> District) also had some women-specific issues, namely “Fighting Sex Trafficking” and “Protecting Survivors of Assault.”<sup>7</sup> Some of the other candidates briefly mentioned women in sub-sections, but rarely were women explicitly placed at the forefront of their priorities. Only five out of the 98 total issue pages across all Republican websites were explicitly linked to non-abortion women’s issues, and only one contained the word woman.

Given that Democratic women mention women’s issues significantly more than Republican women, it stands to reason that the presentation of these issues would be more complex. There were many candidates who included a section specifically for women’s issues where they addressed all of the feminist issues they prioritize. There were seventeen Democratic women who organized their priorities in this way (twelve newcomers and five incumbents). Additionally, there were five women who had multiple women-specific issue sections (three newcomers and two incumbents). These women typically had a section on general women’s rights or equality and then another section on a more specific issue that mattered to them, such as sexual harassment or paid family leave. Finally, and most significantly, there is a group of twelve women (seven newcomers and five incumbents) who did not separate women’s issues from their other priorities. For example, in a section titled “Creating Jobs and Growing the Economy,” Gina Ortiz Jones (Texas’s 23<sup>rd</sup> District) mentions the importance of equal pay for equal work. And, Jahana Hayes writes, “I will work to ensure that women have full access to

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<sup>7</sup> Although Wagner prioritizes protecting survivors of assault on her website, she did not mention Dr. Ford, Brett Kavanaugh, or the hearing process on any of the media platforms analyzed in this study. It appears that there are limits for Republican women in terms of their ability to address more controversial women’s issues such as sexual assault.



reproductive healthcare and maintain their right to choose without restriction,” under the heading of access to healthcare more generally. This trend is a potential sign that women’s issues are no longer being used to signify an outsider status for these candidates. Whereas in previous elections women had to differentiate themselves and emphasize their positions as outsiders in order to gain a strategic advantage (Palmer and Simon 2005), these twelve women do exactly the opposite. They do not present women’s issues as a special interest topic but instead include them as part of their broader platform. They are not a majority of the women I studied, but the trend is noteworthy and signals a potential shift in the way women in politics view themselves and what they think voters expect of them.

### *Twitter Feeds*

Another way that candidates expressed their stances on women’s issues was through the use of Twitter. Given the short length and instant dissemination of tweets, candidates’ goals on Twitter differed from other sources of media analyzed for this project. The candidates used Twitter to offer their perspectives on various women’s issues as opposed to making presentations of identities. Some of the issues featured can give ideas about the personalities of the candidates, but many of the tweets analyzed were not particularly gendered. Identity formation was less conscious and intentional in the Twitter accounts of the candidates. What was conscious and intentional, however, was the presentation of women’s issues through Twitter. Even more so than websites, Twitter was used by candidates, especially Democratic candidates, to address pressing and significant women’s issues.

In terms of differences between Democrats and Republicans, Democratic candidates used Twitter significantly more than Republican women and mentioned women’s issues significantly more as well (Tables 7 and 8). I found that reactions to the allegations made by Dr. Christine

Blasey Ford against Brett Kavanaugh and then to the Senate hearing process and ultimate confirmation offered a good example of the broader trends of Twitter use when it came to women's issues. I specifically chose the dates of my study of Twitter because they included the time from when allegations against Brett Kavanaugh were first made public to the hearings to the confirmation, but also included a couple of weeks during which this issue was not in headlines, potentially allowing candidates the freedom discuss other priorities.

Table 7

Average Number of Tweets per Candidate from September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018 to October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018

	<b>Average Number of Tweets</b>
<b>Newcomer Republicans</b>	47
<b>Incumbent Republicans</b>	62
<b>Newcomer Democrats</b>	138
<b>Incumbent Democrats</b>	73

Table 8

Percent of Tweets Containing Themes

	<b>Masculinity</b>	<b>Femininity</b>	<b>References to Women's Issues</b>
<b>Newcomer Republicans</b>	18%	3%	6%
<b>Incumbent Republicans</b>	17%	3%	9%

<b>Newcomer Democrats</b>	3%	3%	13%
<b>Incumbent Democrats</b>	3%	0.4%	33%

I found that almost no Republican women mentioned Dr. Ford, Kavanaugh, or the hearings (Table 9). The few who did mention the issue did so either in a neutral way or in support of Kavanaugh, pleased that he was confirmed. For example, Cathy McMorris Rodgers (Washington’s 5<sup>th</sup> District) tweeted, “These are serious allegations. As I’ve always said, they need to be taken seriously, and women deserve to be heard. Judge Kavanaugh also deserves due process and an opportunity to defend his character. We need the facts and the truth. That’s why Thursday’s hearing is very important.” As another example, Martha Roby (Alabama’s 2<sup>nd</sup> District) tweeted, “Judge Brett Kavanaugh is a conservative, experienced jurist who I believe will be a strict constitutionalist on the Supreme Court. I am pleased that the United States Senate voted to confirm him, and I am confident that he will serve the Court and the American people admirably.”

This is radically different from the Democratic women, almost all of whom mentioned Kavanaugh (Table 9). In fact, Dr. Ford, Brett Kavanaugh, the hearings, and the issue of sexual assault made up an immense portion of the Democrats’ tweets having to do with women’s issues and of their tweets more generally. Five percent of total tweets from newcomer Democrats, and 42% of their tweets pertaining to women’s issues, were about this topic. For incumbent Democrats the numbers are even more significant, with tweets about Dr. Ford and the hearings making up 26% of their total tweets and 78% of their tweets about women’s issues. This makes

clear the fact that Democratic women, especially incumbent Democratic women, utilize Twitter to open conversations with their constituents about issues in real time. They are able to make their positions known on things that are happening currently in order to communicate directly, efficiently, and clearly with potential voters.

Table 9

## Percent of Candidates Who Did Not Mention Kavanaugh Allegations on Twitter

	<b>No Mention of Kavanaugh Allegations</b>
<b>Newcomer Republicans</b>	80%
<b>Incumbent Republicans</b>	72%
<b>Newcomer Democrats</b>	14%
<b>Incumbents Democrats</b>	4%

Despite the fact that the Democratic women tweeted extensively about Kavanaugh, they did so in a variety of ways. I noticed two major trends when it came to tweets about this topic (Table 10). First, many women reacted in solidarity with Dr. Ford and with survivors. On the other hand, a large number of the candidates reacted with anger and calls to action. One response was demonstrated by appeals for followers to take care of each other and links to resources like women’s clinics and national sexual assault hotlines. Katie Hill (California’s 25<sup>th</sup> District), for example, tweeted, “I have experienced sexual assault multiple times and in different ways – I never reported and I know how hard it is for somebody to come forward. I also know that many women are in the same place. It is not your fault. You deserve to be heard. We believe you.” Lizzie Pannill Fletcher (Texas’s 7<sup>th</sup> District) also took this approach, tweeting, “If you or someone you know needs support today, please know there are people who are there to

hear you. The National Sexual Assault Hotline is free, confidential, anonymous, and available 24/7 at 800-656-HOPE,” followed by, “My job right now is to make sure that there is one more person who will hear you in Congress starting in January.”

In opposition to solidarity, the response of anger was evidenced by indictments of the character of Republican Senators, marches to the Senate, and promises of future fights. Sheila Jackson Lee (Texas’s 18<sup>th</sup> District) epitomized this reaction when she tweeted, “It’s somehow perfectly fitting that the GOP are dragging their feet on #VAWA [Violence Against Women Act] at the same time they are dismissing allegations of violence against women by their Supreme Court nominee. RT [retweet] if you think it’s time to renew the Violence Against Women Act!” Jackie Speier (California’s 14<sup>th</sup> District) offers another example of this approach in a tweet that reads, “This is a railroad nomination process and @senjudiciary and @SenateMajLdr had better put a stop to it. Women are outraged, and unlike what happened with the Anita Hill hearings, we’re going to do something about it.” As a final example, Jan Schakowsky (Illinois’s 9<sup>th</sup> District) tweeted, “Enough is enough. Republicans are actively trying to steamroll an alleged SERIAL sexual abuser towards a lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court. Allegations continue to mount. We #BelieveSurvivors and MUST #CancelKavanaugh.”

These different approaches varied based on tenure of the candidate. Newcomer women were much more likely to take the solidarity approach. 58% of newcomer tweets about Kavanaugh were representative of solidarity, compared to 32% of incumbent tweets about Kavanaugh. As such, only 42% of newcomer tweets about Kavanaugh were more aggressive, compared to 68% of incumbent tweets. Additionally, while similar rates of newcomer and incumbent candidates had at least one tweet representative of solidarity (82% and 85% respectively), the numbers vary widely when it comes to responses of anger. While only 45% of

newcomer Democratic candidates had one tweet from a place of anger, 92% of incumbent Democratic candidates did. This is potential evidence of the incumbency effect, that incumbent candidates are confident in their potential for reelection so they do not have to monitor themselves as much when it comes to their public message. Also, it is potential evidence that the social norms that manage women’s behavior apply less to these women because of their incumbency. Women are expected to be collected and composed, and these displays of anger and aggression go against expectations that appear to dictate the conduct of newcomer women in ways that do not pertain to incumbent women. This finding is consistent with previous research, which found that stereotypes applied to female candidates are less strong for incumbents than for non-incumbents (Fridkin and Kenney 2009). Additionally, this could be further evidence of the trend noted in the gender presentation on the websites of each candidate; the goal of incumbent Democrats is to demonstrate their capacity to continue performing their job whereas the goal of the newcomer Democrats is to form an intimate and personal connection with their constituents to convince them to vote.

Table 10

## Kavanaugh Allegation Trends on Democratic Twitter Feeds

	<b>Newcomer Democrats</b>	<b>Incumbent Democrats</b>
<b>Tweets in Solidarity</b>	96 (by 18 candidates)	158 (by 22 candidates)
<b>Tweets out of Anger</b>	70 (by 10 candidates)	329 (by 24 candidates)
<b>Total Tweets about Kavanaugh Allegations</b>	166 (by 19 candidates)	487 (by 25 candidates)
<b>Total Tweets Referencing Women’s Issues</b>	395 (by 22 candidates)	628 (by 25 candidates)

The example of the Kavanaugh hearings is also indicative of the broader trend of Democratic women mentioning more conflictual issues as compared to Republican women. It appears that, especially in terms of these complex, partisan issues, there are specific camps into which candidates are expected to fall based on party. And, while the Republican candidates mostly refrained from mentioning Kavanaugh, there were many more mentions of a wider variety of women's issues on Republican women's Twitter feeds than in their advertisements or on their websites. This variety also included very few mentions of abortion. The vast majority of the women's issues about which Republicans tweeted are widely agreed upon. For example, seven of the sixteen women mentioned breast and ovarian cancer. This, along with women in business, was the most widely mentioned women's issue across all Republican Twitter accounts. These issues, either entirely societally agreed upon or having to do with a mainly masculine space, do not put candidates at much risk for ostracizing any voters.

It is important to note that three out of the sixteen Republican women did mention touchier issues, but two of those who did were not reelected.<sup>8</sup> For example, Young Kim (California's 39<sup>th</sup> District) discussed work she had done to fight for domestic violence victims, writing, "When I was in the Assembly, I fought for women and victims of domestic violence. As your representative, I will work in [a] bipartisan way to break the gridlock in Washington and get results for our communities." Mimi Walters (California's 45<sup>th</sup> District) also mentioned a more controversial issue, tweeting, "While I am pleased AB 3118 was signed into law, I am extremely disappointed w/ the veto of SB 1449, which would have required the testing of all newly collected rape kits. This is an important step to help survivors seek justice. #EndTheBacklog."

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<sup>8</sup> The third woman who mentioned a touchy women's issue was Ann Wagner, who prioritized protecting victims of sexual assault on her website, but did not mention the allegations against Brett Kavanaugh or the Senate hearings.

Although these women did discuss issues surrounded by more controversy, it did not seem to work in their favor.

Democratic women, on the other hand, did tweet about a broad range of controversial women's issues with much greater frequency than did Republican women (Table 8). Unlike on their campaign websites, however, there was little to no consensus in terms of the issues mentioned outside of the Kavanaugh allegations. The only trend with which there was any continuity was that of newcomer Democrats supporting other female candidates in this "Year of the Woman." These tweets made up 16% of their tweets about women's issues. Most of the examples of this trend are newcomer women supporting other newcomer women. For example, Deb Haaland (New Mexico's 1<sup>st</sup> District) tweeted, "I am proud to be running alongside @sharicedavids to be the first Native American women elected to Congress. With more Indigenous people in office, we can make progress for all Indigenous communities and remind the United States that we are still here and our identity is valid." Mary Gay Scanlon (Pennsylvania's 5<sup>th</sup> District) tweeted, "It is truly an honor to experience this moment with these incredibly women. Together, we can #MakeItHapPEN," followed by a picture of the candidate with three other newcomer Democratic women running in the state of Pennsylvania. As a final example, Elaine Luria (Virginia's 2<sup>nd</sup> District) tweeted, "ICYMI [in case you missed it]: @glamourmag highlights the inspiring bond of three @NavalAcademy graduates running for Congress in #VA02, #KY06, and #NJ11. Thank you @AmyMcGrathKY and @MikieSherrill for always being on #TeamElaine." It appears that the wave of new-to-politics Democratic women in the 2018 election cycle has created a sense of camaraderie and a culture of supporting fellow female candidates. For comparison, tweets from incumbent women that focused on



supporting fellow female candidates accounted for only 0.8% of their total tweets dealing with women's issues.

In terms of other issues addressed by Democratic women on Twitter, there was little to no overlap amongst candidates. There were not very many issues mentioned by multiple candidates (Tables 11 and 12), potentially because Twitter offers so much more freedom than a traditional website format. Twitter acted as a resource that candidates could use to briefly mention issues that they are either actively working on, giving updates in real time, or that they do not deem significant enough to their campaigns to include on their websites but that they want voters to know about. This can give voters a better idea of the day-to-day work of their candidates.

Table 11

Issues Mentioned on Newcomer Democratic Twitter Feeds

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Number of Candidates who Mentioned Issue</b>	<b>Number of Tweets</b>
Support for Fellow Female Candidates	14	62
Access to Birth Control/Reproductive Rights	11	17
Women in Business	6	6
Awareness of Violence Against Women	5	8
General Women's Healthcare	5	5
Support for Planned Parenthood/NARAL	5	5

Equal Pay	4	4
Domestic Violence Awareness	3	4
Support Black Female Leaders	3	6
Breast Cancer Awareness	2	4
Paid Family Leave	2	5
Affordable Childcare	1	1
Rights of Bisexual Women	1	1
Women in STEM	1	2

Table 12

## Issues Mentioned on Incumbent Democratic Twitter Feeds

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Number of Candidates Who Mentioned Issue</b>	<b>Number of Tweets</b>
Pregnant Women in Custody	8	11
Workplace Harassment	5	9
Native Women's Pay Equity	4	4
Reproductive Rights	4	6
Breast Cancer Awareness	3	7
Domestic Violence Awareness	3	4
Maternity Care	3	3

Support for Fellow Female Candidates	3	5
Women's Right to Vote	3	3
Awareness of Violence Against Women	2	2
Women in Business	2	5
Equal Rights Amendment	1	2
Global Gag Rule	1	1
Harassment in Housing	1	3
Harassment in STEM	1	3
Keeping Girls in School	1	1
Opportunities for Women of Color	1	8
Paid Family Leave	1	4
Women's Retirement Gap	1	1

## Conclusion

Although causal arguments cannot be made based exclusively on these data, the results of this election were noteworthy and hold potential consequence when considered in conjunction with the findings of this study. Given the duration of each incumbent's time in office, it was to be expected that all of them would win their elections. This was the case for incumbent Democrats, however, only 73% of incumbent Republican women won reelection. And, given that many of the newcomer women were taking on incumbent candidates, running in competitive

districts, or trying to flip seats, it would make sense for their success rate to be much lower. This was true for Republican newcomers, none of whom won their elections, but the Democratic newcomers were largely successful, with 73% of candidates having been elected.

These results corroborate some of the major contributions of this study, one of which is the importance of social media and online platforms in modern political campaigns. Few previous studies have looked at candidate websites, and even fewer have examined Twitter accounts, but the difference in success rate between Democratic and Republican women and the greater use of resources like Twitter by Democrats suggests that a successful campaign must take advantage of every way to reach voters, especially social media sites like Twitter.

Additionally, it cannot be ignored that these groups of women who approached performance of gender identity and discussion of women's issues so differently faced opposing results when the votes were tallied. Democratic women who discussed a variety of previously unexplored women's issues and who presented their gender identities in ways that did not conform to conventional binaries found much greater success than Republican women, most of whom demonstrated gender as stereotypical and separate and did not broach a diverse array of women's issues. As few previous studies have examined female candidates' self-presentations of gender or perspectives on women's issues, these findings are an important starting point for further investigation of the factors that lead to a successful political campaign.

Finally, while the effects of incumbency have been widely studied, within the parameters of this study it appears that the benefits of being an incumbent apply more to Democratic women than to Republican female candidates. Democratic incumbents were entirely successful, even given their more radical approaches, whereas Republican incumbents were significantly less

successful. This party difference in the benefits of incumbency is a nuance that has not been previously explored.

Despite these contributions, this study was not entirely comprehensive. I did not take into account factors such as age, race, sexuality, or gender and profile of the candidates who ran against these women, all of which impact the results of an election. Additionally, this study examined only some of the candidates for the House of Representatives in one election cycle, meaning the scope was somewhat limited. Finally, this particular cycle represents a very specific cultural moment. This was the first election since the inauguration of President Trump, partisan divides are deepening, and more women ran than ever before with the added element of many of these women being new to politics. In order to understand the trends of this election in the broader context of American politics, additional studies need to be done.

For example, some potential continuations of this research would include an examination of gender in political campaigns as it intersects with race, age, sexuality, and other demographic characteristics. Additionally, given the clear importance of social media to current political campaigns, more in-depth research needs to be done on sites such as Twitter. The inclusion of other social media platforms, such as Instagram or Facebook for instance, could also contribute to our understanding of how female candidates present themselves to voters. The data in this study could also act as a frame of reference for more in-depth case studies of specific female candidates. The number of candidates I examined contributed to the generalizability of this study, but following one candidate specifically could illuminate aspects of gender performance that were outside the scope of this study.

Even given all of the elements for which this study was not able to account, these data do offer evidence of a cultural and political shift. It appears that the women's movement born out

of the current political atmosphere influenced both candidates and voters in ways that fundamentally transformed the makeup of the House of Representatives. Voters responded positively to the feminist candidates of the Democratic party, their non-stereotypical presentations of gender, and their commitment to varied women's issues. It remains to be seen if this trend will continue in future elections, but the message from American voters is clear in the results of the 2018 midterms. They want women in Congress who stand up for feminist issues and who do not confine themselves to stereotypical expectations of gender identity.

**Appendix A: List of Candidates in Study**

<i>Democratic Newcomers</i>	<i>Democratic Incumbents</i>	<i>Republican Newcomers</i>	<i>Republican Incumbents</i>
Katie Hill, CA 25	Doris Matsui, CA 6	Lea Marquez Peterson, AZ 2	Martha Roby, AL 2
Katie Porter, CA 45	Nancy Pelosi, CA 12	Young Kim, CA 39	Mimi Walters, CA 45
Jahana Hayes, CT 5	Barbara Lee, CA 13	Maria E. Salazar, FL 27	Jackie Swihart Walorski, IN 2
Kristen Carlson, FL 15	Jackie Speier, CA 14	Lena Epstein, MI 11	Ann Wagner, MO 2
Lucy McBath, GA 6	Anna Eshoo, CA 18	Katie Arrington, SC 1	Vicky Jo Hartzler, MO 4
Cindy Axne, IA 3	Zoe Lofgren, CA 19		Virginia A. Foxx, NC 5
Sharice Davids, KS 3	Grace Napolitano, CA 32		Kay Granger, TX 12
Amy McGrath, KY 6	Linda Sanchez, CA 38		Mia Love, UT 4
Kathy Manning, NC 13	Lucille Roybal- Allard, CA 40		Barbara Comstock, VA 10
Mikie Sherrill, NJ 11	Maxine Waters, CA 43		Jaime Herrera Beutler, WA 3

Debra Haaland, NM 1	Susan Davis, CA 53		Cathy McMorris Rodgers, WA 5
Alexandria Ocasio- Cortez, NY 14	Diana DeGette, CO 1		
Mary Gay Scanlon, PA 5	Rosa Delauro, CT 3		
Chrissy Houlahan, PA 6	Kathy Castor, FL 14		
Susan Ellis Wild, PA 7	Debbie Wasserman Schultz, FL 23		
Lizzie Pannill Fletcher, TX 7	Jan Schakowsky, IL 9		
Gina Ortiz Jones, TX 23	Betty McCollum, MN 4		
Elaine Luria, VA 2	Alma Adams, NC 12		
Leslie Cockburn, VA 3	Nydia Velazquez, NY 7		
Abigail Spanberger, VA 7	Yvette Clarke, NY 9		
Carolyn Long, WA 3	Carolyn Maloney, NY 12		
Kim Schrier, WA 8	Nita Lowey, NY 17		
	Marcy Kaptur, OH 9		



	Sheila Jackson Lee, TX 18		
	Eddie Bernice Johnson, TX 30		
	Gwen Moore, WI 4		

**Appendix B: Coding Mechanism**

Candidate Name:

Candidate State and District:

Candidate Political Status:

- Incumbent Democrat
- Incumbent Republican
- Newcomer Democrat
- Newcomer Republican

Type of Content:

- Website
- Twitter Account
- Advertisement

Date of Content (if applicable):

**To Fill Out for All Content:**

Content exhibits:

- Stereotypical Masculinity
- Stereotypical Femininity
- References to Women's Issues

Number of Examples:            Masculinity:            Femininity:            Women's Issues:

Additional Notes:

**To Fill out for Websites**

Topics included on Issues Page:

Number and Placement of Coding Examples: (i.e. masculinity in the issues page, femininity in the bio page, etc.):

**To Fill out for Twitter Accounts**

Total Number of Tweets:

**To Fill out for Advertisements**

Number of Views:

Title of Advertisement:

Transcription (Script and Visuals):

Voice of Advertisement:

Placement of Coding Examples:

- Script of Advertisement
- Visuals of Advertisement

Additional Notes:

**Appendix C: Excerpt from Cathy McMorris Rodgers' Twitter Feed**



**CathyMcMorrisRodgers**  @cathymcmorris · Sep 25 

These are serious allegations. As I've always said, they need to be taken seriously, and women deserve to be heard. Judge Kavanaugh also deserves due process & an opportunity to defend his character. We need the facts & the truth. That's why Thursday's hearing is very important.






75  18  67 



**Appendix D: Excerpts from Maxine Waters' Twitter Feed**

**Maxine Waters**  @RepMaxineWaters · Sep 30 




Trump cannot vouch for anybody's honesty, integrity, or respect for women. Trump only chose Kavanaugh based on his declaration that a President cannot be indicted. So glad the Constitution defines impeachment.

874  7.6K  26K 



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**Maxine Waters**  @RepMaxineWaters · Sep 30 




Kavanaugh has proven that he is a puppet of Donald Trump. He got his marching orders and he promptly displayed Trump's lack of respect for others. Aren't Supreme Court justices supposed to be independent, and are they not expected to demonstrate the proper judicial temperament?

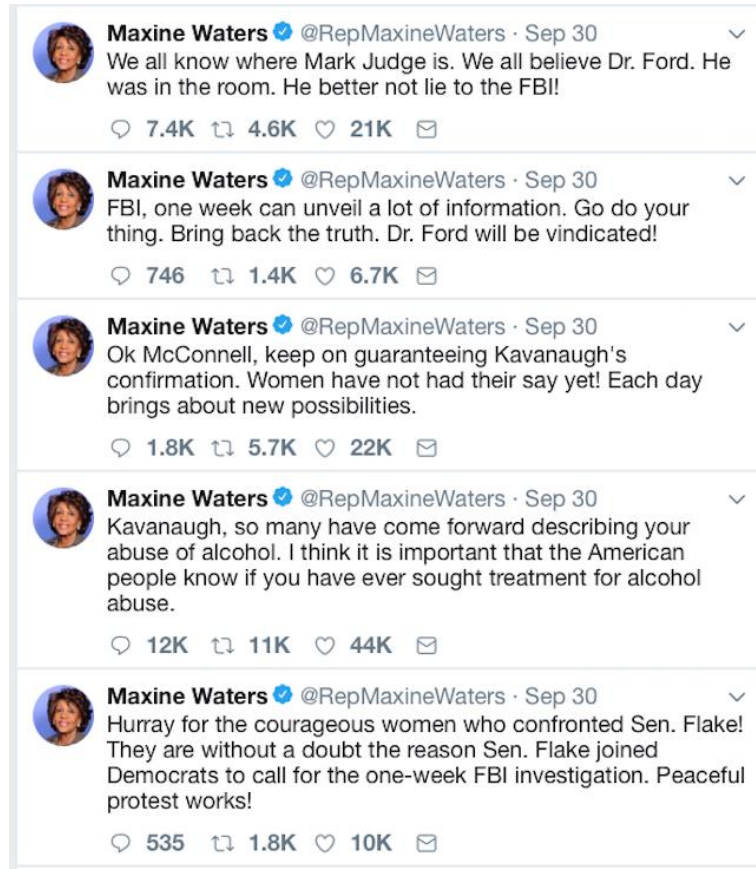
2.2K  14K  57K 

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**Maxine Waters**  @RepMaxineWaters · Sep 30 

We believe you, Dr. Ford. Good lord! Women are outraged by the thought of you being smothered, having a man's hand held over your mouth as you attempted to cry out for help! We understand attempted rape!

1.2K  7.6K  35K 



### **Appendix E: Script of Lena Epstein’s Campaign Advertisement, “Shoulder to Shoulder”**

“Lena Epstein is running for Congress to fight for Michigan jobs. As a business leader, she owns and operates one of the largest women-owned businesses in our state. In Congress, she’ll stand shoulder to shoulder with Michigan small businesses, fighting for lower taxes, less regulation, and a fair deal for Michigan. We need a Congresswomen who will get things done. Lena Epstein for Congress.”

## Appendix F: Excerpt from Ann Wagner's Campaign Website

### ANN'S FAMILY

Ann's most important job has always been as a wife and mother. Ann and Ray have three children: Raymond, a West Point graduate stationed with his wife Julia at Ft. Benning; Stephen, a Client Service Manager for a St. Louis area financial management company; and Mary Ruth, a recent graduate of Miami University in Ohio.



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