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Hillary Clinton's Race: Did She Match the Presidential Prototype?

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Abstract

The present research addresses how voters' perceptions of Hillary Clinton's warmth and competence influenced decisions to vote for her in the 2008 Democratic primary. We apply research on gender stereotypes and perceptions of women leaders to demonstrate that voters perceived Clinton as highly competent but relatively less warm. Further, this research examines how perceptions of Clinton's warmth and competence contributed to decisions to vote for her. Results suggest that perceptions of Clinton's warmth and competence differentially predicted voting behavior for voters strongly and less strongly identified with their political party. This research provides a descriptive analysis of how voters' beliefs about leaders can be colored by gender, and how such beliefs contribute to electing women candidates.

Key words: Gender stereotypes, gender roles, leadership, politics

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The 2008 presidential primary election will doubtlessly be declared a monumental achievement for women's progress in American political history. Fifty-three percent of people who voted in the California state primary cast their votes in support of Hillary Clinton's bid to become president of the United States of America (Johnson, 2008). People turned out across the United States to vote in a presidential primary where for one of the first times in American history, a woman's name appeared on the Democratic primary ballot as a potential candidate for the nation's top political office.

The results of this primary, and the mere fact that a woman appeared on the ballot as a contender for president, highlight a dramatic departure from earlier perceptions of the viability of women candidates in the U.S. In 1936, a Gallup Poll demonstrated that 65% of Americans surveyed claimed that they "would not vote for a woman for president, even if she was qualified in every other respect" (Dolan, 2005). Dolan (2005) pointed out that the wording in this question implies that *being a woman* is the disqualifying characteristic in a woman who is seeking the office of president. In 2000, however, a survey of potential voters showed that 57% of those surveyed believed that having women in government is positive for the country (Dolan, 2005; Simmons, 2001). Though supporting women for the presidency is qualitatively different from more generally supporting women in government, this survey no doubt demonstrates that Americans today believe that having women in government positions is a less foreign concept than it was in 1936. Further, 1992 marked the *Year of the Woman*, an election year where the number of women in national Senate seats tripled from two to six, highlighting an increase in voters' desire to vote for women candidates. Currently there are 92 (17%) women in the U.S. House of Representatives. Though these numbers clearly do not reflect equal representation of men and women in U.S. politics, they do reflect an increase of women into political positions.

The apparent change in voters' perceptions of female candidates' viability for top-level offices may lead to the assumption that voter hostility toward female candidates has all but diminished. On the contrary, Alexander and Anderson (1993) have warned against dismissing the "apparent lack of gender bias in the voting booth" by adopting the viewpoint that gender bias no longer exists among voters (pp. 527-528). Following this warning, the question arises as to whether voters' perceptions of Hillary Clinton during the 2008 primary were colored by beliefs regarding her gender.

Gender and Leadership

Traditional stereotypes characterize women as warm, nurturing, and kind, but not necessarily competent (e.g. Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 1999; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Such stereotypes rest in perceivers' assumptions that women are powerless, but cooperative; thus, people like women, but do not respect them (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 1999). Other researchers have labeled stereotypical women traits as communal (Eagly, 1987), a definition that encompasses the aforementioned traits. The characterization of women as communal, however, stands in stark contrast to people's leadership schemas. For example, in an analysis of managers' leadership qualities, Schein (1973; 1975) demonstrated that respondents believed that successful managers are agentic, aggressive, good leaders, self-confident and competitive. Further, respondents reported that successful managers were more similar to men than to women. Indeed,

at the core of stereotypes regarding masculinity, people tend to characterize men as strong, independent, aggressive, and competent (see Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Americans tend to strongly associate beliefs about leadership with traditionally masculine characteristics. Research findings suggest that survey respondents tend to rate leadership roles such as managers and politicians as highly agentic, but not communal positions (Powell & Butterfield, 1979, 1984, 1989; Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989). Moreover, past research examining voters' perceptions of politicians' warmth and competence has found that competence is a more favorable candidate trait than warmth (Funk, 1997). Hogg and van Knippenberg (2003) suggested that competence is closely associated with perceived leadership ability, thus implying that people support leaders whom they perceive as highly competent. Further, people tend to believe that both men and leaders possess agentic traits such as aggressiveness, dominance, and competence (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Schein, 1983; 1975). In sum, people's beliefs about leaders' traits and abilities are more closely aligned with masculinity than femininity.

Leadership Theories and Women

Kinder, Peters, Abelson, and Fiske (1989) demonstrated that people cognitively represent an image of a prototypical president that embodies the traits of competent and knowledgeable. An examination of leadership categorization theory (Lord, 1977; Palich & Hom, 1992) and social role theory (Eagly, 1987) can explicate differences in beliefs regarding men and women's abilities to lead. Leadership categorization theory posits that people have a prototypic image (i.e., a cognitive representation) of a leader to which they compare all other leaders and potential leaders. If leaders and potential leaders suitably match the prototype, followers perceive them as competent and worthy of support. Leadership categorization theory strongly implies that only those who are perceived as possessing certain traits will match the prototypical image of a leader and these will be the individuals whom constituents support as leaders.

Similarly, social role theory (Eagly, 1987) asserts that people hold beliefs and stereotypes regarding men and women's roles within society because of the historical distribution of men and women into certain roles (e.g., women have historically occupied "nurturer" roles, such as teachers, while men have occupied leadership roles, such as politicians; Eagly, 1987). The roles that women have traditionally occupied tend to be communal and also lower in status and prestige than the agentic roles that men have traditionally occupied (Eagly, 1987). Taken together, leadership categorization theory and social role theory suggest that because women and men have traditionally occupied different roles, people perceive women and men as differentially equipped to occupy leadership positions. Specifically, people observe men more frequently than women in roles associated with leadership; thus the prototype of a leader is more often a man, not a woman, as most individuals believe that men possess the attributes that prototypical leaders embody.

In a similar vein, Eagly and Karau (2002) developed the role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. They asserted that people judge women leaders more harshly and negatively than their male counterparts because people view women as incongruent with leadership roles. This is due to the gendered nature of leadership, which, according to these authors, derives from people having little experience perceiving women in leadership roles (e.g.,

Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002). This is consistent with Duerst-Lahti and Mae Kelly's (1995) argument that socialization from an early age leads individuals to learn and accept gender roles and gender stereotypes, and such gender roles for women rarely include leadership positions.

Other prominent leadership theories seek to describe when and how leaders come to power, without thoroughly examining followers' beliefs grounded in gender. The social identity theory of leadership (Hogg, 2001; Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003) seeks to explain when and how individuals will endorse a leader, as well as what leaders provide for their followers. This theory posits that people prefer leaders who express traits that embody group norms as well as leadership traits (Hogg, 2001). Specifically, followers view a leader as prototypical when they believe that the leader matches the cognitive representation of not only a leadership prototype, but also traits representing the group prototype. Moreover, leaders should possess traits that are conducive to the group's success and should act in the best interest of the group. A leader's perceived prototypicality and the traits s(he) possesses are particularly important among followers who strongly identify with the group to which the leader seeks to represent. Thus, followers' identification with a group is an important predictor of leader support.

Group identification or social identification is the part of the self-definition that is defined by one's group memberships (Hogg, 2006; Tajfel; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). People can derive a strong sense of self and meaning from the groups to which they belong; thus those who identify strongly with a group view the group as an important part of the self-concept. In line with the social identity theory of leadership (Hogg, 2001, 2008; Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003), the present research suggests that perceptions of a leader are strongly influenced by identification with social groups. In the context of elections, voters' identification with political parties is highly salient, thus party identification will strongly influence voters' perceptions of a candidate's viability. Moreover, people who strongly identify with their party should be particularly concerned with a potential leaders' ability to lead their group to success; as a consequence they should rely heavily upon their perceptions of a candidates' traits that provide information about the candidates' prototypicality and viability as a leader, in sum, the candidates' competence.

With respect to women, being viewed as a prototypical leader is a difficult task, as beliefs about gender do not align with leader prototypes. The current research suggests that voters who strongly identify with their political party will place a great deal of emphasis on traits that they believe allude to women's ability to lead as well as to traits commonly associated with political leaders (i.e., candidates' competence, as it directly speaks to the candidates' abilities).

The aforementioned theories illustrate how women seeking to occupy leadership positions (such as high level political offices) may face a variety of obstacles because beliefs about women's abilities are strongly associated with gender and are therefore incongruent with leadership prototypes. With a record number of women currently presiding in the United States Congress (74 women sit in the House out of the 439 members and 16 of the 100 members of Senate are women) it is clear that many women politicians have been able to enter into politics, albeit at drastically lower rates than their male counterparts. How are women politicians perceived, and more importantly, how do such perceptions impact support for women politicians and affect their paths to achieving the nation's highest political office?

Gender and Political Office

Though attitudes toward women politicians have markedly improved since 1936, there exists a plethora of evidence suggesting that voters may often rely on gender stereotypes with respect to making political decisions regarding women candidates. In line with traditional gender stereotypes, voters tend to perceive women politicians as warm, friendly, and kind but perceive men politicians as aggressive, dominant, strong, independent, aggressive, and knowledgeable (e.g., Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993).

Quite often, women who occupy *agentic* positions suffer a backlash with respect to perceivers' beliefs about their personalities, because such women violate traditional gender roles. Research on stereotype content and person perception demonstrates that people organize their perceptions of others' traits along two basic dimensions: warmth and competence (Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005). Perceivers then form attitudes toward others through a combination of these two trait dimensions (Fiske, et al., 1999; Fiske et al., 2002). For example, women leaders, such as female CEOs (e.g., Brenda Barnes), are often perceived as competent and cold (Fiske et al., 2002), and the resulting attitudes are negative and hostile toward such women. Competence is a laudable trait in males; however, research on stereotype violation and stereotype content suggests that people believe that highly competent women lack warmth (Fiske et al., 2002). This mismatch of high competence and low warmth can lead to feelings of hostility and dislike toward such women, due in large part to a perceived violation of traditional feminine stereotypes of women as warm and caring (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman & Glick, 1999; 2001).

The United States' highest and most prestigious leadership position is the office of presidency. Voters' gender expectancies may significantly impact their perceptions of a woman seeking to occupy this position. Along her journey through the Democratic Party's primary, Hillary Clinton was characterized as "... cold and absolutely flawless" by news personality Chris Mathews (Bohlert & Foser, 2008, ¶ 4) and as a "stereotypical bitch" by CNN's Glenn Beck (M.B.B., 2007; ¶ 1). These comments strongly suggest that Mathews and Beck perceived Clinton as a competent candidate, but neither viewed her as particularly warm. This anecdotal evidence begs the question, how did voters perceive Hillary Clinton in the 2008 presidential primary and did their perceptions of her traits influence voting behaviors?

The current research tests two primary hypotheses via a random sample of California voters. Survey respondents completed a battery of items regarding their opinions of Hillary Clinton as well as measures of their identification with their political parties.

Hypothesis 1. In line with previous research that suggests women who occupy leadership positions violate traditional gender stereotypes (e.g., Fiske et al., 2002), we hypothesized that voters would perceive Hillary Clinton as more competent than warm.

Hypothesis 2. We predicted that perceptions of warmth and competence would differentially impact decisions to vote for Clinton among people strongly and weakly identified with their political party. Specifically, for people highly identified with their party, warmth would be positively related to voting for Clinton, only among those who perceived her as

competent. Somewhat conversely, we predicted that perceptions of Clinton's warmth would be more important for people who weakly identify with their political party than for those more strongly identified.

These predictions are based on the assumption that if perceptions of a potential leader's competence are indicative of her prototypicality and thus her ability to effectively lead a group to success, then competence should be particularly important for strong identifiers (in line with predictions of the social identity theory of leadership; Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003). Warmth, however, may imply not only leader prototypicality, but also a personality dimension (i.e., nice, friendly) that speaks directly to gender stereotypes. Those less concerned with the welfare of their political group may be more influenced by traits that are indicative of a woman's conformity to gender roles than a woman's ability to lead.

Overview of the Research

Survey respondents completed a questionnaire that assessed perceptions of Hillary Clinton's traits (warmth and competence), and also indicated level of identification with respondents' political parties. The questionnaire additionally assessed the candidate for whom participants intended to vote in the primary election, the likelihood that they would for Clinton vote if the election were held tomorrow, participants' party affiliation, and demographic variables.

Method

Participants

One hundred and seventy-two adults (56.5% women, 43.5% men) who intended to vote in the California state primary participated in this study. We administered surveys using venue-based sampling, allowing for a diverse sample of voters. Participants completed a paper and pencil survey about *Voters' Attitudes*. Ages ranged from 18 to 75, with a mean age of 38.5; 38% of participants identified themselves as White, 25% as Hispanic, 12% as Black, 8% as Asian, and 16% as Other. Additionally, 54% of participants were Democrats, 24% were Republicans, and 22% claimed to be members of another political party. Though there were clearly more Democrats who participated in this study than Republicans (and members of other parties), this breakdown is roughly representative of the number of people who are registered as Democrats and Republicans in California (Russo, 2008).

Predictor Variables

Party identification. We employed an adapted version of Mael and Tetrick's 1992 group identification scale (e.g., *When someone criticizes my political party, it feels like a personal insult*; $\alpha = .78$) to measure party identification.

Perceptions of Clinton's warmth (Warmth). We adapted seven items from Fiske et al.'s 2002 work to assess participants' perceptions of Clinton's warmth. Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed that each adjective (e.g., friendly, approachable) was true of

Clinton's characteristics on 7-point Likert scales ($\alpha = .88$). We averaged the items to form a composite measure of warmth.

Perceptions of Clinton's competence (Competence)

We adapted six items from Fiske et al.'s 2002 work to assess participants' perceptions of Clinton's competence. Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed that each adjective (e.g., intelligent, confident) was true of Clinton's characteristics on 7-point Likert scales ($\alpha = .88$). We averaged the items to form a composite measure of competence.

Dependent Measure: Likelihood of voting for Clinton (Voting decisions)

To explore how perceptions of warmth and competence predicted participants' decisions to vote for Clinton, participants responded to the following question: *If the Presidential election were held tomorrow, what is the likelihood that you would vote for Hillary Clinton?* This item was on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 being *extremely unlikely* to 7 being *extremely likely*.

Demographics

To conclude the questionnaire, participants completed a series of demographic questions (e.g., age, ethnicity/race, sex) as well as indicated their political affiliation and whether or not they were registered to vote.

Results

Exploratory Analyses

Though we did not hypothesize differences in men's and women's voting behavior, research on social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and research on sharing double ingroup identities (Brewer, Ho, Lee, & Miller, 1987) strongly suggests that women, particularly Democratic women would perceive Clinton as more positively on both warmth and competence dimensions. To examine this, a two (gender: male vs. female) x 2 (party: Democrat vs. Republican) Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) assessed participants' perceptions of Clinton's warmth. There was no main effect for gender on warmth ($p = n.s.$), and the interaction between gender and party was not significant ($p = n.s.$), however there was a main effect of party, $F(1, 125) = 33.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = .22$. Democratic participants perceived Clinton as warmer ($M = 5.06, SD = 1.36$) than Republicans ($M = 3.43, SD = 1.54$).

For competence, there was a main effect of gender, $F(1, 125) = 3.87, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$. Female voters perceived Clinton as more competent ($M = 5.96, SD = 1.55$) than did male voters ($M = 4.91, SD = 1.53$). There was also a main effect for party, $F(1, 125) = 30.99, p < .001, \eta^2 = .20$. Democratic participants perceived Clinton as more competent ($M = 5.72, SD = 2.01$) than did Republicans ($M = 4.19, SD = 1.18$). The interaction was not significant ($p = n.s.$).

Perceptions of Clinton

Hypothesis 1 predicted that because women in high status positions are seen to violate traditional stereotypes, participants would perceive Hillary Clinton as highly competent, but relatively less warm. A paired sample t-test compared participants' ratings of Clinton's competence and warmth. As expected, participants rated Hillary Clinton as more competent ($M = 5.2, SD = 1.6$) than warm ($M = 4.5, SD = 1.6$), $t(164) = 7.6, p < .001, Cohen's d = .44$ (see Figure 1).

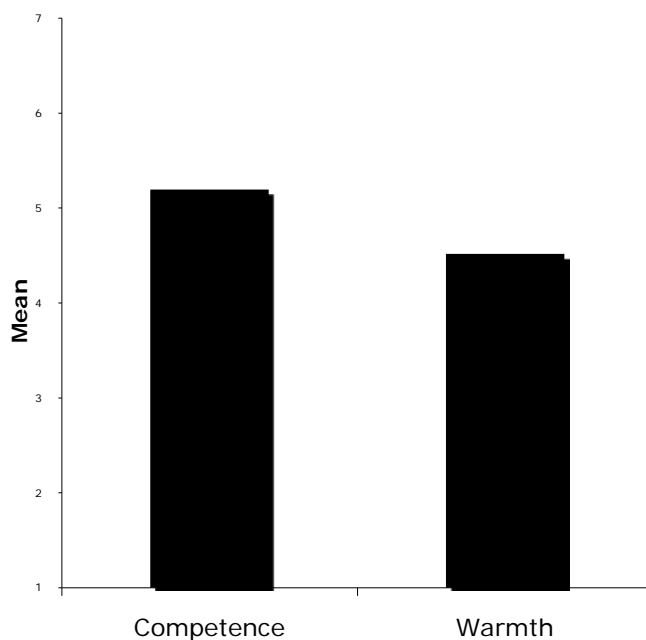


Figure 1. Comparison of participants' perceptions of Clinton's warmth and competence ratings.

Voting Decisions

Hypothesis 2 sought to examine how participants' perceptions of Clinton's warmth and competence predicted intentions to vote for her. Furthermore, we predicted that perceptions of warmth and competence would differentially predict voting for Clinton based upon participants' level of identification with their political parties. To examine this hypothesis, we constructed a 3-way interaction between participants' ratings of Clinton's warmth, ratings of her competence, and party identification.

Following guidelines on constructing and interpreting interactions using multiple regression (Aiken & West, 1991), we centered the predictor variables (warmth and party identification) and the moderator (competence) means of zero to avoid multicollinearity issues.

In the first step of the regression analysis, we regressed participant age, race/ethnicity, gender, and party affiliation (e.g., participants' status as a Democrat, Republican, etc.) onto the dependent measure, likelihood of voting for Clinton (this statistically controlled for demographic

characteristics). We entered all main effects into the second step of the regression, two-way interactions into the third step, and the three-way interaction into the fourth step of the regression analysis.

Results indicate that there were significant main effects for all of the predictors. As party identification increased, likelihood of voting for Clinton decreased ($\beta = -.14$, $SEB = .14$, $t = 2.21$, $p = .03$). Competence and warmth were both positively related to voting for Clinton, such that, as perceptions of Clinton’s competence ($\beta = .32$, $SEB = .14$, $t = 3.46$, $p = .001$) and warmth ($\beta = .50$, $SEB = .14$, $t = 5.30$, $p < .001$) increased, so did the likelihood that participants would vote for her. All of the two-way interactions reached statistical significance; however, these 2-way interactions, as well as the main effects were qualified by the presence of a three-way interaction.

Table 1
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Likelihood of Voting for Hillary Clinton from Final Model (Main Effects and Interactions).

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	β
Party Identification (PI)	-.484	.149	-.231*
Warmth (W)	.665	.129	.450**
Competence (C)	.696	.138	.496**
W x C	.173	.048	.234**
W x PI	-.299	.130	-.237*
C x PI	.424	.127	.366**
W x C x PI	.102	.036	.243**

Note. All predictor variables were centered at their means. All analyses controlled for participant’s age, sex, ethnicity/race, and political party.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

To decompose the three-way interaction, we analyzed the simple slopes (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). These analyses yielded support for the hypotheses. First, for participants who strongly identified with their political party and perceived Clinton as high in competence, warmth was positively related to voting for Clinton ($\beta = .57$, $SEB = .22$, $t = 3.77$, $p < .001$). Further, as predicted, among those high identifiers who perceived Clinton to be low in competence, warmth was unrelated to voting for her ($p = n.s.$).

For participants weakly identified with their political party, warmth was positively related to voting for Clinton, regardless of perceptions of competence. Specifically, for low identifiers, among those who perceived Clinton as high in competence, as perceptions of warmth increased, intentions to vote for Clinton increased ($\beta = .65$, $SEB = .19$, $t = 4.92$, $p < .001$). Likewise, among

those low identifiers who perceived her as low in competence, as perceptions of warmth increased, so did the likelihood of voting for Clinton ($\beta = .58, SEB = .19, t = 4.37, p < .001$).

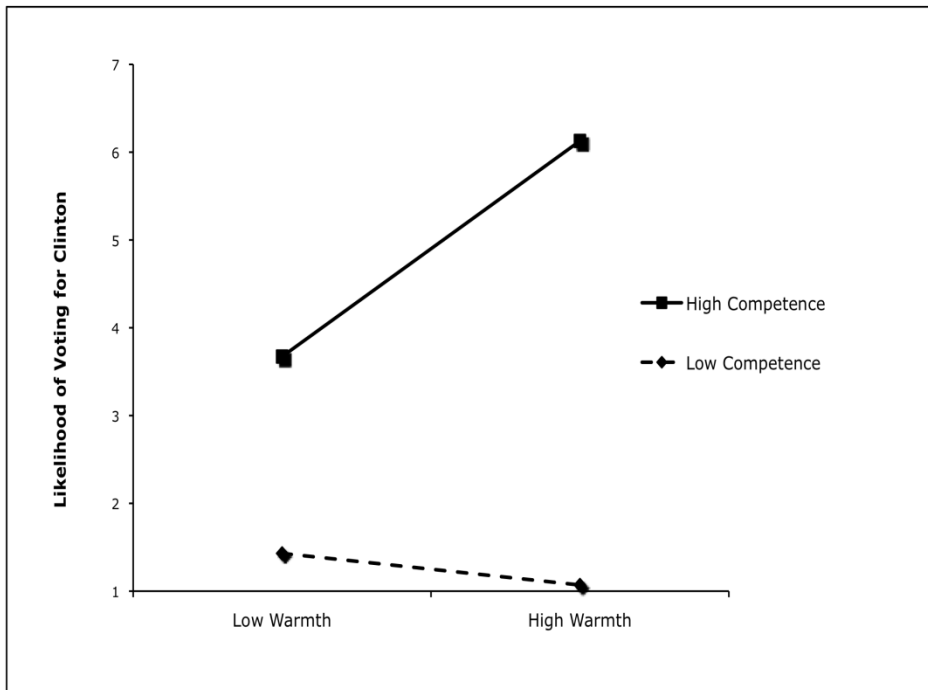


Figure 2. The relationship between warmth and competence among high identifiers in predicting voting for Clinton.

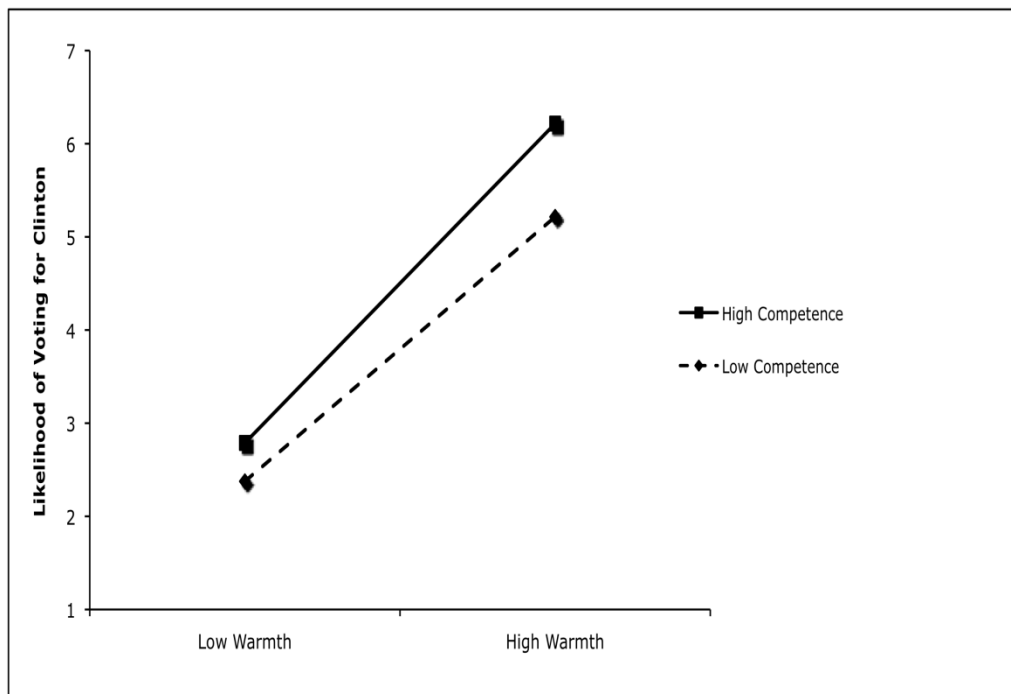


Figure 3. The relationship between warmth and competence among low identifiers in predicting voting for Clinton.

Discussion

The present results generally supported our hypotheses and are consistent with previous findings on perceptions of women who occupy leadership positions. Hypothesis 1 results can be applied to research on perceptions of female leaders and competent women. Our findings indicate that participants viewed Hillary Clinton as higher in competence than warmth, suggesting that participants noted that she possesses strong leadership qualities, but believed that she was less warm than competent.

Due to prescribed gender norms, women are expected to be warm, and to some extent incompetent (Eagly & Karau, 2002). A true competitor for president is doubtlessly a competent individual in the political arena (an area that few women occupy), Hillary Clinton being no exception. Competent women violate traditional gender roles and are often perceived as low in stereotypically feminine traits (e.g., warmth). Our results corroborate this ambivalent view of competent women: competence is a positive trait, however high ratings in competence for women tend to be accompanied by lower ratings in warmth. This suggests that competent women are often disliked as a result of their competence in a male dominated arena.

Glenn Beck's characterization of Clinton plainly demonstrates how many people view women who are competent in realms that are inconsistent with traditional gender roles. Hostile sexism is characterized by overtly adversarial feelings directed toward women, where women are perceived as trying to control men and trying to gain special favors through hiring practices that favor them (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Hostile sexism predicts negative evaluations of women who occupy nontraditional traditional roles (Fiske et al., 1999). Our results indicate that many participants may have ascribed to a similar line of thinking by admitting Clinton's competence, but thinking of her as relatively cold and unkind in comparison.

Though some scholars argue that competence is a more important trait for politicians to possess than warmth (e.g., Funk, 1997), we argue that for women politicians, being perceived as both competent and warm is important, particularly with consideration of identification with political parties. People often characterize competent women as cold; however, voters demonstrate a preference for competent leaders. This begs the question; can we elect a qualified and competent woman to the White House? Hypothesis 2 sought to shed light on how the dual contribution of participants' perceptions of Clinton's warmth and competence were related to decisions to vote for her.

Results from Hypothesis 2 provide evidence that among those who identify strongly with their political party, perceiving Clinton as warm was related to voting for her, only among those who also deemed her as highly competent. Conversely, for those who rated her as low in competence, perceiving Clinton as warm was unrelated to voting for her. In general, our results support the notion that for those heavily invested in the outcome of the election and its implications for the success of their social group, competence is weighed strongly in decisions to select a candidate, while warmth appears to be an important trait in its relation to high but not low competence.

A different pattern of results emerged for people who were relatively low in their identification with their political party. These individuals tended to weigh considerations of Clinton's warmth heavily, regardless of how they perceived her competence. This finding may have significant implications for when voters will apply gender stereotypes in candidate selection: when they weakly identify with their political party, as in this case, they appear to rely on perceptions of warmth rather than competence. Furthermore, this finding may suggest that leader prototypicality is not important among people who do not strongly identify with their group, perhaps because they are less invested in the outcomes of their group's success.

The current research highlights how voters perceived Hillary Clinton during the 2008 primary; however some limitations to this research should be noted. First, these findings are based on correlations, and thus should not be used to imply causation between predictor and outcome variables. The findings suggest how voters' perceptions of Clinton's warmth and competence may have contributed voting decisions, but we cannot state that these perceptions caused voters to cast their ballots for Clinton or for one of her competitors.

We chose to examine the impact of identification with political parties on voting behavior for the current study. These social groups are important in the context of elections, as parties are often the most salient feature of elections and politics. Identification with other social groups

may be important for examining the likelihood of voting for women candidates. For example, identification with gender groups may be particularly important, as may ethnic identification. We controlled for the effects of these variables in the current analyses; however, future research may examine how identification with such groups impacts support for women in the contexts of elections, particularly with respect to the group memberships of her opposition.

Finally, these findings are bound in a particular historical context as these data were collected in California, where Clinton won the Democratic primary. Clinton's primary opponent in the Democratic primary, Barack Obama, is also an untraditional politician, given his multiple heritage background and may not match a traditional president prototype (Americans only have experience witnessing White men as president, and neither Obama nor Clinton conformed to that image).

Taken together, these findings suggest that voters' perceptions of both warmth and competence are important predictors of voting for women politicians. Additionally, these results highlight the important challenges that women face when seeking to occupy this country's highest levels of political office. The 2008 presidential election gave Americans the opportunity to imagine a woman occupying the highest level of political office and perhaps the ability to start to incorporate women into leadership prototypes.

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