

POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING: EXPLORING EMPATHY-BASED INTERVENTION  
MECHANISMS TO COMBAT IMPLICIT BIAS AGAINST WOMEN  
AMONG U.S. POLICY MAKERS

Mayra Sharma

Plan II Honors Program  
The University of Texas at Austin

May 10, 2018

---

Stephen M. Sonnenberg, MD  
Supervising Professor  
Plan II Honors

---

Abigail R.A. Aiken, MD, MPH, PhD  
Second Reader  
LBJ School of Public Affairs

---

Rebecca A. Wilcox, Ph.D.  
Third Reader  
Honors & Scholarships, College of Natural Sciences

## **ABSTRACT**

Author: Mayra Sharma

Title: Political Decision-Making: Exploring Empathy-Based Intervention Mechanisms to Combat Implicit Bias Against Women among U.S. Policy Makers

Supervising Professors: Dr. Stephen Sonnenberg, Dr. Abigail Aiken, Dr. Rebecca Wilcox

This thesis examines how empathy-based strategies can be used to combat underlying biases in politicians that impact women in the United States. This will include an examination of the neurological, rational, and emotional frameworks politicians currently use when making decisions regarding emotionally charged topics. This discussion will then be followed by an exploration of emotional intelligence and empathy, and next, an analysis of the necessity of emotion and empathy within the political decision-making process.

Through a thorough review of the neuroscience, behavioral economics, and psychological literature, this thesis will explore how emotion-based perspectives can provide insight into how to build emotional intelligence and situational awareness in politicians. Supreme Court decisions will also be studied for legislative intent to analyze how political decisions are made and the role of empathy in these processes.

The implications of this thesis are relevant not only to those who are personally affected by policy decisions, but also to the broader population, as a lack of understanding and empathy characterizes our political climate. As politics become increasingly polarized, the gap in empathy grows larger and larger, and this has far-reaching effects on societal function, notably on how we understand and compromise with one another regarding contentious issues.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend the heartiest gratitude to my incredible professors, Dr. Stephen Sonnenberg and Dr. Abigail Aiken. With Dr. Sonnenberg's guidance, I pursued questions with a young, optimistic curiosity, and with each dead-end I encountered, he taught me how to discover opportunities for exploration and focal points of learning. So, thank you, Dr. Sonnenberg, for the passionate encouragement, and especially for taking a chance with me. I hope to make you proud today and every day. Dr. Aiken, thank you for your lively and engaging teaching, your ability to spark discussions of critical weight, and your warmth and compassion. After every conversation with you, I find myself inspired and optimistic about my ability to impact the world around me. You have a truly special ability to energize students to believe in themselves. I am grateful to have you as a role model for all that I hope to be and more. With each future step I take, I will be thinking about you and will use your influence as a guide.

My heart is also full of love and gratitude for my friends-turned-family here at the University of Texas as well. Thank you for the late night coffee runs, the falling-asleep-on-the-floor-of-the-College-of-Liberal-Arts-in-shifts as we wrote our theses, the motivational conversations and pep talks, and especially the laughs. I'll think back to this time with a special sense of fondness, and I owe much of who I am to you all.

Lastly, and most importantly, I am beyond appreciative of my mom, Babita, my dad, Ajay, and my brother, Mudit—who surround me in a constant blanket of love and support and who have never failed to believe in me and my reckless ambition. I am deeply indebted to you all. Mom and dad, I hope to one day make you all as proud to call me your daughter as I am proud to call you my parents.

With all your support, I will continue to keep my chin up and charge the mountain!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. Introduction
- II. History of Rationalism
- III. What is Political Decision-Making?
- IV. Neuroscience of the Relationship between Decision-Making and Emotions
- V. Emotional Intelligence and Empathy
- VI. Pitfalls in Current Political Decision-Making Processes
- VII. How *Should* Policy Makers make Decisions?
- VIII. Narrative Research as a Possible Intervention Strategy
- IX. Importance of Representation and Diversity
- X. Conclusion

## I. Introduction

According to many cognitive psychological studies, it is widely accepted that the “global” processing mechanism in the brain is activated when we are examining people and ideas as a whole. On the other hand, the “local” processing mechanism is activated when we are processing objects instead of people and parts instead of the whole (Gilbert and Sigman, 2007). In 2012, Sarah Gervais and her lab team applied this theory to the question of whether women's bodies were more likely than men's to be reduced to their sexual body parts in the minds of perceivers. They were testing to see if there would be a perceived difference between the parts versus whole body recognition, thus indicating differences in local versus global processing systems. They found that both men and women perceived women's bodies as reduced to their sexual body parts, meaning both sexes used local processing when examining women's bodies. Whereas, with images of males, the study concluded that both sexes used global processing and viewed their bodies as a whole (Gervais, 2012). Is it possible for us, as a society, to empathize with women if we view them as a sum of parts rather than whole beings? How is this empathy, or lack thereof, present in our policy decisions?

I hypothesize that there is an implicit bias against women among U.S. policy makers, and this bias can be minimized by enhancing empathy. I will start with a brief political history of implicit bias toward women by analyzing how policy-makers currently make their decisions, pinpoint flaws in this process, and use various neuroscience and psychology studies to analyze politician's emotional responses or lack thereof to certain decisions. As a proposed solution to the pitfalls in our current political decision-making process, I will discuss narrative research as it relates to Emotional Intelligence (EI) as the mechanism to enhance empathy both in politically

influential individuals. I will consider the primary components of EI and highlight those that are lacking in the political realm. I will also suggest diversity in representation as a way to enhance empathy and understanding within collective political decision-making groups and ultimately contribute to a culture where diversity is both valued and celebrated.

At the end of this discussion, I plan to use these empathy-building approaches to address our current politically polarized climate. To conclude, I will summarize the significance of this work with a discussion of what political empathy toward women can mean for women and for society as a whole.

## II. History of rational thinking

Derogatory views on women, many of which form the roots of some prevailing modern perceptions in the United States, can be traced back through the history of Early Modern Europe. With the emphasis on rationalism during and after the Enlightenment, we see why American society historically held a logic-based approach to politics rather than a romantic and emotional view. This rational lens excluded women from engaging in politics and characterized them as untrustworthy, incapable of making decisions, and largely irrational.

John Knox, an influential Scottish minister and theologian wrote *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regime of Women* in 1558, which reflected the widely held thoughts and beliefs about women at the time. In the pamphlet, he claimed that it is against religion, justice, and nature (science) to have women in positions of power because it would destabilize the entirety of society. His religious argument centered around the idea that since Eve tempted Adam with the apple and brought on the downfall of mankind, women should not be trusted. He used this as evidence to prove women were naturally made subject to man, claiming

that “after the fall, she was made subject to man by the irrevocable sentence of God.” He also asserted that “women in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man, not to rule and command him.” In terms of law and justice, Knox claims that “the Empire of Woman is a thing repugnant to justice, and the destruction of every commonwealth where it is received” (Knox, 1558). This view was commonly held at the time and inspired many of the laws and social norms that have since continued to be passed forward. Men made the decisions, and women were expected to follow them. An ideal that Rousseau championed in *Emile*, elite men were to discuss new political philosophies during this time. This led to the definition of a citizen applying solely to men, and women being primarily confined to domestic spaces (Rousseau, 1763).

Similar to the political differentiation between men and women, the scientific understanding of the time correspondingly argued that women were irrational and less than perfect. For example, Aristotle used the word “monstrous” to describe women, claiming that nature aimed for perfection, and men were perfection, while women were created as a result of a mishap in the typical course of conception that produced men. He used the example that if the parents were too old, then the “deformity” that resulted in the ordinary course of nature would produce a woman. Aristotle’s teachings were widely circulated, and as a result, women’s contribution to social good was reduced to their ability to procreate rather than engage in thought. Hippocrates, another famous thinker of the time, argued for a similar subjugation of women with a theory of bodily humors. Hot and dry attributes were considered positive, and they were typically attributed to men, while cold and wet attributes were negative and typically related to women. He argued that because women weren’t “hot and dry” they were irrational, and this was furthered by the idea that their uteruses would wander around in their bodies, and thus

cause them to act irrationally. As time went on, there were advancements in our understanding of anatomy and biology, but these fundamental ideas prevailed. For example, in the 1540s, artist and scientist Andreas Vesalius proposed the one body model, which stated that men and women have the same bodies, but women are just less perfectly formed, as Aristotle had described. Vesalius, however, attached anatomical pictures to this idea claiming that if you turn male genitals inside out, they then look like a woman's (Singer, 1958). These scientists were considered highly educated for their time, and thus their works were highly circulated and had an immense influence on public understanding.

Socially, the guiding principle in Early Modern Europe was that of coverture. This meant that men—husbands and fathers—were the legal actors for the entire household, and only they could make contracts, rent houses, and borrow money. They had an enormous set of legal rights and privileges that women did not. Under protection from the law, they were treated as masters and afforded the right to discipline their household to “maintain order” if necessary.

Both politically and socially, even with what were considered advancements in thought at the time, women were not incorporated in valuable discussions affecting the citizenry and were restricted to particular roles and domestic duties. These differential gendered role restrictions were justified by science and “rational” thought at the time, and this compartmentalization of men and women into particular segments of society left the imprint of a hierarchy that still impacts women's engagement in politics and legal matters today. To what extent does the historic lack of understanding of women's needs relate to a lack of empathy in our current set of policy makers?



For much of the history of the United States, political decision-making has also been viewed as a rational and systematic process. This ideology originally stemmed from across the Atlantic during the 17th and 18th-century Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was also known as the Age of Reason, and it was characterized by many European philosophers, such as Voltaire, Rousseau, and Kant, exploring the foundations of knowledge and the value of science as a metric that was different from the prevailing medieval importance of religion. The conviction was “that systematic inquiry using mathematical and quantitative methods will lead to certain knowledge about reality” (Van Asselt, 2010).

During the Enlightenment, many political philosophers also discussed the relationship between rationalism and romanticism. In this line of classic political theory, emotion was described as playing a negative role in the proposed theories about what it means to be a citizen and the ways in which societies should be governed. In their discussion of the relationship between emotions and political decision-making, Albertson and Gadarian describe the example of “Plato’s simile of the cave, humans are trapped by desire and prevented from engaging in reason. For Plato, the emotional disorder of democratic leaders creates an instability that will eventually lead to tyranny, or to rule by fear” (2017). Many of these ideas travelled across the Atlantic and spread throughout the Americas as well, so even American political philosophers viewed emotions as harmful and destructive. For example, Alexander Hamilton argued throughout the Federalist Papers, that “government should only respond to the true opinions of the community, not to ‘every sudden breeze of passion or to every transient impulse which the public may receive from the arts of men who flatter their prejudices to betray their interests’” (Albertson and Gadarian, 2017).

In fact, these Enlightenment values of logic and rigor were furthered by Claude Henri de Rouvroy and Auguste Comte who are associated with “positivism.” Positivists argue that science is defined primarily by its ability to empirically test causal relationships and “that science alone gives the ultimate truth about the whole of accessible reality” (Matthews, 2014). Famous positivists, such as John Stuart Mill, turned to science (including physics, biology, chemistry) to understand the world around them rather than metaphysics and God. The goal of this new understanding of what can be known was used “to reorganize society politically and religiously along rational, naturalistic, and humanistic lines, and to substitute for traditional religion a cult transcending both theism and atheism, a ‘Catholicism without Christ,’ with humanity replacing God as the object of veneration and devotion” (Matthews, 2014). These ideas of rationalism, logic and science found themselves entering into the social, legal and political sphere with discussions about positivism and the philosophy of science and have remained as the central method of decision-making in politics.

Sara Shaw discusses the historical roots of this highly rational view of political decision-making, commenting that this view emerged post-World War II out of a concern for policy to improve social conditions based on analytical study (Heineman et al. 1990). This model is described as an “objective separation of facts and values and the search for generalizable findings with quantitative and quasi-experimental approaches adopted that disaggregate the component parts of a policy problem in order to ‘better’ analyze discrete decisions” (Shaw 2010). Similarly, Sharon Krause explains judicial decision-making as a reflection of “the prevailing view among the general populace [that] equates impartial judgment with ‘rational’ judgment, which it sees as the triumph of reason over feeling, cognition over affect” (Krause,

2011). For the vast majority of our nation's history, we have underemphasized the role of emotions in both science and politics, and as a result, the influence of emotions on the process are both left out of the conversation and are less well understood.

### III. What is Political Decision-Making?

When thinking about the impact of our nation's history on the way we understand political decision-making, Kent Base presents a comprehensive definition. In the exploration of the politics of evidence-based sexual and reproductive health policy, Buse and his team describe four elements central to policy-making: "opportunities and constraints within the policy context of a specific sexual and reproductive health issue; the formal and informal processes by which decisions are made; the stakeholders who might be affected by a proposed reform; and the influence, interests, positions, and degree of commitment of various stakeholder groups in relation to a specific policy for sexual and reproductive health." (Buse, Martin-Hilber, Widyanoro, and Hawkes, 2006). This means that typically when policy-makers are formulating policy, stakeholders, in other words those affected by the policy, are one of the prime considerations. Since stakeholders are said to be central to the process of policy-making, how are their needs accessed? And if the stakeholders are women, how are their needs understood in a way that allows them to be captured by a policy?

Buse claims that stakeholder needs are assessed based on evidence from studies, all of which contribute to a policy-maker's general political intelligence, the ability to evaluate the feasibility of possible policy outcomes. Based on this political intelligence, "strategies can then be devised to determine the influence, perspectives, and positions of key players in the policy process" (Buse, Martin-Hilber, Widyanoro, Hawkes, 2006). Moghaddam describes decision

making as “struggling to reach a relevant choice which takes into account various contextual factors as well as the political problem of reconciling conflicts among subgoals and demands” (Moghaddam, 2017). His definition focuses on the way people exercise power together to make decisions on behalf of their organization, and this is the definition that will be used throughout this paper.

To better understand how policymakers think, we need also to better understand the pressures under which they are operating. The phrase “bounded rationality” is often associated with the idea that policymakers “can only gather limited information before they make decisions quickly. They will have made a choice before you have a chance to say ‘more research is needed’” (Courtney, Lovallo, and Clarke, 2013). To gather the information, identify the problem and produce an assessment, politicians will either use rational or irrational methods that include emotions and gut analyses (heuristics and biases). In the literature, we see that the “most common response to bounded rationality in scientific articles is to focus on the supply of evidence: to develop a hierarchy of evidence, which often privileges randomized control trials; to generate knowledge; and to present it in a form that is understandable to policymakers” (Cairney, 2015). But, when considering the nature of decision-making, we also must wonder if there is actually a need to pay attention to politicians’ demand for evidence. Do policymakers use the rational, evidence-approach often enough to necessitate this intense research in the field? Or should we be focusing our efforts more on the emotional side because that approach is in fact used more often in political decision-making? Cairney argues, “there is no point in taking the time to make evidence-based solutions easier to understand if policymakers are no longer interested. Successful advocates recognize the value of emotional appeals and simple stories to

draw attention to a problem” (Cairney, 2017). Cairney’s work acknowledges the lack of emotional appeals and stories in drawing policy-maker attention to the problems people face. The literature shows that although policy makers do draw from evidence to support their understanding of a problem, they primarily function and act under emotional decision-making methods. Therefore, we will examine these emotional decision-making processes in greater depth.

#### IV. Neuroscience of the Relationship between Decision-Making and Emotions

In the field of cognitive neuroscience, many studies have examined the relationship between implicit bias, emotions, and decision-making, particularly with regard to how we think and feel impacts our behavior (Gross, 2001). When faced with a decision to make, research has shown that the brain employs at least two systems for assessing the value of events, one of which relies on conscious recall. In other words, this system functions through memories of past experiences and evaluates options for action and considers possibilities for future outcomes. Then our brains shift into using logical reasoning and knowledge to decide if we will choose one way over another. Another system acts even before the first one. This system activates biases related to our previous emotional experience in situations that are comparable in nature to those we are currently being faced with. So, our non-conscious biases affect the options and strategies we use to reason—both of which impact how we choose to act in the present.

If we know that our brain impacts our decisions according to past biases, it’s important to consider the nature and types of these biases, as well as whether or not they actually exist.

Neuroscientist David Amodio demonstrated through an Implicit Association Test (IAT) that sex-based bias exists. The IAT showed that people were quicker at categorizing negative words over

positive words when a woman's face was flashed on a computer screen compared to when a man's face was flashed on the screen (Amodio and Devine, 2006). These split-second negative responses may exist because our brains have evolved to see patterns and categorize the world around us in order to simplify it. Thus, when we encounter another person, our brains rapidly try to categorize them as in-group or out-group. We make these calculations based on many factors, but if we know little about the person, it is often based on sex; and, this categorization is shaped by the culture in which we live. According to Amodio, while a tendency to categorize has been around for a while, the specific categories that we use and how we feel about them are a social phenomenon. Another neuroscientist, Dr. Elizabeth Phelps at New York University, reviewed brain-scanning studies that showed how sex is processed, evaluated and incorporated into decision-making (Stanley, Phelps, Banaji, 2008).

In a field where politicians are making decisions that impact millions, this split-second decision-making on behalf of our policy makers can have immense implications—particularly for women's health and reproductive rights issues. For example, the literature shows evidence of implicit bias affecting how politicians vote on a bill (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). These subliminal categorization tendencies are historically-rooted and still permeate human behavior.

There are multiple factors that contribute to this implicit sexism in politics including behaviors grounded in cultural norms and social environment (economic opportunities, gender discrimination, and neighborhood conditions), and although stories and emotional anecdotes are often what influences policy maker, there is a bias against women that obscures the helpfulness of these stories and anecdotes. Therefore, studying emotional factors and their political consequences is the next step in understanding this complex web of interactions.

Emotions are notoriously difficult to study with the same level of rigor that is used for most other subjects. As psychology “transformed from the science of the mind (James 1890, Wundt 1897) into the science of behavior (Skinner 1953, Watson 1919), an important topic slipped from scientific view: the subjective experience of emotion” (Barrett, Mesquita, Ochsner, and Gross, 2007). Even with recent advancements in the conversation regarding emotions, “the prevailing wisdom remains that ‘emotion researchers need to figure out how to escape from the shackles of subjectivity if emotion research is to thrive’ (LeDoux 2000)” (Barrett, Mesquita, Ochsner, and Gross, 2007). Their inherent subjective nature has left their study largely ignored and thus downplayed an understanding of their importance too. In fact, many policy makers emphasize that their decision-making process is free of emotion, and instead, is strictly rational (Zhong, 2007). But, we do have evidence that how we think and feel impacts our behavior (Gross, 2001). There has been much work related to how we process information and how that impacts our decisions, but there hasn’t been as much related to the downstream effects of the biases in these decisions.

It is difficult to define the word “rational” as well. In common language, rational might mean thinking according to objective facts and statistics rather than strong emotions. Even with the calculation of statistical probabilities or risks and rewards, we are still surrounded by a world of uncertainty. Therefore, it is unrealistic to presume that rational thought is devoid of bias and emotion; there will always be an element of bias or prejudice based on past experience that guides our decision-making. Dan Sperber, a cognitive scientist at Central European University says, “the main role of reasoning in decision-making is not to arrive at the decision but to be able

to present the decision as something that's rational" (Gutnik, Hakimzada, Yoskowitz, and Patel, 2006).

Although historically there has been a narrow emphasis on reason and logic in the decision-making process, this idea was brought into question by Iversky and Kahneman's iconic work, where they argued that "human reason left to its own devices is apt to engage in a number of fallacies and systematic errors, so if we want to make better decisions in our personal lives and as a society, we ought to be aware of these biases and seek workarounds" (Valentine and Richards, 2016). There is evidence that the brain has at least two processing systems that are used to access the value of events. One of the two systems of thinking, which Daniel Kahneman refers to as *rational thinking*, functions through memory and the conscious recall of options for actions. Logical reasoning of the possibilities impacting a decision characterizes this system of thinking in a way that leads to a logical conclusion. It is slow, systematic, and deliberate (Kahneman, 2013).

Kahneman refers to the other system of thinking as *intuitive thinking*. This system, on the other hand, is fast, automatic, emotional, and for the most part, unconscious. It functions using heuristics and categorical thinking to decide on a course of action. Heuristics are often referred to as simple mental rules of thumb that allow us to process information quickly and make a decision. This second system is related to how we interpret our past emotional experiences and use them to make decisions in comparable situations. Rather than resulting in logical conclusions, it results in impressions, feelings, and inclinations that will ultimately impact a decision. This is often referred to as a "hunch," which relates to Social Cognition Theory (SCT), which states that part of an individual's knowledge acquisition is a result of observing others.



This means that an individual's social interactions, experiences, and media engagement will dictate to a degree what a person knows about the world. We see this theory in practice quite often. For example, the various political news outlets someone is exposed to can impact their political knowledge. SCT states that mental categories and personal experiences become neurologically integrated into our way of thinking, which implies that the social categories we use to describe people (such as Latino, African America, White, and Asian) can become hard-wired into our cognitive functioning (Feldman, Mesquita, Ochsner, Gross, 2007). Therefore, these stereotypes we hold impact how we think and make decisions regarding related topics or situations. The fact that these non-conscious biases affect the options and reasoning strategies we present to our conscious selves has immense implications for political decision-making, particularly in regards to issues impacting previously oppressed group, such as women.

#### V. Emotional Intelligence and Empathy

The previously described historic view that emotions blur decision-making skills has immense implications, because for the past several years, emotions haven't been studied as an element of decision-making. It was believed that we shouldn't trust emotions. But in recent years, new work in legal theory and psychology "challenged the traditional dichotomy between reason and emotion, showing that the two are inextricably linked in decision making" (Krause, 2011).

Emotions are an adaptive response that are vital for normal reasoning and are crucial to learning and memory as well. Therefore, it is worth considering in greater depth how emotions, and particularly emotional intelligence can be valuable in making policy decisions that impact large populations. In particular, Krause discusses how some scholars have argued for the value of

empathy in jury deliberations, saying that “this new work on empathy gives us reason to appreciate at least some kinds of emotion in judicial decision making. The new work...has not yet articulated adequate normative criteria for the proper incorporation of emotion, nor has it attended sufficiently to the wider context of social and political conditions necessary to make emotional judgment impartial” (Krause, 2011).

The social and political conditions Krause describes as important for impartial decisions are essentially indicative of emotionally intelligent thought—contextualized, “intelligent responses that are attuned both to events in the world and to the person’s important values and goals” (Nussbaum, 2006). This means that emotions provide a unique insight into what an individual or even a collective might value and believe. For example, anger might result from the belief that one has been wronged. Nussbaum elaborates on this example of anger resulting from the breaking of a value system through a discussion about rape, arguing that “it is because we believe that murder and rape (for instance) constitute ‘important damages to human beings’ that we ‘fear them when they are impending, [are] angry about them when they occur, and ... feel compassion when they happen to another’” (Nussbaum, 2006). And this form of compassion and understanding underlies the idea of empathy as well.

Empathy is a complicated emotion that Krause defines as the “affective-cognitive communication of sentiments between persons that transpires through perspective-taking” (Krause, 2011). And, since emotions are said to frequently involve beliefs, empathy can allow for the communication of this intellectual content (De Sousa, 1997). De Sousa analyzes the philosophical and behavioral literature to argue that there is nothing irrational about emotions. In fact, in his book “The Rationality of Emotion,” he claims that our ability to make thoughtful and

reasoned decisions is because we are creatures with a wide range of emotions. So, empathy is “a form of understanding that combines feeling with thinking, and the emotions it communicates are themselves a mix of affect and cognition” (Krause, 2011). Under this definition, empathy seems to wholly capture the debate between rational and irrational and can potentially serve as a comprehensive approach to effective decision-making. Lynne Henderson agrees about the value of emotion, suggesting that viewing an individual’s situation in light of their emotional experience can provide us with a more nuanced understanding of the meaning and significance of the situation compared to an understanding if we used only “disembodied reason” (Henderson, 1987). Henderson argues that “feeling is denied recognition and legitimacy under the guise of the ‘rationality’ of the Rule of Law...The law becomes not merely a human institution affecting real people, but rather The Law.” (Henderson, 1987). She also agrees with Krause and Nussbaum in the value of empathy in legal issues, asserting that legal issues are fundamentally *human* problems, and therefore empathy is a form of cognitive understanding that provides a rich source of knowledge and insight into moral issues that were previously limited to “reductionist rationality.” Henderson explicitly asserts that “empathy enables the decision maker to have an appreciation of the human meanings of a given legal situation. Empathy aids both processes of discovery - the procedure by which a judge or other legal decision maker reaches a conclusion - and processes of justification - the procedure used by a judge or other decision maker to justify the conclusion - in a way that disembodied reason simply cannot” (Henderson, 1987).

Henderson’s work was particularly groundbreaking because it introduced the value of empathetic listening in the context of stories, as she analyzes why *Roe v. Wade* and later cases demonstrate

the Court's failure to hear empathic narratives; this is an idea that will be explored later in the thesis.

In addition, fundamental to the definition of empathy is “perspective-taking.” It describes the ability to understand the situation of another in terms of their goals, interests, and affects. Being able to “perspective-shift” and be empathetic is not gender specific (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974) and is a characteristic that can be learned. One of the primary factors that impacts someone’s flexibility with perspective-shifting and empathy is experience. For example, those who have experienced pain before are more likely to personalize the pain and suffering of others and be more strongly impacted by it (Bandura, 1986). Henderson confirms too that “we are more likely to empathize with people similar to ourselves...elites will empathize with the experience of elites, men empathize with men, women with women, whites with whites” (Henderson, 1987). And although empathy for those who are different from oneself requires more cognitive work, she also claims that it is most definitely possible.

These arguments in support of the role of emotions in political decision-making are also supported by cognitive neuroscientific studies. For example, Green and his team used fMRI to study emotion and moral judgment and found that “moral dilemmas vary systematically in the extent to which they engage emotional processing and that these variations in emotional engagement influence moral judgment” (Green, 2001). Similarly, cognitive neuroscientist Elizabeth Phelps and social psychologist Mahzarin Banaji used fMRI to examine the brain’s emotion center, the amygdala, and how it related to the way they evaluated racial groups. Their results suggested that “amygdala and behavioral responses to Black-versus-White faces in White subjects reflect cultural evaluations of social groups modified by individual experience” (Phelps

and Banaji, 2000). Another fMRI study showed evidence that social exclusion activates the same regions in the brain as would be activated by physical sensations of pain (Eisenberger, Lieberman, and Williams, 2003). This means that someone who has experienced social exclusion before is more likely to empathize with another individual who might be experiencing something similar. This does not mean, however, that experience is the only factor that determines an individual's ability to empathize with another. Engaging with various narratives outlining someone's experience can also allow those previously unexposed to the experience to still empathize with an individual. For example, since men will not be able to fully experience the micro-aggressions and day-to-day unique encounters associated with being a woman, they can still empathize with women by being exposed to and listening to their stories. The same would be for those of different races. This means that empathy can be learned, and if it can be learned, we must also consider how it might be integrated into our decision-making mechanisms.

In their review essay of Nussbaum's work, Huang and Anderson acknowledge that "Nussbaum is most compelling when she contends that our system of law cannot be understood without some reference to emotions, which indicate what is important to those persons the law should protect" (Huang and Anderson, 2004). So, if we know that emotions impact our political decisions and that men are less likely to be empathetic to women than they are to men, and men make up the vast majority of our political decision-making bodies, it is important to consider to what extent women are impacted by this differential understanding of emotions.

This role of empathy in political decision-making can be extended to the broader idea of emotional intelligence. In response to our historic understanding of the decision-making process as functioning best when "replacing intuition with more intensive data collection and analytical

processes enabled the decision-maker to construct linear models to produce relevant predictors... and transform our cognitive functions to resemble those of an emotion-free microprocessor,” (Hess and Bacigalupo, 2013) Simon argues that emotion and rationality are, in actuality, intimately linked together, and emotional intelligence serves as the bridge between the two. In their paper, Hess and Bacigalupo discuss EI awareness as it relates to enhancing decisions and decision-making processes. Although their findings were specifically regarding non-profit organizations, their insights also apply to political decision-making as well. To better understand their argument and those of others, we will first explore what Emotional Intelligence means.

The first use of the phrase EI has been attributed to Wayne Payne’s 1985 thesis titled, *A Study of Emotion: Developing Emotional Intelligence*. Thereafter, two diverging, but often overlapping, theories about EI developed. The ability model was developed by Peter Salovey and John Mayer in 1989. This model focuses on the individual’s ability to process emotional stimulation and use this information to respond properly in a social environment. The trait model, developed by Konstantin Vasily Petrides, focuses primarily on behavioral dispositions. The most recent model, the mixed model, combines both the ability and trait models. This is the model that most researchers use when discussing EI, and it was based on the premise that “emotional competencies are not innate traits, but rather learned skills that may be developed and improved” (Hess and Bacigalupo, 2013).

As for the different components of EI, Daniel Goldman argues that EI has the following essential elements: (1) knowing one’s emotions; (2) managing one’s emotions; (3) motivating oneself; (4) recognizing emotions in others; and (5) handling relationships (Goleman, 2003).

However, according to most researchers, these elements can be condensed into four primary categories—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management with related behavioral competencies as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1.

*Dimensions of emotional intelligence and associated behavioral competencies*

<b>Individual</b>		<b>Individual relationship and interaction with others</b>	
<b>Self-Awareness</b>	<b>Self-Management</b>	<b>Social Awareness</b>	<b>Relationship Management</b>
Self-confidence	Self-control	Empathy	Developing others
Accurate self-assessment	Trustworthiness	Service orientation	Influence
	Adaptability	Organizational awareness	Communication
	Achievement drive		Conflict management
	Initiative		Leadership
			Change catalyst
			Building bonds and teamwork
			Collaboration

\* Reprinted from Goleman, D. (2001). *The emotionally intelligent workplace: how to select for, measure, and improve emotional intelligence in individuals, groups, and organizations* (1st ed). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Although all four of these components impact politicians and their EI, I will focus primarily on self-awareness and social awareness as they are the most influential. Goleman describes self-awareness as having a “deep understanding of one’s emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs and drives. People with strong self-awareness are neither overly critical nor

unrealistically hopeful. Rather, they are honest—with themselves and with others” (Goleman, 2004). This is important in the scope of politician emotional intelligence, because this type of understanding of the self would allow politicians to consciously keep their biases at bay. It is impossible for anyone to completely rid themselves of all their biases, but having a level of self-awareness about these biases might help us better recognize how our feelings affect us, other people, and our job performance. This does, however, seem overly optimistic. How can we foster self-awareness? And if we can encourage it, how can we ensure it’s salient enough to truly have an impact on our decisions and thought processes?

In short, we cannot. Although self-awareness as an element of politician EI is valuable to consider, it is not nearly as influential in encouraging systemic change as much as the social awareness aspect of EI does. This is due partly due to the fact that self-assessment is at the level of the individual, whereas social awareness contextualizes the individual within the broader jurisdiction of their relationship and interaction with others. As such, social awareness involves a recognition of various perspectives and unique experiences, diversity in narrative, and an organizational awareness. Empathy lies at the foundation of both the self and social elements of EI because it involves not only the individual’s ability to perceive their own emotions, but also the individual’s ability to contextualize these emotions within broader patterns the individuals might encounter.

#### A. How are Emotional Intelligence and Political Decision-Making related?

Yip and Côté studied whether or not people with high emotional intelligence can correctly pinpoint what specific events caused them to feel the emotions they felt (self-awareness) and whether or not these people can filter out the effects of emotions that aren’t



rooted in an emotion-based experience (2013). In one of their studies, individuals “high in emotion-understanding ability showed less impact of incidental anxiety on risk estimates when informed about the incidental source of their anxiety.” Having an understanding of the impact of emotional intelligence can better decision-making, particularly in high-stakes public settings where decisions are made, such as federal governing bodies, operating rooms, and intelligence agencies.

So, this need for empathy is especially important in politics, because research also shows that male policy-makers may have implicit biases about women, and these biases reveal themselves not only through public remarks, but also through their policy-decisions. In the past, there have been many politicians who have made public statements that demonstrate a lack of emotional intelligence and understanding. For example, Rick Santorum, former Senator representing Pennsylvania, said in an interview with Piers Morgan on CNN in 2012 that “[rape victims] should make the most of a bad situation.” We hear these types of inconsiderate remarks from our current President as well. The well-known example of the interview with CNN in August 2015 involved President Donald Trump implying that journalist Megyn Kelly was asking him difficult questions during the Republican Presidential Debate because she was menstruating. He said, “you could see there was blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her — wherever.” It is clear that these examples reflect a lack of emotional intelligence. Men might not understand women and their lived experiences or they simply might not care because of the perception that these issues don’t affect them. This causes them to not only make dangerously inconsiderate remarks, but also impacts the ways in which they decide on particular policy matters as will be discussed in a later section. Therefore, an important question to consider is

whether or not we can build empathy, and if we can build empathy, how much empathy is enough for politicians?

## VII. Pitfalls in Current Political Decision-Making Processes

Now that we've considered the neurobiological basis of decision-making, we will contextualize this information to see how policy-makers make their decisions and in what capacity evidence is used to support these decisions.

### A. How do Policy Makers currently use Evidence?

Both Sara Shaw and Nick Black claim that the current model of policy making is based on a direct relationship: research influences policy. This is because people recognize the role of authority in making impactful decisions: “the views and priorities of healthcare professionals (and doctors in particular) dominate healthcare policies. It assumes research evidence can and should influence health policy.” (Black, 2001). Politically, we've believed that a largely rational method has been employed in making decisions for large populations. Under this perspective, policy is a formal structural intervention that is based on rational, political thought and “evidence-based policy.”

According to Ian Sanderson, evidence-based policy is when decision making is “regarded as a science that involves problem identification, collection of data on alternative solutions and selection of the alternative that best resolves the problem” (Sanderson, 2006). This understanding is consistent with the trend of overlaying natural science methodologies to the study of social phenomenon (Bonner, 2003). And it operates under the idea that the more rigorous, scientific data policy makers collect, the closer they are to making more and more rational decisions,

because they assume that these empirical approaches help them obtain “facts” about social and political problems, which would then most effectively impact policy decisions (Parsons 1995).

In theory, evidence-based policy sounds like an ideal method to ensure that the policies we have in place reflect as accurately as possible the social and public health issues we face. Black explores the extent of researcher success at facilitating evidence-based policy by studying the relationship between research and policy-making over the course of five years. He makes a distinction between “practice policies (use of resources by practitioners), service policies (resource allocation, pattern of services), and governance policies (organizational and financial structures)” (Black, 2001). He concludes that the linear model where research maps onto policy functions quite well in practice policies, but poorly in both service and governmental policies. Most public health issues fall under the service and governance policies, so health-related policies aren’t as based on evidence as we might think.

Black suggests research evidence has had little influence on service policies because policy makers “have goals other than clinical effectiveness (social, financial, strategic development of service) and there is a lack of consensus about research evidence (complexity of evidence, scientific controversy, different interpretations)” (Black, 2001). As for governance policies, Black argues that decisions were based on experiential evidence, ideology and electoral considerations, claiming that “clearly, research has only a limited role because governance policies are driven by ideology, value judgments, financial stringency, economic theory, political expediency, and intellectual fashion” (Black 2001).

Black’s studies show that there is a clear gap in how current policy makers are engaging in seemingly informed decisions. Although Black was analyzing the political conditions in the

United Kingdom, these patterned flaws in understanding and the application of research can be extended to United States politics too. In other words, these conflicting goals (electoral self-interests, social, and financial) and lack of consensus still impacts U.S. service and governmental policies. Black concludes that “researchers have to accept that their work may be ignored because policy makers have to take the full complexity of any situation into account” (Black, 2001). The question then becomes, how do policy makers take the full complexity of a situation into account, especially regarding moral issues, when it may be entirely separate from a base of evidence.

### B. Heuristics and Cognitive Biases as Barriers

As alluded to in the previous section, despite the fact that many policy makers argue that they make their decisions through *rational thinking*, there are elements of *intuitive thinking* that impact their decisions as well. Specifically heuristics, unconscious problem-solving strategies, are used to "keep the information processing demands of the task within bounds" (Abelson and Levi, 1985). Heuristics such as affect, anchoring, and availability largely influence political decisions and might result in biased decision making. (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001). The affect heuristic, for example, describes our tendency to base decisions on emotional reactions rather than a calculation of risks and benefits. It occurs when we think that if a decision “feels” good, it is the right decision. This can be compared to making a decision based on a “gut feeling.” The anchoring heuristic is described by our intuitive tendency to think that recently acquired information is relevant when making a decision. Lastly, the availability heuristic describes our tendency to think that events that are easily retrieved from our memory are either more likely to happen again or more important.

Biases such as the confirmation bias and framing effect also impact our emotional decision-making processes. Confirmation bias describes the phenomenon that we typically interpret new information in a way that validates our previous conceptions. The framing effect describes how our thinking is biased to reflect how information is presented. This includes the visual representation of statistical data in graphs and charts as a means of impacting our thinking.

Emotions can also influence the depth of information processing as it relates to decision-making. Schwarz proposes that, if “emotions serve in an adaptive role by signaling when a situation demands additional attention, then negative mood should signal threat and thus increase vigilant, systematic processing, and positive mood should signal a safe environment and lead to more heuristic processing” (1990). There are many studies that support Schwarz’s claim as well that people in positive affective states are more likely to be influenced by heuristics such as expertise and attractiveness (and other stereotyping strategies), whereas those in negative affective states were less likely to be influenced. Since affective state might impact decisions, we know there is a certain irrational element in our decision-making that is not well understood.

Groups or individuals also typically use a cognitive heuristic called satisficing to most efficiently make decisions. This decision-making strategy is related to searching through information until an acceptable threshold of certainty is met to confidently make a choice. The term combines the words satisfy and suffice, and is used when decision-makers cannot determine an optimal solution, either because there is too much information for them to serially process, or because there are time constraints on their thinking processes. This is a political reality that underlies many of the ways in which political committees decide on a certain course of action.

So, intuitive thinking is present in our decision-making processes. Emotion is present, and it is impacting the decisions our political leaders make. We cannot ignore it, because there are dangers to leaving emotions unchecked as well. Since we know we use them, it would be in our best interest to further examine how they function so we can most effectively make decisions that benefit people equally.

### C. Reproductive Rights Case Studies Analyzed for Legislative Intent

When making decisions that impact the masses, we learned that emotions have historically been viewed as arbitrary, unanalyzable, and as barriers to understanding and making objective decisions. Legal reasoning, on the other hand, is treated as a primarily deductive process that is separate from emotions (Langdell 1871). The current Federal Rules of Evidence declares that evidence should not be used in trial if it encourages the jury to decide on an improper basis, “commonly...an emotional one” (Federal Rule of Evidence 403). The traditional assumption that those trained in the law should not traffic in emotion has led to gaps in our knowledge about the role of emotions in our key decisions. Jurors are studied the most often, but these studies rarely focus on their emotions, and even fewer focus on their emotions as a collective body even though we know they play a role in the making of decisions.

Terry Maroney, who researches the role of emotion in law, explains that judges are typically taught to be “emotionless practitioners of pure reason” (Maroney, 2011). This sharp separation between emotion and reason can be dangerous as it alters what makes an argument convincing (Bandes and Salerno 2014). There’s a greater focus on the logos rather than the pathos, and it ignores the power of pathos in impacting people and their lived experiences. There is a gap in research and understanding of how collective bodies use emotions to make decisions

that impact many, and this gap extends to policy decisions impacting women's reproductive rights.

The following examples will help us further explore the political decision-making process and the steps that lead to the creation of a policy. We will do so by studying iconic reproductive rights Supreme Court cases for their legislative intent, which is defined as the “search for decisional context” (Nourse, 2014). This will include an exploration of intuition-based assumptions with the examples about later-gestation abortions and rape law, historic notions following the abortion debate as an example, religious influences with the examples about abstinence-only education and the fetal remains burial law, and statistical limitations with an example about unintended pregnancy. These various explorations of emotion and bias in reproductive health policy will be italicized with their own sub-section heading to guide the discussion.

#### *A Note about Reproductive Rights Issues and Reproductive Justice*

Before delving into this analysis, however, it is important to acknowledge that women's experiences are shaped by many facets of their identity—whether that be their sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, cultural background or religious affiliation. Each of these aspects of their identity and the intersections among them are important in defining how we discuss women's experiences. Therefore, the metric according to which the following examples of national policies will be measured against will be the extent to which they encapsulate the diversity of women's experiences—all women's experiences, regardless of race, class, education, and more.

The importance of intersectionality in women's health issues relates to the concept of reproductive justice, which Ross defines as “an intersectional theory emerging from the

experiences of women of color whose multiple communities experience a complex set of reproductive oppressions” (Ross, 2011). This notion of reproductive justice is based on the understanding that the impacts of race, class, gender and sexual identity oppressions are not additive but integrative, further emphasizing the fact that intersectionality is important to consider in the analysis of reproductive issues. Therefore, the following analysis will be conducted under a reproductive justice framework that captures the impact of a woman’s societal institutions, environment, economics and culture on her reproductive life and recognizes the complex nature of the interactions between identities.

*Intuition-based Assumptions: Later-Gestation Abortions*

The first example of pitfalls in our current decision-making process is described by the 2007 Supreme Court case, *Gonzales v. Carhart*, when a rule against later gestation abortions was upheld. This decision was partially based on assumptions regarding what the woman receiving the abortion would or should feel. Justice Kennedy wrote that, “respect for human life finds an ultimate expression in the bond of love the mother has for her child.” In this case, the Court’s decision assumed post-abortion regret. Chris Guthrie, a behavioral law and economics professor, argued that the Court misunderstood the dynamics of regret and “ignored the available evidence that most women who choose abortion manage their feelings of regret and use them in constructive ways. Their primary feelings are positive emotions like relief” (Guthrie 2007-2008). The research available even at that time showed that post-abortion, women feel more positive emotions than those Justice Kennedy described. This describes the clear disconnect between what the research demonstrated and what the Court decided upon.



Judges and jurors also have intuition-based assumptions regarding the emotional state of the defendant. They might imagine that they should feel and outwardly display remorse—and if not, they must not be feeling any remorse, so the sentence must be harsher. In fact, in more extreme capital cases, the “perceived lack of remorse is one of the main factors leading juries to sentence a defendant to death” (Haney, Sontag & Constanzo 2010). So, women might not be allowed to obtain late-term abortions because of arbitrary emotional standards that are based in a history with sexist undertones that do not allow women to have autonomy over their bodies.

*Intuition-based Assumptions: Rape Law*

The second example of a failure within our current political decision-making process relates to the norms and expectations of emotional reactions that are particularly salient in rape law. Legal actors may have beliefs about what a “real” rape survivor might feel and how they express their feelings. For example, investigators might believe a rape victim should seem hysterical, not calm after the incident. Miller and Armstrong share examples of a rape victim whose “account was disbelieved and who was charged with perjury for reporting the rape, based largely on her flat affect” (Miller and Armstrong, 2015). Another study showed that judges in Minnesota viewed rape victims as more credible when they expressed compassion or forgiveness toward their assailant, instead of anger (Schuster and Proppen, 2011). Research shows, however, that elements of shock, denial and other common responses may lead rape victims to display outwardly unemotional affects (McKimmie, Masser and Bongiorno, 2014).

Even at a collective level, women and their credibility might be undermined because of expectations for emotional reactions. This is detrimental, because if they share their experiences, they might not always be taken seriously. For example, if a woman on the jury was angered by

the fact that the rest of the jury was thinking a survivor of rape had to visibly act with forgiveness toward their assailant, the jury might find her “unpersuasive” due to her heightened emotions. The influence of emotional display has also been shown to impact the persuasive capability of jurors in interaction with fellow jurors in a gendered manner. One study found that, “an angry male juror is regarded as persuasive; an angry female juror as shrill, emotional and therefore unpersuasive” (Salerno and Peter-Hagene, 2015). These same biases exist in political decision-making and are impacting women’s credibility. The credibility of a woman isn’t based on the letter of the law; instead, it is based on arbitrary, gendered biases that are impacting legal outcomes, and therefore individual lives. This highlights why it is important that juries and other large bodies of decision-makers should and must have women as representatives to provide a sense of balance to these gendered interests. This isn’t to say, however, that only women can truly understand what other women are feeling or have experienced. Men serving on a jury are also capable of empathy towards women and capable of understanding their experiences, but they must first build social awareness of these fundamental biases that are present within the systematic way group decisions are made.

#### *Historic Notions: The Abortion Debate*

Relying primarily on historic beliefs to make a decision, particularly one regarding an issue of reproductive rights, serves as another example of a pitfall in our current decision-making process. This can best be exemplified through the question of abortion rights in the United States.

When examining the series of Supreme Court cases related to abortion, we see a path-dependent nature of the decisions that relies primarily on precedent. Figure 1 describes a timeline

of the Supreme Court cases that influenced the conversation regarding abortion rights in the United States to an extent. As can be seen on the far right, the first case *Griswold v. Connecticut* provided those in legal marital relationships with the right to contraceptive use in 1965 under the 14th amendment's right to privacy clause. Shortly thereafter, this right was extended to unmarried individuals under *Eisenstadt v. Baird* in 1972. This decision came a year before the famous *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973, which extended women the right to choose whether or not they wanted to terminate a pregnancy. These three decisions were all made using the right to privacy as a critical part of the ruling. Justice Harry Blackmun declared that the right of privacy protected by the 14th amendment "is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy." Therefore, despite the considerable strides made for women and their ability to have control over their own bodies, the ruling wasn't made with the intention of truly extending reproductive rights to women, so it came with some stipulations.

The Court made it clear that they did not grant an "unlimited right," meaning the states could essentially enact various regulations to minimize the scope of impact of this ruling by interpreting the "point of viability" of the fetus as they deemed fit. Many states, for example, implemented the trimester framework to regulate abortions. The trimester framework created a tiered approach to when the state could and could not intervene in abortions. During the first trimester of pregnancy, the Court decided the decision to abort was left to the mother, since an abortion was shown to be a safer procedure than childbirth. For the second trimester, the state could regulate abortion only if doing so would protect the mother's health. The final trimester was when the fetus was considered "viable," so abortion was prohibited, unless it was absolutely necessary to preserve the health of the mother. This decision was contrary to the medical

evidence present at the time that showed “maternal health risks and fetal viability demonstrates that the trimester framework [was] inconsistent with current medical knowledge....Medicine, as demonstrated through fetal research and technological advances, has surpassed the limitations of the trimester framework” (Mangel, 1988).

Following *Roe v. Wade*, almost 20 years later, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* reached the Supreme Court. As a result of this ruling, the trimester framework and regulations such as ensuring a woman had “informed consent” by instituting a mandatory 24-hour waiting period (although it served no practical function) or requiring a minor to obtain parental consent (although it was clear this could serve as a barrier to obtaining abortions) were removed. States were still, however, granted freedom to introduce regulations as long as they did not constitute an “undue burden” on the woman.

In 2013, with Texas House Bill 2 (HB2), the “admitting privileges” and “surgical center requirement” were introduced. These two requirements placed regulations on abortion-providing facilities and resulted in a dramatic reduction of the number of abortion clinics in the state and served to increased travel time for those in need of abortions. These restrictions were brought into question by *Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt* which argued that HB2 placed an “undue

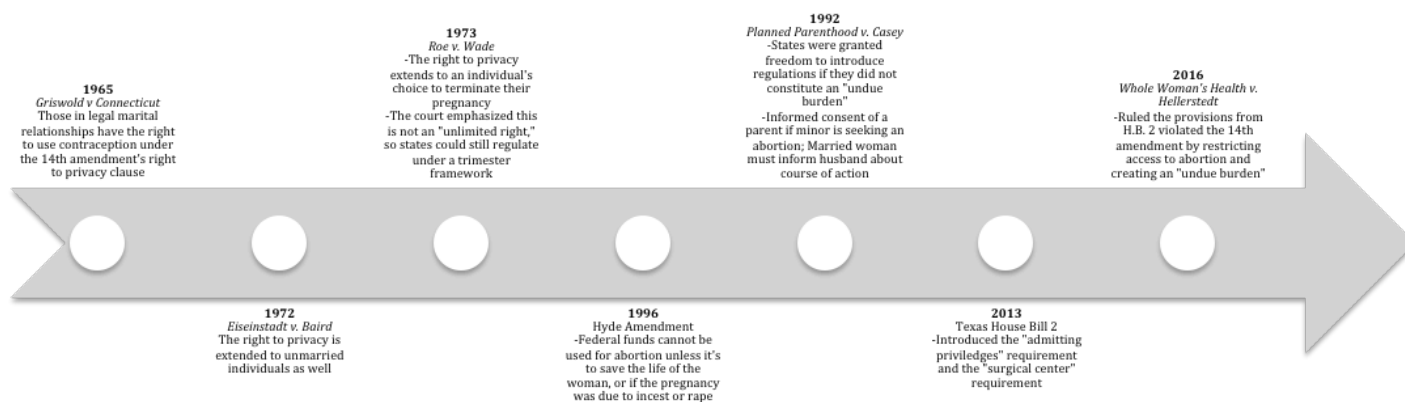


Figure 1. Timeline of key Supreme Court cases related to abortion rights

burden” on women in need of care. Researchers cited an increase in cost for the remaining clinics, an unquenchable demand with the intense increase in number of people per clinic, and quantified the increase in travel time associated with these changes. As a result, the requirements introduced by HB2 were ruled as placing an undue burden on women attempting to get an abortion.

Throughout this timeline of Supreme Court case decisions, it is clear that the decisions are primarily based on past precedent that has been set. As the years progressed, it became clear that more and more evidence was available, however, the historic view of abortion prevailed none-the-less, although it was disguised as progress at times. And as discussed in the section regarding the history of rationalism, women were historically viewed as reckless and incapable of controlling their own bodies. This ideology remained, but the progress was masked under the right to privacy, not the right to bodily autonomy for women. Many narratives of women’s experiences with abortions, difficulty with accessing abortions, and subsequent turning to unsafe methods for abortion weren’t fully captured within the conversations regarding these issues. There are also particular challenges faced by women at risk for experiencing access barriers, such as those who are poor, those on Medicaid or who are uninsured, as well as racial and ethnic minorities. Marginalized women and their narratives were left out of the conversation as well, making the decision-making grounds used dangerous and not comprehensive enough.

As described in the note in an earlier section, the isolation of abortion from other social justice issues that concern communities contributes to, rather than counters, reproductive oppression. Abortion separate from other social justice/human rights issues neglects issues of economic justice, the environment, criminal justice, immigrants’ rights, militarism,

discrimination based on race and sexual identity, and a host of other concerns directly affecting an individual woman. Decisions that are based primarily on precedent fail to capture the narratives that help policy makers better achieve a more nuanced understanding of this complex web of identity interactions.

Within Texas, we can also more clearly see the impact of decisions not based on evidence, particularly in how it affects women of lower socioeconomic status. For example, in 2011, the legislature decided it would no longer fund Planned Parenthood and even eliminated funding for clinics that were associated with abortion clinics, even if they didn't perform abortions within their own confines. As a result, the entire family planning budget for the state was cut by two-thirds (Goodwyn, *Texans Try To Repair Damage Wreaked Upon Family Planning Clinics*, 2013). The legislature was targeting abortion, but as a result, many family planning clinics—particularly rural clinics that provided access to care (gynecological/obstetrical care, pap smears, etc) and resources to individuals who would have trouble accessing resources otherwise would have significantly less funds. In 2013, researchers found that these dramatic cuts resulted in fewer than half the number of women obtaining care from women's health programs in the state of Texas than before the cuts. Texas' women's health program managed to serve fewer than half the number of women it had before. Remaining clinics have an unprecedented demand that they are far from satisfying even when operating under full capacity. Throughout the state, “just 22 percent of childbearing-age women who qualify for subsidized preventive health care treatment actually get it” (White and Grossman, 2013). So, these decisions are differentially impacting women of lower socio-economic status and of specific races, too.

*Influence of Religion: Abstinence-Only Education*

Similarly, religious beliefs often play an influential role in political decision-making with regards to reproductive rights issues. The literature reflects a dynamic discussion regarding the dangers of religious differences to democratic deliberation (Habermas, 2006) and the ideals of justice (Rawls, 1997). Sociologists have researched the role of religion in individuals' political stances on controversial issues such as abortion (Evans, 2002), euthanasia (Moulton, Hill, and Burdette 2006), and same-sex marriage (Olson, Cadge, and Harrison 2006).

Evans, for example, discusses how people with different religious views reason through political differences. In his study, Evans uses the phrase "political decision-making" to refer to "situations in which individuals in a democratic society (in this case the United States) assess an issue, evaluate options, and recognize a legitimate resolution to substantive political differences" (Evans, 2014). He analyzed interviews from 61 respondents, all holding different religious beliefs who answered questions regarding stem cell research, the origin of humans, environmental issues, and the origins of sexuality. These interviews were analyzed according to whether or not religion played a substantial role in their decision-making process and how the respondents resolved political and religious differences. When analyzing these interview responses, Evans looked for evidence of "religious involvement, either in the explicit use of religious language, distinctive religious approaches, or as patterns across respondents with shared religious commitments" (Evans, 2014).

The study found that although the majority of interview respondents were willing to defer to political processes despite their religious beliefs, there were cases under which this was not the case. Evans provides a few example interview responses. For example, Sterling, a 52-year-old evangelical Protestant, "articulates a substantive commitment to something that is so 'important'

that it overrides any willingness to defer to a legitimate political process” (Evans, 2014). During another part of his interview, Sterling said, “I’m an advocate of democracy, but, you know, this is an issue where this particular issue has major consequences on human behavior, human attitudes. It’s important.” A couple of other participants, “Holly, a 33-year-old Catholic, and Anita, a 57-year-old evangelical Protestant, both show an unwillingness to defer to the outcome of political processes regarding the issue of sexuality” (Evans, 2014).

Evans concluded that although most respondents were willing to defer to a political process to resolve a conflict that was underlain with religion, “focusing on the common willingness to defer conceals important diversity in how respondents engage in political decision making” (Evans, 2014). For example, in addition to the category of respondents who were willing to use whichever process would help them achieve their religious goals, there was also a category of individuals who decided based on precedent. They would defer to whatever process they assumed was already in place.

There are many suggested solutions regarding the role of religion in political decision-making: excluding religion from politics altogether (Audi, 2000), integrating an internalized “deep pluralism” (Connolly, 2005), or even encouraging religious participation in politics (Audi and Wolterstorff, 1997), none of which are rigorously implemented in practice. Evans focuses on the process we see the most frequently in practice, the “procedural solution” suggested by Jurgen Habermas and John Rawls. This solution states that if there is a conflict between religious beliefs and political process, then it would be resolved by having both religious and non-religious groups defer to a political process. Therefore, religious convention and its ability to generate insight about moral law and moral intuition should be secondary to the political process. Evans



also focuses on the “procedural solution,” because not only is it the most common method of addressing religion in political processes, but it also can be empirically studied through social scientific methods and the analysis of interviews as described above. When people are faced with a conflict between religious and process preferences, their decision can be studied when they defer to one process over the other.

Evan’s theories regarding the influence of religion, and particularly, the historically-rooted social influence of religion on our political and legal decisions, can be seen in the example of abstinence-only education. As found in studies published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, abstinence-only education, while theoretically effective in preventing pregnancy, fails in practice. Despite the evidence and the expert advice against these abstinence-only programs from health professional groups, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Society of Adolescent Health, our federal government continues to spend \$2 billion funding them (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States). The evidence shows it is an ineffective method of preventing pregnancies, yet our government continues to fund it. This is contrary to all logic, but it may be continued to be funded because of religious beliefs that influence our societal standards.

The euro-centric religious views that dominates the United States argue that sex-before-marriage is an immoral or a sinful act, and therefore should not be discussed publicly or even addressed as an occurrence. Therefore, although the alternative option of sex education is by far more effective at preventing pregnancies according to various studies, these religious ideals inform our policy makers funding decisions.

*Influence of Religion: Fetal Remains Burial Law*

There is another particularly salient example of the influence of religion on political decision-making from here in Texas. Senate Bill 8 was passed during the 2017 legislative session, and it was known as the Fetal Burial Law, as it required health care facilities that were involved in miscarriage management to bury or cremate any fetal remains—regardless of the patient’s personal wishes. Many conversations followed about who would carry the financial burden this would inspire and whether or not this was infringing on a woman’s reproductive right to an abortion due to the additional regulatory burden it placed on providers and women.

The Texas Tribune documented previous public hearings, and described that “anti-abortion groups argued the rule was a means to bring human dignity to the fetuses, [while] reproductive rights advocates said it was another way for Texas to punish women who choose an abortion.” Reproductive rights advocates additionally argued that patient’s would have to carry the burden of cost for the burials, making abortions harder to obtain for low-income Texans.

This issue rests upon the idea that fetuses are autonomous beings who deserve a proper and respectful burial, which again has religious undertones and is contrary to the financially responsible and rational option that results from not burying the fetus. The burial offers no scientifically shown public health interest, especially because 92% of terminations only occur during the first trimester, when fetal remains are a maximum of about 3-4 inches long and weigh a maximum of one ounce (Bromley, Harlow, Laboda, and Benacerraf, 1991).

This law also doesn’t consider the values and opinions of mothers engaging in these abortions. Research shows that the most common feeling women feel after an abortion is relief, therefore, asking mothers to engage in a grieving process that assumes guilt is unnecessary. This fetal burial law would force a morose sentiment from the woman involved due to the deeply

emotional burial process that would follow their medical procedure. Therefore, the grounds for this law are based largely on religious sentiment reflecting the loss of life rather than scientific evidence and reason.

*Limitations of Statistics: Unintended Pregnancy*

Often times too, the statistical information policy makers are provided with fail to reflect the reality that is present, and thus, this may lead to flawed decision-making as can be seen in the example regarding unintended pregnancies. Finer and Henshaw found in their 2006 study that in the United States, nearly one-half of all pregnancies are unintended. The researchers interviewed different women to gain an understanding of whether their pregnancy was “intended” or “unintended.” This statistic informed policy decisions, but the study had many limitations with the way unintended pregnancy was defined and measured. For example, since the study was cross-sectional, it did not account for the fact that opinions change with time or that women were more likely to claim the pregnancy was intended in retrospect. The study was conducted only on women and didn’t take into consideration their partner’s intentions with the pregnancy either. Most importantly, however, the study took a narrow, binary approach that didn’t capture nuance or gradient in women’s responses such as ambivalence or indifference toward pregnancy. This model doesn’t allow for the women’s feelings and desires to be incorporated into their intentions and plans.

A later study in 2015, however, conducted by Abigail Aiken shows that there is a gradient of responses in a woman’s intention for pregnancy. Aiken and her team performed in-depth interviews to gain an understanding of this variation. They found one woman who said that although another pregnancy was definitely not the right path for her, she’d still very much be

open to the idea. This falls neither under the “intended” nor in the “unintended” category, because she still wants a child: “Another pregnancy is definitely not the right path for me and I’m being very careful with birth control. But If I somehow ended up pregnant would I embrace it and think it’s for the best? Absolutely” (Aiken, Dillaway & Mevs-Korff, 2015). The original statistic regarding nearly one in two pregnancies being unintended in 2006 failed to capture this nuance in the woman’s wants and desires.

Additionally, as counter-intuitive as it might seem, evidence from Geronimus’s 1997 study shows that teen pregnancy does not inspire adverse outcomes for neither the mother nor the child. In fact, it is beneficial for the vast majority of those of low socio-economic status to give birth during their youth, as it is when they are healthiest and best able to provide for the child with familial support. Yet, despite the evidence, we still see a strong policy push and rampant political messaging against unintended pregnancies. Can our policymakers encourage policies to prevent women from low socio-economic backgrounds from reproducing? If we see that there are not adverse outcomes and they might still want kids, don’t they have the right to do so? The societal push-back we are seeing may be due to the biases that are deeply embedded within the fabric of our history as described in the first section, such as the desire for household stability and the supposed link between a woman’s sexuality and evil.

### *Summary of Examples*

Through the various examples in this section, we’ve seen that the political-decision making process isn’t as “evidence-based” as we might hope it to be. This discrepancy may be even greater with reproductive rights issues, as these are often based in religious or social motivations rather than scientific evidence. There are many examples of this lack of

understanding of diversity in women's' lived experiences and a further lack of empathy in national public policy decisions that affect women.

## VII. How *Should* Policy Makers use Evidence?

With heuristics and biases, moral ambiguity related to our nation's religious history, and more at play, we see that there is a problem with our current political-decision making system. In this next section, we will discuss potential mechanisms with which we can resolve the decision-making pitfalls demonstrated previously.

The phrase “policy-as-discourse” has gained much traction as a response to Black's criticisms of evidence-based research and its impact on policy decisions. Sara Shaw suggests that the “policy-as-discourse” approach seeks to understand underlying social processes and contextualize the decisions within the complex policy environments in which they exist (Shaw, 2010). Under this discourse model, experts argue that policy problems should be analyzed qualitatively to fully capture the issues they're designed to solve.

This push for policy-as-discourse research parallels another emerging field of qualitative research—narrative research, which is the study of experiences as expressed as lived and told stories of individuals. I believe that narrative research should be integrated into the political-decision-making process in a way that supplements the policy-as-discourse and rational models discussed above to combat the pitfalls described in the previous section. The studying of these narratives provides contextualizing insight that allows us to empathize with diverse populations of women that policies might affect. Henderson also highlights the value of “empathetic narratives” that involve “descriptions of concrete human situations...in the context of their lives” to promote “affective understanding” (Henderson, 1987).

To see the potential impact of this narrative approach in practice, we will consider its value in the abortion debate. Krause describes that “sound legal judgments on the question of abortion should be informed by empathy for the potential suffering of both fetuses and women facing unwanted pregnancies” (Krause, 2011). Opponents of abortion have generated empathy for the fetus, but women’s emotional experiences have not been so effectively captured. In *Roe v. Wade*, “the women ... were faceless and indeed nameless – disembodied accumulations of medical and social data. The facts about Jane Roe were sparse and conclusory; the narrative of her experience was nonexistent” (Henderson, 1987). If we do not have substantial information about why women are choosing to have abortions, people are more likely to succumb to the historic biases that label women as frivolous or selfish. But, if we do consider the emotional experiences (rape, incest, poverty, unsustainable domestic situations, etc.) then the basic right to individual dignity and autonomy becomes more clear.

#### VIII. Narrative Research as a Possible Intervention Strategy

Narrative research has been used within clinical medicine over the past several years and has seen great success. We will briefly examine narrative research in medicine to see how it can be applied to health policy decisions. Since “the ‘narrative turn’ in the social [and medical] sciences, narratives or stories have been the focus of considerable interest. This is because researchers have come to understand that personal, social, and cultural experiences are constructed through the sharing of stories” (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006).

The healthcare system currently operates according to numbers, since they are viewed as accurate metrics of a physical condition. For example, we use instruments and devices to measure blood pressure, temperature, height and weight when creating a patient profile. We run

blood tests and obtain results that might get flagged as abnormal according to average sets of data we've assigned as the norm. These numbers then dictate the medication prescribed, the dose of the medication, and its dosing schedule.

But, narrative research is now being used within healthcare to better understand patients and their experiences. It can be defined as “collecting and analyzing the accounts people tell to describe experiences and offer interpretation” (Overcash, 2003). Janine Overcash studied specifically how narrative research can provide oncology clinicians with insight regarding clinical outcomes, patient coping mechanisms, and patient quality of life. She argues that narrative research provides “an option to explore personal experiences beyond the boundaries of a questionnaire, providing insight into decisions involving treatment, screening or various health practices, which can help guide how health care services are developed and provided” (Overcash, 2013). This method of data collection is valuable, because it suggests an alternative, more thorough approach to understanding the needs of a population. As Overcash suggests, this understanding can also guide how health policies are developed and implemented, which can be a worthy consideration, particularly when making public health decisions.

In *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, Authur Frank challenged “the prevailing paradigm of scientifically informed evidence-based decision-making, in which every patient with a particular disease was assumed to be sick in more or less the same way” (Frank, 1995). He argued for a more ethical, holistic, relational, personal rather than purely rational paradigm (Greenhalgh World Health Organization, 2016). In fact, in the healthcare field, some researchers are working as part of an international collaborative effort to collect and index hundreds of illness narratives in an online database with the purpose of using these narratives to

provide a systematic assessment of patient experiences (Herxheimer, Ziebland 2004). But narratives have yet to make their way into the political decision-making process in a similarly systematic way. The narratives I am suggesting are different from, for example, congressional testimonies. These narratives should be treated as pieces of data that provide a deeper and more diverse insight into women's lived experiences.

But as with any semi-subjective method of assessment, the rigor of the scientific analysis is put into question. How can we streamline any insights about the root of an issue if our data is composed of stories? How can we assume, and thus, ultimately magnify a few anecdotes to hold as representative of larger subsets of data without introducing inaccuracies? How can we be certain these anecdotes are truthful and thus a candid indication of the issue at hand? Many philosophy-of-science questions arise when narrative research methods are suggested as a means to impact health care policy.

There is, however, validity to these qualitative methods. Qualitative research is not simply a collection of journalistic anecdotes. It instead involves a sampling matrix and systematic analysis of rich text to generate themes. One major criticism of narrative data, however, is that we cannot know if someone is being truthful or not. But, that is the case with any research study that involves a questionnaire or survey with numerical values, too. We take the value that a research participant gives us—whether qualitative or quantitative—and accept it at face value. Researchers are expected to believe that information provided accurately reflects the participant's experiences and feelings, while designing controls to ensure it is as reflective as possible of the truth. Therefore, due to the subjectivity surrounding “truth,” our goal with narrative data should be to collect an “inclusive body of data.” (Overcash, 2013). Gergen and



Gergen agree, writing that the value of an experience's description or the story's telling depends on the social context and the culture surrounding the individual, "rather than on an absolute match between word and thing" (Gergen and Gergen, 1988). This means that the social context (for example the pressures that may be influencing someone to share their story in a particular way or the personal experiences that shape an individual's vocabulary, etc) have as much salience as do the words themselves. This means that the narratives can still be analyzed as true within the context in which the individual is stating them. Bury agrees, arguing that "individual narratives have proved to be powerful tools in the study of the social, material and environmental determinants of health, since personal stories are invariably couched within deeper, cultural narratives and folk myths" (Bury 2001). Similarly, individual narratives can prove to be powerful in studying deeper cultural and social affects or barriers of a policy.

Current systems of evaluating the needs and status of a population of people to inform healthcare decisions include sending out questionnaires, merging data sets, and analyzing hospital data sets. These methodologies, however, do not help to produce a comprehensive, full understanding of the situations patients face. In fact, these methods particularly fail to contextualize the experiences of the population they are aiming to serve. Narratives, on the other hand, aid in providing that context in a way that, when used in conjunction with quantitative data helps bolster our understanding of the policy issues at hand.

Overcash agrees with this valuation of narratives, particularly in policy implementation and program development and intervention, because this research allows people to thoroughly explain their individual experiences and choices. Angrosino describes the value of using life history as "a method of ethnographic research among stigmatized, unempowered people."

Angrosino studied the role of narratives in those with mental retardation, because “it helps to demonstrate the proposition that mental retardation is not a monolithic condition whose victims are distinguished by arbitrary gradations of standardized test scores” (Angrosino, 1994). This again relates to our discussion of intersectionality and how multiple identities and experiences impact an outcome. The narratives help paint a more robust picture of what these individuals might be experiencing and both contextualizes and validates them as well.

Now that we’ve established the reasonability of narrative research as an information-gathering technique for policy makers, we next want to consider how the narrative data can be analyzed. Overcash identifies many ways to analyze narrative data, but she discusses one in particular, thematic analysis. This is when researchers identify and subgroup ideas and phrases that participants have discussed in their narratives and then analyze these terms as having a importance based on the recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness of terms or phrases. The first criterion, “recurrence, refers to concepts that are repeated using similar words or phrases. The second term, repetition, means that an idea is conveyed with the use of the same words. The last criterion, forcefulness, refers to the emphasis applied to a concept” (Overcash, 2003). This structured, thematic analysis allows for a rigorous understanding of the ways in which an individual’s lived experience might be impacted by policy decisions made upstream.

For emotional narratives, scientists can treat “self-reports as verbal behaviors and examining how people use words to represent those experiences. Self-report studies, where participants characterize their experiences using emotion words, reveal that states of pleasure or displeasure comprise mental representations of emotion and point to several contents of experience in addition to valence” (Barrett, Mesquita, Ochsner, and Gross, 2007). These

experiences can be evaluated according to their “core effect,” a theory that claims the “mental representation of emotion is a contentful state of pleasure or displeasure...whether objects or events are helpful or harmful, rewarding or threatening, calling for acceptance or rejection” (Barrett, Mesquita, Ochsner, and Gross, 2007). Self-reflecting scales have also been used within the field to measure more discrete emotions such as fear or sadness to provide more detailed insight into the “core effect” of pleasant or unpleasant feelings (Boyle, 1986). This structural analysis of narratives would provide us with further insight into women’s emotional experiences. This would have been helpful, particularly within the previously discussed rape law example, where women were expected to demonstrate forgiveness toward their perpetrator rather than anger or resentment. This analysis of the core effect provides a unique avenue of insight regarding the emotional impact of a policy on those who are actually affected by it.

Some may claim that the reason this narrative approach hasn’t been integrated into policy-making is that there is a dramatic difference in narratives being used to elucidate trends about individual patient experiences and narratives being used to impact policy decisions that impact larger populations of people. Skultans agrees with this claim at first, saying that “until recently, narrative research has focused on what individual illness narratives say about the individual,” but he continues that, “an exciting development is extending the analysis of such narratives to capture the wider cultural (meta-)narratives within which the individual’s personal account of illness and suffering is nested” (Skultans, 1998). This implies that narratives are especially useful when examining systematic experiential results, because the stories communicate an intricate, detailed web of understanding in which individual experiences live. Politics in the United States rest heavily on an embedded web of narratives, therefore, when

making policy decisions that impact populations, it is important to rigorously work to understand this web of narratives.

In terms of the practical use of this narrative research approach in politics, we have seen a bit of this extension of it into political discourse abroad in the United Kingdom. For example, Alex Stevens describes how telling stories can be used as evidence in policy-making in the United Kingdom, but he also concludes with a discussion about the extension of this work to other systems of government as well (Stevens, 2010).

#### A. Relationship between Narrative Research and Political Empathy

On a related note, Susan McWilliams also emphasizes the importance of narratives in politics in her paper about creative writing's value in the study of politics, arguing that "creative writing allows students to consider politics from multiple perspectives and expands their communicative powers" (McWilliams, 2017). This relates back to our definition of empathy as an emotion-based term to describe one's ability to "perspective-shift." McWilliams ultimately suggests integrating an element of creative writing within the training of a political scientist, because creative writing facilitates the development of empathy and appreciation for different points of view. Just as narrative research does, this McWilliams understands with her discussion of creative writing and politics "that literature is the bedrock of democracy because storytelling works to create the underlying feelings of empathy necessary for a healthy democratic polity" (McWilliams, 2017). The question then becomes whose stories are being shared?

Minority stories are often ignored, therefore narrative research methods can be particularly beneficial for particularly those who are within minority groups. Studies have shown that previously oppressed groups experience a phenomenon called "minority stress." Members of

stigmatized groups face chronically high levels of stress due to a lack of social support and exhaustion from the constant exposure to prejudice and discrimination. This stress accrues over time and can result in long term physical and mental health deficits (Pascoe and Richman, 2009). This is important to consider, because if a woman is also within a minority racial group, the compounding of these two identities (female sex and minority racial group) can have a heightened negative impact on her health. This would also, for example, be the case for women with socially unconventional sexual preferences, because the impact of prejudice in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations has been shown to impact minority stress as well (Meyer, 2007). So, policy-makers must consider the narratives that lead to minority health disparities and employ this understanding to enact policies that resolve them.

#### B. Sharing Narratives on the National Women's Health Network

To understand the value of women's narratives with a more concrete example, we will explore a brief personal experience with abortion. The National Women's Health Network (NWHN) is an organization that analyzes critical health issues impacting women to affect policy and support consumer decision-making. On their web platform, they encourage women to share their stories about their experiences in women's health. In fact, NWHN also releases a newsletter titled, "Women's Health Activist" where stories of diverse groups of women sharing their health-related challenges are published. For example, there was a post about "a woman's telling description of being shackled, humiliated, and dehumanized during pregnancy and childbirth when she was incarcerated." (Mendez, 2014). Hearing about a woman's traumatic experience with the healthcare system allows politicians to take these narratives into account when making policy decisions.

In this same issue, perinatal epidemiologist, Dara D. Mendez, writes that, “narratives that draw our attention to the power of women’s voices — voices and life experiences that are sometimes silenced, disregarded, or marginalized. There is power in these women’s words, because they openly share with us truths about their lives.” (Mendez, 2014). Narratives, personal stories, and other forms of qualitative information add richness and explanation to quantitative data and might challenge statistics-based conclusions and allow political decision-makers to adjust their preconceptions about women’s health.

Policy makers should recognize the importance of women’s descriptions of their own experiences, and this understanding of diversity in experience should be integrated into how elected officials create policy. These narratives move us closer to a health system that champions social justice, reflects equity, and is based in comprehensive evidence that reflects women’s lived experiences.

### C. Implications of Narrative Research

But this is a complicated question and my suggestion may seem overly simplified. If we supplement evidence-based research with qualitative research in policy-making, then how will this impact the public’s understanding of science? For example, recently, there have been marches in cities across the country in support of science, as the Trump administration has proposed dramatic cuts to programs such as the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Institutes of Health. Books have also been published discussing how politicians misuse, misrepresent, or simply do not understand scientific principles on which they are basing their decisions. This movement, however, is the populous demanding evidence in support of policy claims—and this still stands as a fundamental aspect of political-decision-making in my

proposal. The integrity of science as a field will not be destroyed by the incorporation of structured narrative data. The data and method of study does, however, serve to expand political understanding by expanding one's ability to empathize with populations that are different from oneself.

#### IX. Importance of Representation and Diversity in Building Group Empathy

In addition to more attention to narratives of experience, to establish Emotional Intelligence among a group of political decision-makers, representation and diversity are necessary. Enhanced representation of diverse groups of people from various backgrounds expands the capacity of the collective decision-making body to "perspective-shift." This is important, as many research studies have shown that increasing power in an organization tends to diminish capacity for empathy, compassion, and the ability to see from another person's perspective. A diminished capacity for empathy can be especially damaging when entire populations are impacted by decisions that result from this leadership.

In fact, we can examine how the ability to empathize with others varies with power at the level of the brain by exploring mirror neurons, the neurons that are activated both when an animal performs an action themselves and when they view another animal perform the same action. In other words, the neuron "mirrors" the behavior of the other as if the individual themselves were acting. Neuroscientists describe how increased power diminishes the activity of "mirror" neurons, which are suggested to be related to empathy and a sense of connection with another's experience (Inzlicht, Hogeveen, and Obhi, 2014). The researchers found that, "the balance of the literature [also] suggests that people in positions of power tend to act in a self-

interested manner and display reduced interpersonal sensitivity to their powerless counterparts” (Inzlicht, Hogeveen, and Obhi, 2014).

These findings are further supported by similar studies in the field about perspective-shifting, the other phrase typically used to describe empathy. Galinsky and his team define perspective-taking as “stepping outside of one’s own experience and imagining the emotions, perceptions, and motivations of another individual” (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, and Gruenfeld, 2006). They ran five separate experiments to inform their conclusion that compared to individuals with little power, high-power individuals depend primarily on their own perspectives and have a lessened ability to correctly perceive others’ perspectives. One of their primary experiments involved first priming participants to either feel powerful or not feel powerful. Then, the participants were asked to draw the letter “E” on their foreheads. There are two ways in which they could have drawn the letter—self-facing or others-facing, meaning it could be drawn such that the participant themselves could read the letter or it could be drawn such that others could read it.

After controlling for their findings, those primed to feel powerful were two to three times more likely to draw the “E” in a way that is incomprehensible (backwards) to others (Haas, 1984). Although this experiment describes primarily how those in power do not visually perceive things from another’s point of view, the research group described how these findings are particularly valuable when thinking about training leaders to be more socially responsible. This finding also makes it clear that our political leaders must be held accountable to those marginalized in society for the decisions they are making. But, how can we ensure our policy-makers remain sensitive to the issues facing the marginalized?



### A. Representation in Political Decision-Making Groups

When thinking about the influence of emotions on political-decision making, we would want to consider if it's possible to foster emotional intelligence for entire decision-making bodies, to ensure their decisions better capture populations and needs that may be ignored otherwise due to a lack of comprehensive understanding. Encouraging representation, the act of making citizens' voices, opinions, and perspectives "present" in the policy making processes, may be one way to do so (Sintomer, 2013). As has been the case for many years in the past, the statistics are staggering. For example, while the U.S. Congress has increased in the number of women representatives ten-fold from the 1960s, women still are only 20% of U.S. Senators and 19% of U.S. Representatives (Center for American Women and Politics, 2015b). In term of state legislators, women make up only 24%—and although this is an increase from the 5% average in 1971 and the average of 15% in 1985, it is still far below the standard of parity.

Mendelberg and Kapowitz found a difference in the priorities that men and women share in political decision-making groups, arguing that "though gender roles have changed, women are still more involved than men in care-giving. As a result, women tend to place more weight on human needs and the needs of vulnerable populations – the populations that they are disproportionately expected to care for" (Mendelberg and Karpowitz, 2015). When political scientist Melody Crowder-Meyer examined data from the National Election Studies where participants were asked to consider the nation's most important problems, she found that "women are about twice as likely as men to mention the needs of the poor and children," while children ranked last in men's priorities. (Crowder-Meyer, 2007).

Therefore, when women are not participating in the conversation, there are fewer people at the table who emphasize vulnerable population's needs and the Emotional Intelligence of the collective decision-making body is diminished. When women are not well represented, the discussion will not fully reflect these priorities—and thus, the decisions as well. We also know that women's lived experiences differ from that of men's, as experiencing life as a woman imposes various fears, obligations, and responsibilities that are different from those imposed on men. Therefore, it is natural that women will articulate views perhaps unfamiliar to men, but the sole fact that there's a difference shouldn't undermine the value of these views. If more women are at the tables where various policy conversations are occurring, they could perhaps contribute to these discussions in a meaningful way.

But is it enough to just increase the number of women engaged in these conversations? Mendelberg and Karpowitz claim that there are two ways women can exercise and build influence, “equal participation in the discussion and experiencing equal affirmation while speaking” (Mendelberg and Karpowitz, 2015). If women engage in these two behaviors more often, they can enhance their influence, which will then help them build authority. Groups in which women participate actively, advocate for their distinctive perspectives, and help “move the group's collective decision also have effects that spill over beyond the immediate discussion at hand: women in these groups build their store of authority” (Mendelberg and Karpowitz, 2015). An increase in the authority of women functions to enhance male politician emotional intelligence and actually has a greater impact on women's influence in political decision-making groups than solely increasing the number of women representatives. Meaning that solely because women are at the table does not mean they exercise their voice or that they are heard.

This isn't to say, however, that representation of women isn't important at all, because the number of women in positions of power does still impact our subconscious biases and understanding of women. In her 1999 article, Mansbridge discusses the idea of symbolic representation, which refers to general respect, dignity, and authority that results from one's presence. Mansbridge argues that "one important way that women's presence in formal decision-making matters is by shaping the perception that women are competent to make decisions, that women are well suited to exercise power" (Mansbridge, 1999). Therefore, when women are under-represented in decision-making, it reinforces the idea that women are less capable and less authoritative. And these stereotypes don't just end with "people's impressions of women leaders, but also their views of women in general. If women don't participate in public affairs, then they will not be viewed as worthy of being listened to in other areas of life – settings such as marriage, the workplace, and voluntary associations such as clubs, committees and community boards" (Mansbridge, 1999).

In recognition of the need to enhance the female voice in politics, the United Nations formally issued a call for equal female representation in decision-making groups, and many countries within the European Union have also legislated minimum quotas for women on various government boards (Reingold, 2010). They argued that women's "full participation and representation in decision-making affects the level of basic human dignity and respect accorded to women as a social category" (Mansbridge, 1999).

The proposed solution of increasing the representation of women in political arenas includes more than simply enhancing the number of women in decisive political conversations, but it includes a culture change that involves encouraging women to feel confident with voicing

their opinions and also in encouraging others to listen to these opinions. This will in turn also affect the “symbolic representation” of women in society. Achieving culture change at this scale is a difficult endeavor, but it can be incrementally achieved in part by enhancing politician emotional intelligence and empathy, particularly in terms of developing their ability to perspective-shift. Requiring that marginalized and minority voices “within the society be heard regularly in public debate, that they be protected by a system of civil and political rights that gives others (including government officials) an incentive to take them seriously, and that they be well represented in the jury room,” and thus in the political decision-making tables as well (Krause, 2011).

#### B. Diversity in Political Decision-Making Groups

Further research explores differences when members of dominant groups empathize with racial or ethnic minorities, which highlights the importance of diversity within these decision-making groups as well. Studies show there are systematic differences in how a majority group empathizes with an oppressed group versus how a minority group empathizes with another oppressed group. Members of historically oppressed groups are better able to understand the experiences of other previously oppressed groups, even if their “outgroup categories” are different (woman versus minorities). In other words, “to take the perspective of another person, it helps to hold a repertoire of relevant experiences...therefore, we expect historically disadvantaged groups might find it easier to cognitively imagine themselves in the position of a person being unfairly treated due solely to their group membership, even when that person is from a different group with which the individual has little in common” (Valentino, Villalobos, and Sirin, 2014). And many factors, including race, gender, education and age, impact an

individual's exposure to discrimination, which will "in turn, make an individual sensitive to, and perceptive about, the social experience of people from other groups" (Valentino, Villalobos, and Sirin, 2014).

If individuals not part of an "out-group," (those with privilege in race/gender, such as the straight cis-gender white men who occupy the majority of our seats in public office) are exposed to individuals with different experiences or hear stories about struggles with discrimination, they are more likely to take these "narratives about the struggle of an out-group to overcome discrimination and unfair treatment might lead to greater sensitivity to and empathy toward the struggle of other groups" (Valentino, Villalobos, and Sirin, 2014). The researchers also argue that quality and quantity of contact with "out-group" members can enhance collective empathy as well, which is a testament to the necessity of diversity not only in gender, but also in the race of individuals who occupy our public offices and make decisions for populations of people. The implications of this insight include recognizing the inherent difficulty in the attempting to encourage those in positions of power, who are most often white men, sympathize and understand the circumstance of those who are marginalized. But, it also means that an emphasis on diversity and the listening of narratives can result in enhanced collective political empathy.

Research also shows that homogenous groups, those with the same initial opinions, show a stronger confirmation bias than heterogenous groups. They are also more susceptible to making an irrational decision to maintain uniformity of opinion (Witte and Davis, 2013). Most legislative decisions are made in a group, so team members may be more susceptible to groupthink, "the destructive tendency to minimize conflict and maximize harmony and conformity" (Janis, 1972). This means that if someone in our currently homogenous, male-dominated political decision-

making groups were to present a relatively unpopular opinion, it is more likely than not that it would be rejected due to the homogeneity in thought and experience of the other group members. However, if there was diversity in the representatives at the table, the group would be classified as heterogeneous and less likely to fall victim to confirmation bias, groupthink, and the various heuristics discussed in an earlier section.

## X. Conclusion

Political decision-making has been historically defined as “rational” and because we assume that the evidence we use is scientifically-vetted, and therefore as objective as possible, we fail to recognize how unrepresentative these political decisions really are. There is a need to inject empathy into the process, and this can be done through sharing narratives, as emotions contribute to our holistic understanding of reproductive rights issues.

We also know that policy-making isn't as evidence-based as we think it is, and often decisions, particularly those that impact women, are made on moral and religious grounds. So, we cannot simply ignore these emotional aspects, because then we cannot address them. Therefore, we must integrate this emotional element into our understanding and add rigor to the process to help empathy more directly inform our policy decisions. In doing so, we must also emphasize diversity and the importance of surrounding ourselves with people who have a diverse set of experiences. We must also encourage the representation of women in positions of political power and influence. Having more women sitting at the table where these decisions are made may help those currently at the table, who are primarily men, better understand the experiences of others. This will aid them in the act of perspective-shifting, considering different points of view, and enhance their empathetic capacity.

The implications and significance of this work are immense when considering the downstream effects of this bias in politics. Large numbers of people could be differentially affected by a policy due to underlying biases that fail to capture the entirety of a narrative or experience. When women's interests are not being addressed by political representatives, then that means half the population's needs are being ignored. This subconscious disregard can also be extended to other previously oppressed groups through race-based bias; therefore, understanding empathy and how to foster it allows us to cultivate it within interactions with other communities of people too.

A lack of understanding and empathy also characterizes our political climate today. As politics become increasingly polarized, the gap in empathy grows larger and larger, and this has far-reaching effects on societal function, notably on how we understand and compromise with one another regarding contentious issues. Exploring political polarization and the need for empathy within this context would be an area of future research worthy of pursuing. Through my research I discovered that we must share our stories, amplify our voices, and listen with empathy—and demand that our politicians do the same.

## References

- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: a social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall.
- Barrett, L. F., Mesquita, B., Ochsner, K. N., & Gross, J. J. (2007). The Experience of Emotion. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58(1), 373–403. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.58.110405.085709>
- Black, N. (2001). Evidence based policy: proceed with care. *BMJ (Clinical Research Ed.)*, 323(7307), 275–279.
- Bromley, B., Harlow, B. L., Laboda, L. A., & Benacerraf, B. R. (1991). Small sac size in the first trimester: a predictor of poor fetal outcome. *Radiology*, 178(2), 375–377. <https://doi.org/10.1148/radiology.178.2.1987595>
- Bursens, P., Landtsheer, C. de, Braeckmans, L., & Segaert, B. (2017). Complex political decision-making: leadership, legitimacy and communication. Retrieved from [https://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzE0MjQ0MzZfX0FO0?sid=ade9d4f4-4491-432f-bea4-fcca51787d61@sessionmgr4008&vid=0&format=EB&lpid=lp\\_31&rid=0](https://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzE0MjQ0MzZfX0FO0?sid=ade9d4f4-4491-432f-bea4-fcca51787d61@sessionmgr4008&vid=0&format=EB&lpid=lp_31&rid=0)
- Buse, K., Martin-Hilber, A., Widyanoro, N., & Hawkes, S. J. (2006). Management of the politics of evidence-based sexual and reproductive health policy. *The Lancet*, 368(9552), 2101–2103. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(06\)69837-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(06)69837-1)
- Cairney, P. (2015). *The Politics of Evidence-based Policymaking*.



- Cairney, P., & Oliver, K. (2017). Evidence-based policymaking is not like evidence-based medicine, so how far should you go to bridge the divide between evidence and policy? *Health Research Policy and Systems*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-017-0192-x>
- Chauhan, S. P., & Chauhan, D. (2007). Emotional Intelligence: Does It Influence Decision Making and Role Efficacy? *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 43(2), 217–238.
- Cohen, D., & Crabtree, B. (2006, July). Qualitative Research Guidelines Project. Retrieved from <http://www.qualres.org/HomeNarr-3823.html>
- Courtney, H., Lovallo, D., & Clarke, C. (2013). Deciding How to Decide. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2013/11/deciding-how-to-decide>
- Crowder-Meyer, M. (2007). Gender Differences in Policy Preferences and Priorities. Presented at the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL.
- De Sousa, R. (1997). *The rationality of emotion* (1. paperback ed., 5. print). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Decision Making. (2017). In F. M. Moghaddam, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Political Behavior*. 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, California 91320: SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483391144.n78>
- Eisenberger, N. I., Lieberman, M. D., & Williams, K. D. (2003). Does rejection hurt? An fMRI study of social exclusion. *Science (New York, N.Y.)*, 302(5643), 290–292. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1089134>
- Emotions and Political Decision Making. (2017). In S. Gadarian & B. Albertson, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Political Behavior*. SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483391144.n112>

- Eres, R., Decety, J., Louis, W. R., & Molenberghs, P. (2015). Individual differences in local gray matter density are associated with differences in affective and cognitive empathy. *NeuroImage*, 117, 305–310. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroimage.2015.05.038>
- Galinsky, A. D., Magee, J. C., Inesi, M. E., & Gruenfeld, D. H. (2006). Power and Perspectives Not Taken. *Psychological Science*, 17(12), 1068–1074. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2006.01824.x>
- Gervais, S. J., Vescio, T. K., Förster, J., Maass, A., & Suitner, C. (2012). Seeing women as objects: The sexual body part recognition bias: Seeing women as objects. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 42(6), 743–753. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.1890>
- Gilbert, C. D., & Sigman, M. (2007). Brain States: Top-Down Influences in Sensory Processing. *Neuron*, 54(5), 677–696. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuron.2007.05.019>
- Goleman, D. (2001). *The emotionally intelligent workplace: how to select for, measure, and improve emotional intelligence in individuals, groups, and organizations* (1st ed). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Goleman, D. (2004). What Makes a Leader? *Harvard Business Review*.
- Greene, J. D. (2001). An fMRI Investigation of Emotional Engagement in Moral Judgment. *Science*, 293(5537), 2105–2108. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1062872>
- Greenhalgh, T. (n.d.). *Health Evidence Network Synthesis Report 49: Cultural contexts of health: the use of narrative research in the health sector*. World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe.
- Gross, J. J. (2001). Emotion Regulation in Adulthood: Timing Is Everything. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 10(6), 214–219. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.00152>

- Gutnik, L. A., Hakimzada, A. F., Yoskowitz, N. A., & Patel, V. L. (2006). The role of emotion in decision-making: A cognitive neuroeconomic approach towards understanding sexual risk behavior. *Journal of Biomedical Informatics*, 39(6), 720–736. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbi.2006.03.002>
- Hass, R. G. (1984). Perspective taking and self-awareness: Drawing an E on your forehead. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46(4), 788–798. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.46.4.788>
- Hein, G., Engelmann, J. B., Vollberg, M. C., & Tobler, P. N. (2016). How learning shapes the empathic brain. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113(1), 80–85. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1514539112>
- Henderson, L. (1987). Legality and Empathy. Scholarly Works. Retrieved from <http://scholars.law.unlv.edu/facpub/870>
- Hess, J., & Bacigalupo, A. (2013). Applying Emotional Intelligence Skills to Leadership and Decision Making in Non-Profit Organizations. *Administrative Sciences*, 3(4), 202–220. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci3040202>
- Hogeveen, J., Inzlicht, M., & Obhi, S. S. (2014). Power changes how the brain responds to others. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 143(2), 755–762. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033477>
- Huang, P., & Anderson, C. (2006). A Psychology of Emotional Legal Decision Making: Revulsion and Saving Face in Legal Theory and Practice. *Minnesota Law Review*, 90(63), 1045–1071.

- Izard, C. E. (2009). Emotion Theory and Research: Highlights, Unanswered Questions, and Emerging Issues. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163539>
- Jones, B. D., & Baumgartner, F. R. (2005). *The politics of attention: how government prioritizes problems*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kahneman, D. (2013). *Thinking, fast and slow* (1st pbk. ed). New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Knox, J., & Arber, E. (2011). *The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women*. Place of publication not identified: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Krause, S. R. (2011). Empathy, Democratic Politics, and the Impartial Juror. *Law, Culture and the Humanities*, 7(1), 81–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1743872109355567>
- Lapate, R. C., Samaha, J., Rokers, B., Hamzah, H., Postle, B. R., & Davidson, R. J. (2017). Inhibition of Lateral Prefrontal Cortex Produces Emotionally Biased First Impressions: A Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation and Electroencephalography Study. *Psychological Science*, 28(7), 942–953. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797617699837>
- Lau, R. R., & Redlawsk, D. P. (2001). Advantages and Disadvantages of Cognitive Heuristics in Political Decision Making. *American Journal of Political Science*, 45(4), 951. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2669334>
- Leat, D., Williamson, A., & Scaife, W. (2018). Grantmaking in a Disorderly World: The Limits of Rationalism: Grantmaking in a Disorderly World. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 77(1), 128–135. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12249>

- Maccoby, E. E., & Jacklin, C. N. (1974). *The psychology of sex differences*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Ma-Kellams, C., & Lerner, J. (2016). Trust your gut or think carefully? Examining whether an intuitive, versus a systematic, mode of thought produces greater empathic accuracy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 111(5), 674–685. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000063>
- Mangel, C. P. (1988). Legal abortion: the impending obsolescence of the trimester framework. *American Journal of Law & Medicine*, 14(1), 69–108.
- Mansbridge, J. (1999). Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent “Yes.” *The Journal of Politics*, 61(3), 628–657. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2647821>
- Maroney, T. A. (n.d.). Emotional Regulation and Judicial Behavior. *California Law Review*, 1485.
- Matthews, M. (2014). Positivism. In *Encyclopedia of Educational Theory and Philosophy* (Vol. 2, pp. 639–642). SAGE Reference. Retrieved from <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX6500400233/GVRL?u=txshracd2598&sid=GVRL&xid=0f26be14>
- McWilliams, S. (2017). Creative Writing and the Study of Politics. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 50(04), 1094–1098. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517001275>
- Mendelberg, T., & Karpowitz, C. F. (2016). Women’s authority in political decision-making groups. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 27(3), 487–503. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.11.005>

- Mendez, D. (n.d.). Sharing Our Experiences, Stories, and Narratives. Retrieved from <https://www.nwhn.org/sharing-our-experiences-stories-and-narratives/>
- Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(5), 674–697. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674>
- Nourse, V. F. (n.d.). Elementary Statutory Interpretation: Rethinking Legislative Intent and History. *Boston College Law Review*, 1613.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2009). Hiding from Humanity Disgust, Shame, and the Law.
- Overcash, J. A. (2003). Narrative research: a review of methodology and relevance to clinical practice. *Critical Reviews in Oncology/Hematology*, 48(2), 179–184. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.critrevonc.2003.04.006>
- Pascoe, E. A., & Smart Richman, L. (2009). Perceived discrimination and health: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 135(4), 531–554. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016059>
- Phelps, E. A., O'Connor, K. J., Cunningham, W. A., Funayama, E. S., Gatenby, J. C., Gore, J. C., & Banaji, M. R. (2000). Performance on indirect measures of race evaluation predicts amygdala activation. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 12(5), 729–738.
- Reingold, B., & Harrell, J. (2010). The Impact of Descriptive Representation on Women's Political Engagement: Does Party Matter? *Political Research Quarterly*, 63(2), 280–294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912908330346>
- Rousseau, J.-J. (1979). *Emile: or, On education*. New York: Basic Books.

- Sanderson, I. (2006). Complexity, “practical rationality” and evidence-based policy making. *Policy & Politics*, 34(1), 115–132. <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557306775212188>
- Shaw, S. E. (2010). Reaching the parts that other theories and methods can’t reach: How and why a policy-as-discourse approach can inform health-related policy. *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine*, 14(2), 196–212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363459309353295>
- Singer, C. (1958). A short history of anatomy and physiology from the Greeks to Harvey. *Les Etudes Philosophiques*, 13(3), 387–388.
- Sintomer, Y. (2013). The Meanings of Political Representation: Uses and Misuses of a Notion. *Raisons Politiques*, 50(2), 13–34. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rai.050.0013>
- Sools, A. (2013). Narrative health research: Exploring big and small stories as analytical tools. *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine*, 17(1), 93–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363459312447259>
- Stanley, D., Phelps, E., & Banaji, M. (2008). The Neural Basis of Implicit Attitudes. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 17(2), 164–170. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2008.00568.x>
- Stevens, A. (2011). Telling Policy Stories: An Ethnographic Study of the Use of Evidence in Policy-making in the UK. *Journal of Social Policy*, 40(02), 237–255. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279410000723>
- Suzuki, Y., Galli, L., Ikeda, A., Itakura, S., & Kitazaki, M. (2015). Measuring empathy for human and robot hand pain using electroencephalography. *Scientific Reports*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep15924>

- Valentine, S. J., Richards, R., & Ovenell-Carter, B. (2016). *Blending leadership: six simple beliefs for leading online and off*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Valentino, N., Villalobos, J., & Sirin, C. (2014). *The Social Causes and Political Consequences of Group Empathy*. Presented at the APSA 2014 Annual Meeting Paper. Retrieved from <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2452988>
- Van Asselt, M. B. A. (2010). *Perspectives on Uncertainty and Risk: the PRIMA Approach to Decision Support*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. Retrieved from <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=3565925>
- Vial, A. C., Napier, J. L., & Brescoll, V. L. (2016). A bed of thorns: Female leaders and the self-reinforcing cycle of illegitimacy. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 27(3), 400–414. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.12.004>
- Vis, B. (2018). Heuristics and Political Elites' Judgment and Decision-Making. *Political Studies Review*, 147892991775031. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929917750311>
- White, K., Hopkins, K., Aiken, A., Stevenson, A., Hubert, C., Grossman, D., & Potter, J. (2007, September 13). *The impact of reproductive health legislation on family planning clinic services in Texas*. Planned Parenthood.
- Witte, E. H., & Davis, J. H. (2013). *Understanding Group Behavior: Volume 1: Consensual Action By Small Groups ; Volume 2: Small Group Processes and Interpersonal Relations*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. Retrieved from <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10806664>
- Zhong, C.-B. (2007). *The ethical dangers of rational decision making*.



## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Mayra Sharma currently attends the University of Texas at Austin, where she studies Neuroscience in the College of Natural Sciences with the Polymathic Scholars Honors Program and Plan II Honors in the College of Liberal Arts. She was born and raised in El Paso, Texas where she laughed and learned with people who mean the world to her before she came to Austin to do more of the same. She became interested in this topic for her thesis, because she was curious about why our discussion of emotions didn't match the prevalence of their influence. She wanted to explore the implications of this lack of emphasis on emotions and understanding—and due to the toxic political context and lack of empathy she was surrounded by, she decided to consider the potential impact of emotions in the policy arena.

Mayra hopes to continue pursuing policy work in her future, but first she will work as a management consultant with McKinsey and Co. before heading to Washington D.C. to engage in health policy research. She ultimately hopes to attend medical school, but in a true polymath fashion, she also hopes to first explore her many other passions that range from interior design and screenwriting to Russian history and yoga.