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Gender non-conformity in the appearance of political candidates and its effect on voters

Megan Amanda Holmes

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In this time of political uncertainty and shifting cultural norms, it has become challenging to rely upon our preconceived notions of what makes a good political candidate. This research was conducted for the purpose of deepening our understanding of the relationship between politics and the nonverbal communication of gender norms, and to shed light on how a candidate's gender presentation influences voters. Through examining the ways in which political candidates conform to or deviate from gender norms in their physical appearance, we begin to discover the impact of non-conformity on voters' evaluations of candidates. In this study, respondents were shown one of four variants of a hypothetical candidate—one conforming and one non-conforming male and female—and evaluated the candidate in a number of areas. Results show that masculinity tends to be favored over femininity, while conformity is not always favored over nonconformity. These results, in total, carry implications for public tolerance in both politics and society at large, and build upon our understanding of the ways in which voters make political decisions, as well as provide insight into how conforming to or deviating from social norms affect the thought processes of the average person when it comes to evaluating political candidates.

Degree Type

Open Access Senior Honors Thesis

Department

Political Science

First Advisor

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Second Advisor

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Subject Categories

Political Science

GENDER NON-CONFORMITY IN THE APPEARANCE OF POLITICAL CANDIDATES

AND ITS EFFECT ON VOTERS

By

Megan Amanda Holmes

A Senior Thesis Submitted to the

Eastern Michigan University

Honors College

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation

with Honors in Political Science

Approved at Ypsilanti, Michigan, on this date: April 19, 2021

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Abstract

In this time of political uncertainty and shifting cultural norms, it has become challenging to rely upon our preconceived notions of what makes a good political candidate. This research was conducted for the purpose of deepening our understanding of the relationship between politics and the nonverbal communication of gender norms, and to shed light on how a candidate's gender presentation influences voters. Through examining the ways in which political candidates conform to or deviate from gender norms in their physical appearance, we begin to discover the impact of non-conformity on voters' evaluations of candidates. In this study, respondents were shown one of four variants of a hypothetical candidate—one conforming and one non-conforming male and female—and evaluated the candidate in a number of areas. Results show that masculinity tends to be favored over femininity, while conformity is not always favored over non-conformity. These results, in total, carry implications for public tolerance in both politics and society at large, and build upon our understanding of the ways in which voters make political decisions, as well as provide insight into how conforming to or deviating from social norms affect the thought processes of the average person when it comes to evaluating political candidates.

Introduction

Understanding the ways in which voters make political decisions is particularly important not only for those directly involved in politics, but for voters themselves to evaluate their own decision making processes. It's important to understand how conforming to or deviating from social norms will affect the thought processes of the average person when it comes to evaluating political candidates.

A *norm* is something that is expected or standard within a society, generally considered acceptable and customary. The individual who conforms to all of their society's norms would be considered exceptionally normal, standard, and ostensibly average. Social norms, then, are like an unwritten code of conduct to govern the behaviors of members of a society. They function as a way of maintaining social order, detecting in-group/out-group status, and allow for a certain level of predictability—if a person violates certain norms in certain ways, members of society can use that information to make predictions about that person with some degree of accuracy. Existing scholarly work supports this—including, especially for our purposes, studies which examine the use of gender cues in determining a person's sexual orientation (Stern et al., 2013; Rieger et al., 2010). However, this study does not deal with sexual orientation explicitly; rather, we will be dealing with gender non-conformity in appearance alone, instead of any implications that may carry.

Within gender norms specifically, cues of masculinity and femininity are used to manage behaviors and appearance. Standards of masculinity and femininity vary and are determined within a cultural context. For our purposes, these standards will be defined by

those which guide North American white men and women. In this sense, masculinity is primarily comprised of restrictive emotional regulation, dominance and control, self-sufficiency, and a fear of femininity (Mahalik et al., 2003; O'Neil, 2008; MacArthur & Shields, 2015). The key, then, is that masculinity relies on the rejection of femininity. By that metric, femininity is the antithesis of those masculine traits—nurturing and submissive behaviors, codependency, and emotional vulnerability (Gillespie & Eisler, 1992).

From there, the problem then becomes when those norms are deviated from by individuals within a society. In general, those people who fall significantly outside of a society's expectations are, by design, treated differently, often being punished by others. When it comes to departure from gender norms, non-conformity poses unique challenges and consequences. Our specific problem for exploration regards the application of these ideas to a highly gendered field: politics. Namely, we are concerned with the ways in which candidates whose appearance does not conform to typical gender norms are punished by voters, through negative (or less favorable) evaluations.

The problem of non-conformity, or rather, the problem of reactions to non-conformity, is of considerable importance in any society. With regard to politics, conformity to one's political party is prominent, but conformity to societal gender roles is evident as well. Despite growing numbers of women in American politics, it's a field largely dominated by men; the gendered expectations placed on candidates and elected officials are very much present, and have interesting implications for understanding the political arena and society at large.

Literature Review

Understanding masculinity and femininity

The concepts of masculinity and femininity are both salient and elusive. At their core, they are inherent states of being; psychologically important and socially "real," yet generally indefinable (Spence & Buckner, 2012). Within any sociocultural context in which the terms are used, they tend to need no real elaboration on what is meant by them in order to be understood. The natural thought is of masculinity and femininity as being opposite ends of a spectrum, where "masculine" is the inverse of "feminine," with a blending of characteristics between (Spence & Buckner, 2012); i.e. as one becomes less masculine they become simultaneously and equally more feminine. Here, we could expect to see women largely grouped at the feminine end, and men at the masculine end.[1]

This bipolar model isn't the only theory though, and neither is it necessarily wholly accurate. Another fairly popular model exists, which considers masculinity and femininity not as opposites of each other, but as distinct and separate continuums (Jenkin & Vroegh, 1969). The two-factor model embraces the similarities which exist between the concepts. It follows, then, that under the bipolar model a person who is purely masculine would be not at all feminine, but a less masculine person would be somewhat feminine, and vice versa. But viewing them on separate continuums allows a different interpretation: masculinity is not dependent upon the absence of femininity, and femininity is not dependent upon the absence of masculinity.

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[1] Much of the existing theory on masculinity and femininity equate sex and gender. For our purposes, the terms will not be used interchangeably. See the *gender and presentation* subsection of the literature review for clarification.

Characteristics which are associated positively with one of the concepts tend to be associated positively with the other, in general terms. Those characteristics are ones associated with social desirability, such as dependability, consideration, and intelligence (Jenkin & Vroegh, 1969). Masculinity and femininity as concepts here are substantially different from each other, but the areas in which they are similar or overlap lend support to the two-factor model. Neither model is inherently valid or invalid; both have their unique strengths and weaknesses and contribute to our understanding of masculine and feminine distinctiveness, which we can now examine further.

Masculinity tends to define itself as the antithesis of femininity. Many core features of masculinity have been posited and discussed in sociological and psychological literature, which share a common theme centered on dominance, control, and the rejection of femininity. Two prominent evaluative tools demonstrate this with particular clarity; the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI) lays out 11 distinct aspects which contribute to this concept of masculinity: winning, emotional control, risk-taking, violence, dominance, playboy, self reliance, primacy of work, power over women, disdain for homosexuals, and pursuit of status (Mahalik et al., 2003). Similarly, the Gender Role Conflict model (GRC), "a conceptual model that [explains] the negative outcomes of restrictive gender role socialization for men in the United States," includes patterns of restrictive emotionality, health care problems, obsession with achievement and success, restrictive sexual and affectionate behavior, homophobia, and socialized control, power, and competition issues (O'Neil, 2008).

The role of femininity here is multifaceted. Although most of the aforementioned elements of masculinity are not *explicitly* anti-feminine, many of them are in opposition to aspects associated with femininity—e.g. restrictive emotional regulation being the antithesis of stereotypical feminine emotional expressivity. The aspect of homophobia fits here as well, to a substantial degree. Studies have found that heterosexuals tend to perceive gay men as being feminine, and lesbians as being masculine, with heterosexual men in particular viewing stereotypical effeminate traits in gay men as problematic because of their divergence from masculine gender role behaviors (Schope & Eliason, 2004). Additionally, these stereotypes, when present, represent "feminized masculinity," which can be troubling both for the heterosexual man's perception of the others in question, and his perception of himself and his own concept of masculinity (Stein, 2005).

Femininity, as with masculinity, is hard to define. If masculinity is the state of being not-feminine, then femininity is the state of being not-masculine. Studies have compiled certain key characteristics of femininity and feminine gender roles, which include emotional openness in relationships, concern with being perceived as physically attractive, and submissive and nurturing behaviors (Gillespie & Eisler, 1992). As we have seen, those characteristics are essentially the inverse of the typical masculine traits mentioned previously.

Cues and signaling

Norms are used by members of a society to make predictions and evaluative judgements about others. When those others deviate from certain norms, inferences can be made, whether consciously or unconsciously, about their meaning, and result in a

substantive judgement of those persons. These norms are used as *cues* for distinguishing any number of personal characteristics of an individual, and can do so with a fair degree of accuracy in some instances—they are commonly understood as being valid indicators of group membership when the cues in question have shared meaning within society (i.e. stereotypes) (Stern et al., 2013). This fact—meaning that when an individual does fit a particular stereotype, they are likely to be correctly categorized by others because of it— is important for understanding why norms continue to be of value to societies and remain pervasive in people's minds.

Gender inversion cues, specifically, are often used as indicators of sexual orientation; however, these stereotypes are often exaggerated and can lead to inaccurate categorization (Stern et al., 2013; Rieger et al., 2010). Similarly, people, when shown the image of a person whose appearance is gender non-conforming in some way, tend to attribute cross-gendered behaviors and characteristics to them, and evaluate them more negatively than they do those who they perceive as gender conforming (Flores et al., 2018).

Gender and presentation

Although this study does not explicitly deal with either gender identity or sexual orientation, those things are often consciously and unconsciously associated with gender presentation and conformity to gender norms, which this study does explore. But in order to understand the full meaning and value of this research, we must first understand how gender, appearance, and orientation aren't necessarily linked.

When I say that this study involves gender non-conforming candidates, I do not mean to say transgender candidates, nor do I mean to say LGBT+ candidates. However, the frequency with which those terms are conflated make it deserving of recognition. Using our understanding of norms, cues, masculinity, and femininity, we can explore their applications within a more nuanced and less rigid conceptualization of gender, identity, and presentation.

At the center of these ideas is the concept of *gender identity*: the perception of one's own gender—male, female, a blending of both, or neither—which does not necessarily correspond with their sex assigned at birth (HRC, 2021). If a person's gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth, that person would be considered *transgender*, regardless of whether or not they choose to physically transition. If a person's gender identity does match the sex they were assigned at birth, they are *cisgender*.

Gender identity often goes hand-in-hand with gender expression. *Gender expression* refers to the outward presentation of one's gender identity through, among other things, their behavior, physique, and clothing (HRC, 2021). Gender expression, in this sense, is the result of both inborn characteristics and conscious choices—a person generally has little control over the structure of their own body, but very much control over their clothing and behavior. To better understand this, consider an example: a person whose gender identity is female may express her gender in a variety of ways. If she was born with features considered to be more typically masculine, regardless of whether she is cisgender or transgender, that element of her gender expression would be difficult to

change. She may choose to compensate with increased femininity in her clothing, hair, and makeup, or she may not—it depends upon how she perceives herself in her gender, and whether (or to what degree) she desires to conform to the prevailing societal norms for members of her gender identity. This idea of gender non-conformity is the core concept for the purposes of this research.

Gender non-conformity is a broad concept, and refers to expressions of one's gender that fall outside of a society's traditional expectations for that particular gender identity (HRC, 2021). Given that, in the U.S., much of the cultural norms surrounding gender are cis-centric, and equate sex with gender (identity), gender non-conformity is often taken as a cue signaling LGBT+ status, or used as a synonym for transgender. That being said, while many gender non-conforming people do identify as LGBT+, not all gender non-conforming people do, nor are all LGBT+ people gender non-conforming.

Therefore, as stated earlier, I ask for readers to keep in mind that separation of identity and presentation, and hold the ample number of potential implications of the findings presented in this paper as just that—potential implications, not explanations, not assumptions. The candidates created for evaluation in this study are not specified as being either cisgender or transgender, gay or straight; only their clothing, hair, and makeup have been altered into non-conformity—the rest exists only in their interpretations by the minds of our participants.

Political applications

Little research has been done on gender non-conformity in the appearance of political candidates. Work exists on gender roles and conformity with regard to speaking

and attitude behaviors, and gender identity and sexual orientation, but as of writing this I have yet to find anything that specifically addresses the relationship between gender conformity of political candidates' dress and the ways in which that affects their evaluations by voters.

The work of Hayes, Lawless, and Baitinger (2014) was of particular inspiration in the conception and development of this study, as their exploration of media coverage and candidate appearance as an influence on election outcomes, and the relationship of the results to the candidates' sex, brought several questions to mind. In their study, the descriptions of the hypothetical candidates they created were controlled to preserve internal validity, so the male and female candidates were described in the same way—wearing the same outfit (and given the same descriptors depending on the treatment condition), with one curious difference: the male candidate wore a tie, and the female candidate wore a scarf. The fact that this detail was included raises an interesting question: why does the addition of this difference create a sense of equivalency? It would have been easy to leave neckwear completely out of the equation, but in including it, the researchers created another difference between the candidates aside from their sex. I don't consider this to be a methodological concern for the context of their research, but it got me thinking about the pervasive nature of gender differences, and how the conscious choice was made to create a difference in order for there to be equivalence between the candidates. In this sense, the choice to differentiate the candidates in that way was a specifically gendered one, which relied on our cultural norms and expectations for men and women to dress differently. That thought, in mind along with the work of Jones and

Price (2017) on candidate beauty, guided me into the search for a more nuanced political perspective on gender and presentation.

Questions remaining

Generally speaking, voters' evaluations of candidate appearance can be helpful for understanding both the ways voters make political decisions, as well as the potential biases that are present in society which affect politics (as well as other areas). It can be particularly valuable to examine deviations from the perceived norms, specifically in this case extending findings from studies around gender differences in both perceived capability in politics (Bauer, 2020) as well as differences in appearance (Hayes, Lawless, & Baitinger, 2014; Jones & Price, 2017), and seeking to discover the effects of appearance not conforming to gender norms. In which ways would a female candidate who presents herself in typically masculine clothing be judged differently than a more feminine female candidate? The same for a male candidate with feminine clothing presentation as compared to a masculine male candidate. What differences would be seen in these evaluations between the non-conforming female and male candidates? Would one be more favored than the other?

Evaluating those questions I believe is important for understanding not just the ways in which society and gender roles/norms are changing over time, but especially how they play out in politics, which can have interesting implications for the progressiveness of modern politics and the feelings and expectations people have about politicians and government officials in relation to the rest of the population. These implications also have to do with tolerance, and how although people may often be tolerant of non-conformity

among the general population, they are likely to have different expectations for people in high-level positions of power, such as government.

Methodology

In pursuit of answers to the questions of non-conformity, tolerance, and electability, I designed a survey in which participants were shown a political candidate—fabricated for the purposes of this research—and shared their thoughts on that candidate. Each of the created candidates were presented with a short biography and a headshot image;[2] the contents of the biographies were written such that the version for each of the treatment candidates was identical, except for one key difference: the gender of the candidate (i.e. the pronouns used to refer to them). The images were where the treatment was applied—the pictures presented the candidates either as masculine or feminine in their clothing, hair, and makeup, which created four conditions: conforming (feminine) female (*FF*), non-conforming (masculine) female (*MF*), conforming (masculine) male (*MM*), and non-conforming (feminine) male (*FM*).

The survey was distributed to participants via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk).[3] The survey was designed to collect respondents' evaluations of the candidates on multiple levels, including measures of electability, likability, professionalism, and

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[2] See *Appendix A*.

[3] MTurk is a service that allows for nominal compensation (in this case, $0.40, funded by myself and the Department of Political Science at Eastern Michigan University) to be provided to participants in academic or market research. There are pros and cons to utilizing this and other online services, but the demographic constituents of the samples it provides make it appropriate for use in political science research (Berinsky et. al., 2012). See https://www.mturk.com/ for more information.

competence. Respondents were randomized into treatment groups, and received one of the four variations to evaluate.

Predictions

Through this research I seek insight into the question of electability—to know more about the discrepancy I assume to be present between the liberalization of society and that of the government; I believe that this, in particular, is an important area to study as the polarization of politics increases exponentially. This research, and any results produced thereby, will carry important political implications, as well as more general social implications, about tolerance and acceptance. Thus, my primary hypothesis is that the gender non-conforming candidates will receive more negative reviews than the conforming candidates. Additionally, I hypothesize that the non-conforming male candidate will perform less favorably than the non-conforming female candidate, and the conforming male candidate will perform most favorably, followed by the conforming female candidate.

Results

The survey was distributed to participants in four batches over a total of thirteen days in February of 2021, and garnered 653 complete responses.[4]

Respondents were asked to rate how likely they would be to vote for the candidate they had seen, on a scale from 1 to 7, very unlikely to very likely, with unsure halfway in-between; respondents who saw the conforming male gave an average score of 5.46 out of

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[4] Some respondents elected not to answer certain questions on the survey, but the 653 discussed here were all shown one of the treatment candidates.

Table 1. Candidate Evaluations.

Treatment Candidate		How likely would you be to vote for this candidate?	Do you think other people will vote for the candidate?[a]	Do you think the candidate is a Democrat or a Republican?[b]
FF	Mean	4.9609	1.1000	1.3278
	N	179	180	180
	Std. Deviation	1.74936	0.30084	0.47071
MF	Mean	5.1269	1.1418	1.2537
	N	134	134	134
	Std. Deviation	1.60554	0.35014	0.43678
MM	Mean	5.4593	1.0988	1.3023
	N	172	172	172
	Std. Deviation	1.34798	0.29931	0.46061
FM	Mean	5.3373	1.1737	1.2156
	N	166	167	167
	Std. Deviation	1.70757	0.37995	0.41245

[a] Scored as binary, 1 = yes, 2 = no. [b] Scored as binary, 1 = Democrat, 2 = Republican.

7, corresponding to a rating about halfway between somewhat likely and likely. Second place was taken by the non-conforming male candidate with an average score of 5.34, followed by the non-conforming female at 5.13. The conforming female candidate came in last place here, with an average rating of 4.96. Interestingly, however, when asked whether they thought *other* people would vote for the candidate, the conforming male still rated highest, the non-conforming male was rated least favorably, preceded by the non-conforming female, then the conforming female, who moved up from last place to second place. Additionally, when respondents were asked whether they thought the candidate they saw was a Democrat or a Republican, the non-conforming male candidate

was perceived as being the most Democratic of the candidates, followed closely by the non-conforming female, conforming male, and the conforming female, who was seen as the most Republican, although all of the candidates fell just slightly on the Democratic side of the halfway point between the two parties.

Respondents also evaluated the candidates in nine specific categories: whether they thought the candidate was a good fit for the job, professional, likable, competent, trustworthy, qualified, a strong leader, has good judgement, and cares about people like me (the respondent). Candidates received a score between 1 and 4—strongly disagree to strongly agree—in each of the categories (see table 2). The conforming male received the highest scores in fit for the job, likability, competence, qualification, strength of leadership, and care for people like the respondent. He ranked second for professionalism and having good judgement, and third for trustworthiness. In each of those three categories where the conforming male was out-performed, the top spot was taken by the non-conforming female candidate. The conforming female and non-conforming male candidates received the least favorable evaluations overall in these categories.

Discussion

It is important to note that not all of the compared means data of the candidates is significant[5]—however, the data that lacks significance is equally important in our analysis. Because each of the candidates received quite similar evaluations from the

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[5] Significance refers to statistical significance, rather than any subjective perception of the size of a number/measurement.

Table 2. Specific Candidate Evaluations.

Treatment	Candidate	A good fit for the job	Professional	Likable	Competent	Trustworthy	Qualified	A strong leader	Has good judgement	Cares about people like me
FF	**Mean**	2.9492	3.1564	3.1573	3.1285	3.1910	3.0950	3.0506	3.0800	3.2286
	N	177	179	178	179	178	179	178	175	175
	Std. Deviation	0.70123	0.69355	0.69541	0.72687	0.79371	0.79812	0.74616	0.53002	0.69834
MF	**Mean**	2.9925	3.2955	3.1493	3.2164	3.2239	3.1716	2.9774	3.1061	3.1642
	N	134	132	134	134	134	134	133	132	134
	Std. Deviation	0.65461	0.71770	0.68833	0.76936	0.64472	0.76114	0.75344	0.59588	0.78706
MM	**Mean**	3.0292	3.2706	3.2412	3.2367	3.1765	3.2294	3.1520	3.1059	3.2442
	N	171	170	170	169	170	170	171	170	172
	Std. Deviation	0.51366	0.65068	0.62071	0.67495	0.55845	0.70523	0.63267	0.48708	0.62942
FM	**Mean**	3.0000	3.1037	3.1758	3.1386	3.1145	3.1768	3.0366	3.0798	3.1402
	N	166	164	165	166	166	164	164	163	164
	Std. Deviation	0.64197	0.77237	0.67129	0.67785	0.68235	0.74254	0.71693	0.60839	0.69958

respondents, their average scores are very close to one another. That fact on its own suggests that perhaps the appearance of the candidates had less of an effect on respondents than anticipated—which implies a certain level of tolerance for non-conformity being applied towards political figures. And by looking at the areas of difference between candidates that *are* significant, we reveal where that tolerance may be falling short, or what preferences voters may have.

When it comes to electability, the conforming female candidate was evaluated significantly less favorably than both male candidates, but not significantly less than the non-conforming female candidate; similarly, although the conforming male received the

highest scores, the conforming female was the only candidate rated below him with any significance.[6]

Regarding the interesting discrepancies noted earlier between respondents' willingness to vote for the candidate they had seen and whether they thought others would be willing to vote for that same candidate, that relationship is significant, but only in relation to the non-conforming male. Although respondents were, on average, willing to vote for the non-conforming male candidate (even more-so than the conforming female), they expected others to be significantly less willing to do so. In fact, he's perceived as the least electable in this regard based on means alone, and he is rated significantly lower than both conforming candidates, although not significantly below the non-conforming female.[7] This suggests an interesting relationship between what people believe about other people, and how other people actually behave; which, I believe, is evidence of the period of transition and social uncertainty we currently inhabit. Respondents' tolerance of the non-conforming candidates in their own evaluations suggests a general attitude of acceptance, but their pessimism surrounding the capacity for tolerance in others implies a reluctance, or uncertainty—a belief that the general population is less tolerant, less accepting, less progressive, than they are. This sense of progressiveness may be related to the fact that the non-conforming male is perceived as being significantly more likely to be a Democrat than the conforming female.[8]

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[6] See table 1B in *Appendix B*.

[7] See table 2B in *Appendix B*. Keep in mind that the scoring of this variable is opposite the others—higher numbers equal a *lower* expectation of electability.

[8] See table 3B in *Appendix B*.

The areas of significance in the evaluation categories are worth noting as well. The only significance is seen in professionalism and strength of leadership, with the non-conforming male and non-conforming female being scored less favorably than the conforming male in those categories, respectively.[9] So far, though, we've only examined the means taken as the aggregate of all respondents' evaluations of the candidates, but we see different trends among different subsections of the sample.

Among LGB+ (non-straight) respondents (26% of the sample), for instance, no candidate is significantly more electable than another, but heterosexual respondents (73% of the sample) favor the conforming male over the conforming female. Similarly, LGB+ respondents rated the non-conforming male as significantly more competent than the conforming female, whereas heterosexual respondents rated the non-conforming male as significantly less competent than both the conforming male and non-conforming female candidates, but not significantly less than the conforming female. This latter fact suggests a gendered relationship affecting these perceptions—within our sample, heterosexuals perceive masculine candidates (regardless of gender) as being more competent than feminine candidates, while LGB+ individuals do not. In terms of strength of leadership, heterosexual respondents scored the conforming male significantly higher than both non-conforming candidates, and the conforming female higher than the non-conforming male, while LGB+ respondents rated the non-conforming male higher than the conforming female, with none of the other candidates being significantly different from one another. Similarly, respondents who reported that LGBT+ issues were important to them rated all

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[9] See tables 4 and 5B in *Appendix B*.

the candidates as equally electable, but respondents who reported that LGBT+ issues were not important to them rated the conforming male more electable than both female candidates; and respondents who reported that they approved of Planned Parenthood did not rate any one candidate as significantly more electable than any other, but respondents who reported that they disapproved of Planned Parenthood found the conforming female candidate less electable than the conforming male.[10]

This examination of the evaluative differences between gay and straight respondents is particularly valuable in this study. Due to the LGBT+ community's relationship with gender non-conformity, members of that community are often more aware of and/or familiar with gender non-conformity in everyday life than cisgender heterosexuals are, and often have a more complex relationship with gender identity and expression (their own and those of others around them). Thus, the ways in which the data reflect the differences between those groups can have various implications for understanding how social norms are determined within a cultural (or *sub*cultural) context, and how communication between subcultures shapes the development of their respective society and norms.

Aside from sexual orientation, there are differences in how other demographic subsets of the sample evaluated the candidates. Interestingly, men and women[11] were both significantly more likely to vote for the conforming male candidate than the conforming female, but men perceived the conforming male candidate as caring more

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[10] See *Appendix C* for data.

[11] 67% of the sample identified as men, 33% as women. Only one participant identified as nonbinary/other.

about people like them than the non-conforming female candidate (the other masculine candidate), while women perceived no significant differences in that category, and the same goes for strength of leadership.[12]

There are partisan differences as well. Respondents who reported voting for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris in the 2020 presidential election rated the conforming female as the least electable candidate, significantly below each of the others, while the only significant result with regard to electability among Trump/Pence voters was the conforming male being rated more favorably than the non-conforming male. Additionally, Trump voters perceived the conforming male candidate as having better judgement and being more likable than the non-conforming male, while there were no significant differences in these categories among Biden voters. However, Biden voters rated the non-conforming female candidate as more professional than the conforming female, while Trump voters rated the conforming male over the non-conforming male in professionalism.[13]

Conclusion

When asked how likely they would be to vote for the candidate they had seen, respondents favored the male candidates, yet rated the non-conforming female candidate more favorably than the non-conforming male in the evaluation categories—this suggests that in terms of pure electability, the yes or no question of whether to vote or not vote,

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[12] See *Appendix D* for data.

[13] See *Appendix E* for data.

people prefer men over women; but when it comes to actually evaluating the merits of candidates, masculinity is preferred, regardless of gender. Similarly, given that voters expected others to be less likely to vote for the non-conforming male than the other candidates, we can see that something about that candidate—possibly his non-conformity to gender norms in his appearance—is being perceived by respondents, and having an overall negative effect on their opinion of him.

We also see respondents who are either members of the LGBT+ community or passionate about LGBT+ issues rating the candidates more equally to one another, and those ratings aligning less with the expected results as influenced by dominant societal gender norms, which suggests that people who are more personally familiar with gender non-conformity[14] are less susceptible to its effects, or interpret it differently (in many cases more favorably) than those who are less familiar.

Overall, the tendency for the non-conforming female candidate to be evaluated somewhat more favorably than the non-conforming male suggests that while respondents may be punishing non-conformity in the male candidate, they punish it slightly less in the female candidate—and that has particularly interesting political implications. These results also suggest the partial rejection of my primary hypothesis, which rests itself on the non-conforming candidates performing more poorly than the conforming ones, which, as we have seen, is not always necessarily the case. Due to the performance of the conforming female candidate, especially in relation to the non-conforming female and

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[14] Due to the pervasiveness of gender non-conformity within the LGBT+ community.

non-conforming male, it seems that respondents subconsciously associate masculinity in appearance with the candidate's political ability.

The results of this study as a whole inspire deeper thought into the gender biases at play, as well as their relationship to various demographic groups, and I would recommend this as a direction for future research. Similarly, an investigation into voters who are themselves non-conforming in their gender expression, or whose gender identity is nonbinary would be beneficial to examine the relationships at play further.

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Appendix A

Candidate Information

Candidate Biography

"Growing up in suburban Springfield, Alex Greene has always had a passion for politics. In high school, (she/he) split (her/his) free time between tutoring (her/his) peers and volunteering at the local humane society. (Her/His) hard work and dedication allowed (her/him) to graduate from Harvard University with a degree in political science. After graduating, (she/he) returned to (her/his) local church, where (she/he) leads the youth group. In addition to (her/his) faith, (her/his) passion for human rights and (her/his) lifelong enthusiasm for education led Alex to years of rewarding work for the American Red Cross, where (she/he) has worked diligently securing funding for disaster relief and humanitarian aid. The sense of commitment towards (her/his) community, as well as the political knowledge and expertise (she/he) gained through these experiences have built the foundations necessary for Alex Greene to become a leader as a new State Senator."

Figure 1A. Conforming Female Candidate (FF).

Figure 2A. Non-Conforming Female Candidate (MF).

Note. Images used with permission from Rachel Dorschner(rachel.dorschner@gmail.com).

Figure 3A. Conforming Male Candidate (MM).

Figure 4A. Non-Conforming Male Candidate (FM).

Note. Images used with permission from Samuel Winnie (smlwinnie94@gmail.com)

and Michael Makar (mwmakar@gmail.com).

Appendix B

Primary Data

Table 1B. How likely would you be to vote for this candidate?

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	-0.16597	0.18404	0.367	-0.5274	0.1954
	MM	-0.9841*	0.17202	0.004	-0.8362	-0.1606
	FM	-0.37646*	0.17360	0.030	-0.7173	-0.0356
MM	FF	0.49841*	0.17202	0.004	0.1606	0.8362
	MF	0.33244	0.18564	0.074	-0.0321	0.6970
	FM	0.12195	0.17529	0.487	-0.2223	0.4662

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 2B. Do you think other people would vote for the candidate?

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	-0.04179	0.03795	0.271	-0.1163	0.0327
	MM	0.00116	0.03546	0.974	-0.0685	0.0708
	FM	-0.07365*	0.03573	0.040	-0.1438	-0.0035
MM	FF	-0.00116	0.03546	0.974	-0.0708	0.0685
	MF	-0.04295	0.03832	0.263	-0.1182	0.0323
	FM	-0.07482*	0.03613	0.039	-0.1458	-0.0039

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 3B. Do you think the candidate is a Democrat or a Republican?

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	0.07405	0.05098	0.147	-0.0261	0.1741
	MM	0.02545	0.04764	0.593	-0.0681	0.1190
	FM	0.11221*	0.04800	0.020	0.0179	0.2065
MM	FF	-0.02545	0.04764	0.593	-0.1190	0.0681
	MF	0.04859	0.05148	0.346	-0.0525	0.1497
	FM	0.08676	0.04854	0.074	-0.0086	0.1821

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 4B. Professionalism.

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	-0.13903	0.08130	0.088	-0.2987	0.0206
	MM	-0.11416	0.07589	0.133	-0.2632	0.0349
	FM	0.05277	0.07660	0.491	-0.0976	0.2032
MM	FF	0.11416	0.07589	0.133	-0.0349	0.2632
	MF	-0.02487	0.08221	0.762	-0.1863	0.1366
	FM	0.16693*	0.07756	0.032	0.0146	0.3192

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5B. Strong leader.

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	0.07312	0.08159	0.370	-0.0871	0.2333
	MM	-0.10148	0.07622	0.184	-0.2512	0.0482
	FM	0.01398	0.07705	0.856	-0.1373	0.1653
MM	FF	0.10148	0.07622	0.184	-0.0482	0.2512
	MF	0.17460*	0.08230	0.034	0.0130	0.3362
	FM	0.11546	0.07780	0.138	-0.0373	0.2682

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Appendix C

Sexual Orientation & Related Data

Table 1C. How likely would you be to vote for this candidate? (Heterosexual respondents)

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	-0.08593	0.20465	0.675	-0.4881	0.3162
	MM	-0.38951*	0.19256	0.044	-0.7679	-0.0111
	FM	-0.21184	0.20573	0.304	-0.6161	0.1924
MM	FF	0.38951*	0.19256	0.044	0.0111	0.7679
	MF	0.30358	0.20292	0.135	-0.0952	0.7023
	FM	0.17767	0.20401	0.384	-0.2232	0.5786

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 2C. Competence (LGB+ respondents).

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	-0.26667	0.18342	0.148	-0.6289	0.0955
	MM	-0.27302	0.16981	0.110	-0.6083	0.0623
	FM	-0.38343*	0.14912	0.011	-0.6779	-0.0889
MM	FF	0.27302	0.16981	0.110	-0.0623	0.6083
	MF	0.00635	0.19299	0.974	-0.3748	0.3875
	FM	-0.11041	0.16076	0.493	-0.4279	0.2070

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 3C. Competence (Heterosexual respondents).

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	-0.03237	0.09078	0.722	-0.2107	0.1460
	MM	-0.06729	0.08587	0.434	-0.2360	0.1015
	FM	0.15604	0.09101	0.087	-0.0228	0.3349
MM	FF	0.06729	0.08587	0.434	-0.1015	0.2360
	MF	0.03493	0.09062	0.700	-0.1431	0.2130
	FM	0.22334*	0.09086	0.014	0.0448	0.4019

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 4C. Strong leader (Heterosexual respondents).

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	0.18472	0.09420	0.050	-0.0004	0.3698
	MM	-0.03433	0.08856	0.698	-0.2084	0.1397
	FM	0.19424*	0.09420	0.040	0.0091	0.3793
MM	FF	0.03433	0.08856	0.698	-0.1397	0.2084
	MF	0.21905*	0.09356	0.020	0.0352	0.4029
	FM	0.22857*	0.09356	0.015	0.0447	0.4124

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5C. Strong leader (LGB+ respondents).

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	-0.23704	0.16573	0.155	-0.5643	0.0903
	MM	-0.28889	0.15344	0.062	-0.5919	0.0141
	FM	-0.36959*	0.13576	0.007	-0.6377	-0.1015
MM	FF	0.28889	0.15344	0.062	-0.0141	0.5919
	MF	0.05185	0.17438	0.767	-0.2925	0.3962
	FM	-0.08070	0.14620	0.582	-0.3694	0.2080

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 6C. How likely would you be to vote for this candidate? (LGBT+ issues not important)

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	0.05952	0.28720	0.836	-0.5057	0.6247
	MM	-0.65100*	0.27156	0.017	-1.1854	-0.1166
	FM	-0.44048	0.26797	0.101	-0.9678	0.0869
MM	FF	0.65100*	0.27156	0.17	0.1166	1.1854
	MF	0.71053*	0.29355	0.16	0.1328	1.2882
	FM	0.21053	0.27476	0.444	-0.3302	0.7513

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 7C. How likely would you be to vote for this candidate? (Disapprove of Planned Parenthood)

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	-0.13220	0.31235	0.672	-0.7473	0.4829
	MM	-0.65320*	0.29696	0.029	-1.2380	-0.0684
	FM	-0.44776	0.29805	0.134	-1.0347	0.1392
MM	FF	0.65320*	0.29696	0.029	0.0684	1.2380
	MF	0.52101	0.31130	0.095	-0.0920	1.1341
	FM	0.20544	0.29696	0.490	-0.3794	0.7903

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Appendix D

Gender Data

Table 1D. How likely would you be to vote for this candidate? (Women)

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	-0.36958	0.33995	0.278	-1.0398	0.3006
	MM	-0.71308*	0.31195	0.023	-1.3281	-0.0981
	FM	-0.38892	0.30107	0.198	-0.9825	0.2046
MM	FF	0.71308*	0.31195	0.023	0.0981	1.3281
	MF	0.34349	0.34634	0.322	-0.3393	1.0263
	FM	0.32416	0.30827	0.294	-0.2836	0.9319

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 2D. How likely would you be to vote for this candidate? (Men)

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	-0.06846	0.21921	0.755	-0.4993	0.3624
	MM	-0.40825*	0.20690	0.049	-0.8149	-0.0016
	FM	-0.38977	0.21328	0.068	-0.8090	0.0294
MM	FF	0.40825*	0.20690	0.0049	0.0016	0.8149
	MF	0.33979	0.22043	0.124	-0.0935	0.7730
	FM	0.01848	0.21454	0.931	-0.4032	0.4401

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 3D. Cares about people like me (Men).

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	0.14268	0.09668	0.141	-0.0474	0.3327
	MM	-0.07819	0.09129	0.392	-0.2576	0.1012
	FM	0.09228	0.09433	0.329	-0.0931	0.2777
MM	FF	0.07819	0.09129	0.392	-0.1012	0.2576
	MF	0.22087*	0.09687	0.023	0.0305	0.4113
	FM	0.17047	0.09452	0.072	-0.0153	0.3562

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 4D. Strong leader (Men).

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	0.10040	0.10054	0.319	-0.0972	0.2980
	MM	-0.15582	0.09481	0.101	-0.3422	0.0305
	FM	0.02901	0.09778	0.767	-0.1632	0.2212
MM	FF	0.15582	0.09481	0.101	-0.0305	0.3422
	MF	0.25623*	0.10128	0.012	0.0572	0.4553
	FM	0.18483	0.09855	0.061	-0.0089	0.3785

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Appendix E

Political Data

Table 1E. How likely would you be to vote for this candidate? (Biden voters)

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	-0.50901*	0.21330	0.017	-0.9283	-0.0898
	MM	-0.58420*	0.19710	0.003	-0.9716	-0.1968
	FM	-0.60920*	0.20241	0.003	-1.0070	-0.2114
MM	FF	0.58420*	0.19710	0.003	0.1968	0.9716
	MF	0.07519	0.21175	0.723	-0.3410	0.4914
	FM	-0.02500	0.20078	0.901	-0.4196	0.3696

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 2E. How likely would you be to vote for this candidate? (Trump voters)

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	0.13950	0.41584	0.738	-0.6823	0.9613
	MM	-0.68900	0.38501	0.076	-1.4499	0.0719
	FM	0.09441	0.38236	0.805	-0.6613	0.8501
MM	FF	0.68900	0.38501	0.076	-0.0719	1.4499
	MF	0.82849	0.42868	0.055	-0.0187	1.6757
	FM	0.78340*	0.39629	0.050	0.0002	1.5666

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 3E. Has good judgement (Trump voters).

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	0.11548	0.15444	0.456	-0.1898	0.4207
	MM	-0.11138	0.14310	0.438	-0.3942	0.1714
	FM	0.20036	0.14212	0.161	-0.0805	0.4813
MM	FF	0.11138	0.14310	0.438	-0.1714	0.3942
	MF	0.22686	0.15848	0.154	-0.0864	0.5401
	FM	0.31174*	0.14650	0.035	0.0222	0.6013

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 4E. Likability (Trump voters).

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	-0.01123	0.17229	0.948	-0.3518	0.3293
	MM	-0.27404	0.16078	0.090	-0.5918	0.0438
	FM	0.15146	0.15855	0.341	-0.1619	0.4648
MM	FF	0.27404	0.16078	0.090	-0.0438	0.5918
	MF	0.26281	0.17783	0.142	-0.0887	0.6143
	FM	0.42550*	0.16455	0.011	0.1003	0.7507

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 5E. Professionalism (Biden voters).

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	-0.20807*	0.09316	0.026	-0.3912	-0.0250
	MM	-0.08766	0.08599	0.309	-0.2567	0.0814
	FM	0.00274	0.08834	0.975	-0.1709	0.1764
MM	FF	0.08766	0.08599	0.309	-0.0814	0.2567
	MF	-0.12042	0.09266	0.194	-0.3025	0.0617
	FM	0.09040	0.0870	0.304	-0.0822	0.2630

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 6E. Professionalism (Trump voters).

Treatment Candidate (I)	Treatment Candidate (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
FF	MF	0.04221	0.19455	0.829	-0.3424	0.4268
	MM	-0.23771	0.17951	0.188	-0.5926	0.1171
	FM	0.16627	0.17822	0.352	-0.1860	0.5186
MM	FF	0.23771	0.17951	0.188	-0.1171	0.5926
	MF	0.27992	0.20158	0.167	-0.1185	0.6784
	FM	0.40398*	0.18587	0.031	0.0366	0.7714

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.