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## All the difference in the world: Gender and the 2016 Election

**ABSTRACT:** In this paper, I analyze multiple aspects of how gender norms pervaded the 2016 election, from the way Clinton and Trump announced their presidency to the way masculinity and femininity were policed throughout the election. Examples include Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, Barack Obama, and Gary Johnson. I also consider how some women who support Trump reacted to allegations about sexual harassment. The difference between running for President as a man and running for President as a woman makes all the difference in the world.



**IMAGE DESCRIPTION:** This image shows Donald Trump on the left and Hillary Clinton on the right. Trump's eyes are narrowed, his brow furrowed. He looks serious, and there is no hint of a smile. On the right, Clinton has a composed look with a slight, close-mouthed smile, her eyes open to a typical degree. Both are white and have greying blonde hair.

The May 21, 2007 cover of *TIME* magazine showed a close-up image of Mitt Romney's face with the cover tagline "...he looks like a President...", the first of many such claims. In 2011, as Texas Governor Rick Perry geared up for a run at the presidency, *Washington Post* opinion writer Richard Cohen said that Perry "actually looks like a President." The term, here, is used as praise. Yet the power of its use as an epithet when people fail to look adequately presidential cannot be understated. During the primaries for the 2016 election, while watching Republican candidate Carly Fiorina, Donald Trump said in front of a reporter, "Look at that face! Would anyone vote for that? Can you imagine that, the face of our next president?!?! I mean, she's a woman, and I'm not s'posed to say bad things, but really, folks, come on. Are we serious?" (Lawler) Campaigning in Cleveland in early September, Trump said of Hillary Clinton, "Does she look presidential, fellas? Give me a break." (Nguyen) It will not have escaped the reader's notice that Romney and Perry are both men, while Fiorina and Clinton are both women. What difference does this difference make? And what difference did it make to the 2016 election? Rather a lot, as it turns out.

It would be folly to claim that the 2016 election involved more gender performance than previous elections. Indeed, the presence of Sarah Palin as the Republican nominee's Vice Presidential Pick in 2008 and Hillary Clinton's effort for the Democratic Presidential nomination at the time heightened attention to gender in politics. Saturday Night Live effectively lampooned this feature of the 2008 election in a skit featuring "Sarah Palin" and "Hillary Clinton" uniting to call the nation out on its attention to their appearance. However, it is the 2016 election on which I focus, and which presents us with ample opportunity for seeing gender in play. This is in part due to the very competitive Republican primary, the persona of the eventual Republican nominee (Donald Trump), and the presence of women candidates in the Republican primary (Carly

Fiorina) and as the Democratic nominee (Hillary Clinton). I argue that gender as performed in this election makes crystal clear the role gender plays in American society. This is exemplified in the behaviors and treatment of candidates throughout the election. Let us begin at the official beginning: with the announcement of the major party candidate's intention to run for President.

On April 12, 2015, Hillary Clinton released the announcement video formally putting her forth as candidate for President of the United States (TimesVideo 2015). In this short video, she featured the stories of a diverse group of Americans who are "getting ready" to plant their gardens (an older white woman), watch their kids start school (a young white woman), have a baby (an African-American couple), get a job after college (a young Asian woman), get married (a gay couple), and start a company (a burly white man). Clinton then appears and says she, too, is getting ready to do something:

I'm running for President... Everyday Americans need a champion, and I wanna be that champion. So you can do more than just get by. You can get ahead, and stay ahead. Because when families are strong, America is strong... I hope you'll join me on this journey. (TimesVideo 2015)

The images that flash on the screen include a lesbian couple as well as some of the families seen earlier. The image is a clear image of inclusion, nurturing, and defending families. Indeed, Clinton's campaign slogan for the next year and a half would be "Stronger Together."

By contrast, on June 16, 2015, Donald Trump announced his candidacy for President in a live speech in which he entered a packed lobby via escalator, waving and smiling, as Neil Young's guitar-driven "Rockin' in the Free World" blasts. Ivanka Trump then introduced her father, saying:

We don't need talk, we need action. We need execution. We need someone who is bold, and independent... I can tell you that there is no better person than my father to have in your corner when you are facing tough opponents or making hard decisions. He is battle-tested. (C-SPAN)

Trump then proceeded to talk for over forty minutes about what he sees as the problems facing America. It is in this speech that he first positions Mexican immigrants as criminals and rapists, acknowledging that some may be good people. It is also in this speech that he introduces a theme he will repeat throughout the election and into his presidency: that America hasn't been winning, but with his skills America will begin to do very well and start winning again. Indeed, Trump's campaign slogan for the next year and a half would be "Make America Great Again."

These two announcements set the tone for the remainder of the election. Clinton's announcement performed key aspects of femininity: defense of family, preparation and planning, social and emotional labor, interdependence, asking rather than demanding, serving as a champion by advocating for people. As Marilyn Frye (1983) has argued, women are taken most seriously when they put themselves into traditionally masculine roles such as politics but only on behalf of traditionally feminine values and roles including advocacy for the family and concern for the welfare of others. These were themes on prominent display in Clinton's announcement. However, the toolset we will need to make sense of the 2016 election goes beyond this and requires careful examination of the norms of both femininity and masculinity.

As the election wore on, Clinton was increasingly attacked for how she looked and comported herself: for her "masculine" pantsuits, for how she carried herself, for how she didn't smile enough, for how old she looked. In short, she was critiqued for how she performed femininity. The key notion behind gender as performativity, as developed by Judith Butler in the

influential *Gender Trouble*, is that gender is not natural but rather is manufactured through repeated acts. When people perform gender in ways that don't fit into gender norms, their existence becomes socially unintelligible, and so we police their actions to bring them into conformity. The alternative would be to allow gender norms themselves to be disrupted. This would make their artifice, their nature as a performance, startlingly clear (Butler 1999). Such policing is precisely what happened to Hillary Clinton. The media and populace went on to demand behaviors of Clinton that we can see as clearly fitting into the double binds of femininity. Consider the following images:



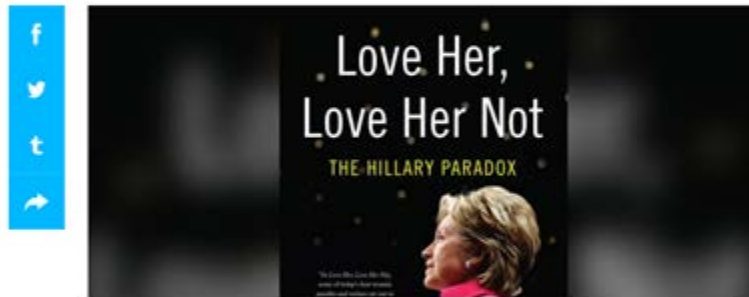
Politics  
Is she 'likable enough'?

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Hillary Clinton on the campaign trail

OPINION  
HILLARY SHOULD PLAY UP HER FEMININE SIDE

BY ESTELLE ERASMUS ON 11/4/15 AT 10:49 AM



Hillary Clinton's  
The World of Hillary Clinton  
Chocolate Chip Cookies Recipe



You will need:  
1 1/2 cups unbleached flour  
1 tsp salt  
1 tsp baking soda  
1 cup solid vegetable shortening  
1/2 cup granulated sugar  
1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar  
1 tsp vanilla  
2 eggs  
2 cups unbleached rolled oats  
1 pkg (12 oz) semisweet chocolate chips

TO MAKE COOKIES: Combine flour, salt and baking soda on wax paper. In mixing bowl beat together shortening, sugars and vanilla until creamy. Add eggs. Beat until light and fluffy. Gradually beat in flour mixture and rolled oats. Stir in chocolate chips.  
TO BAKE COOKIES: Drop well-rounded teaspoonfuls of dough onto greased baking sheet. Bake in 350-degree oven for 8 to 10 minutes or until golden. Cool cookies for 2 minutes. Transfer to wire rack. Cool completely. Makes 7 1/2 dozen cookies.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: The first image shows a screen capture of a headline from the Washington Post which reads “Is she likable enough?” The second image shows a screen cap of an Opinion piece by Estelle Erasmus featuring a photo of Jennifer Lee’s book *Love Her, Love Her Not: The Hillary Paradox* with the title of Erasmus’s piece: “Hillary should play up her feminine side.” Finally, there is an image of Hillary Clinton’s Chocolate Chip Cookie recipe, released during the campaign.

Was Clinton too strong and independent and cold and not likable enough, not loveable enough? Would being more feminine help her, or cause her to be seen as too emotional and relational and domestic, playing right into sex stereotyped comments by opponents about whether a woman could be trusted with “the red button” at certain times of the month? Frye discusses such double binds as a classic experience of oppressed people. These are “situations in which options are reduced to a very few and all of them expose one to penalty, censure or deprivation” (1983, 2). This is a textbook case.

Another classic, and related, double bind is revealed in the constant policing of women’s affect complete with injunctions to “smile” so as to be pleasing to others who find unsmiling women to be distressing. How can one be friendly without reinforcing gender norms? Frye provides us with an elegant elucidation of this particular double bind:

...it is often a requirement upon oppressed people that we smile and be cheerful. If we comply, we signal our docility and our acquiescence in our situation. We need not, then, be taken note of. We acquiesce in being made invisible, in occupying no space. We participate in our own erasure. On the other hand, anything but the sunniest countenance exposes us to being perceived as mean, bitter, angry, or dangerous. This means, at the least, that we may be found ‘difficult’ or unpleasant to work with, which is enough to cost one one’s livelihood; at worse, being seen as mean, bitter, angry or dangerous has been known to result in rape, arrest, beating and murder. One can only choose to risk one’s preferred form and rate of annihilation. (1983, 2–3)

Women’s comportment is also often policed via their literal voices. From picking on upspeak—ending statements with a higher pitch so that it sounds almost as if the speaker is asking a question—to volume and the way that one speaks about facts vs. narratives, gender is enforced in myriad ways by examining women’s voices. Alas that after decades of criticisms of such policing, they were still levied at Clinton. Consider the following images which embody the oft-levied critiques of Clinton’s affect as well as her voice and speaking style.

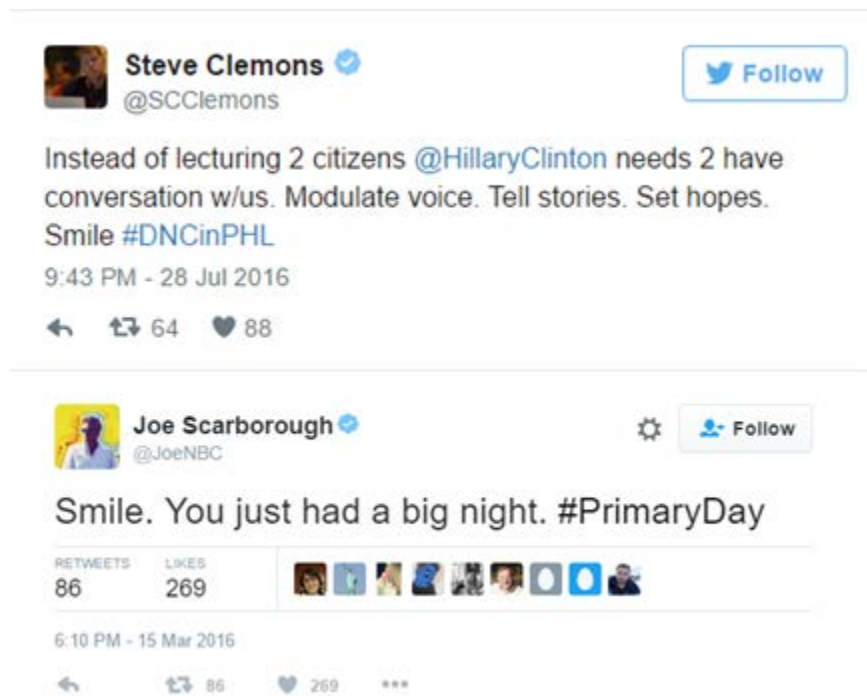


IMAGE DESCRIPTION: We see here two screen caps of tweets. The first tweet, by Steve Clemons, is from July 28, 2016. In it, Clemons says [condensed twitter abbreviations replaced with full English words] “Instead of lecturing to citizens Hillary Clinton needs to have conversation with us. Modulate voice. Tell stories. Set hopes. Smile.” A hashtag reveals that this was in reference to her speech at the Democratic



National Convention. The second tweet, by MSNBC's Joe Scarborough of Morning Joe, is dated March 15, 2016 and reads "Smile. You just had a big night." The hashtag reveals this is in reference to primary results.

To truly demonstrate the nature of affect policing, and smiling in particular as a double bind a la Frye (1983), it would be most useful if we had an example of another person critiquing Clinton for later beginning to smile too much. Consider:



IMAGE DESCRIPTION: We see here one screen cap of a tweet. It is by David Frum, dated September 26, 2016. It reads "Who told Hillary Clinton to keep smiling like she's at her granddaughter's birthday party?"

These critiques all fall on Clinton for the performance she gives the public; they are not simply about political efficacy. Rather, they both embody and rely on gender norms and sexism for their power. When these comments are made, they bring into play a whole host of prior beliefs and stereotypes in the mind of the audience. Without those, the critiques would seem silly: "doesn't smile enough" is not a good criterion for President of the United States, after all.

Philosopher Sandra Bartky (1998) addresses precisely these kinds of critiques when she discusses femininity as a disciplinary regime. Bartky argues that there are three types of these

disciplinary practices that create “styles of the flesh” (while these apply to both masculinity and femininity, Bartky focuses on the latter):

1. Practices which aim to produce a body of a certain size and general configuration (diet; weightlifting; not too heavy/large for women and not too small/slight for men)
2. Those that bring forth from this body a specific repertoire of gestures, postures, and movements (including “steering”: when someone puts their hand on another’s body to patronizingly guide them in where to go)
3. And those that are directed toward the display of this body as an ornamental surface (makeup, tattoos, jewelry, lotion, perfumes, hair dye, etc.) (Bartky 2010)

It is worth noting that on Bartky’s account, these disciplinary practices create a highly constrained and time-consuming femininity that literally weakens women relative to how strong they could be if they took up more space, lifted weights to get strong, and so forth. This dominant set of norms of femininity also literally makes women and feminine persons take up less space by urging them to make their bodies small, sit with knees crossed close together and elbows in, and so forth. By comparison, men and masculine persons are encouraged to take up space, both in sitting and in moving, and are encouraged to lift weights to grow larger and more muscular.



IMAGE DESCRIPTION: On the left, a man with close-cropped hair sits on a chair. His feet and knees are spread should-width apart and he leans forward, resting his elbows on his thighs with his hands clasped. Both feet are firmly planted on the floor. He is wearing a full-coverage long-sleeved olive sweater with a white t-shirt underneath, a pair of jeans, and brown sneakers. On the right, a woman with straight shoulder-length hair wears a white knee-length sundress with thin spaghetti straps, with knee-high black leather boots with a high heel. Her arms are bare. One leg is crossed tightly over the other, with her heel held in close to the other lower leg. Both her hands rest on her top knee. This brings her shoulders in, making them narrower than if she were sitting back with her arms at her side. These are typical masculine and feminine postures. If a man were to take the pose on the right, he would be seen as feminine. If a woman were to take the pose on the left, she would be seen as masculine.

Even though masculinity can also be a disciplinary regime in that it requires one to be muscular, have thick hair, and avoid displaying emotion, these do not have the subordinating effect that femininity does. As Frye notes, for men, “a steely tough or laid-back demeanor (all are forms

which suggest invulnerability) marks [a man] as a member of the male community [who] is esteemed by other men. Consequently, the maintenance of that demeanor contributes to the man's self-esteem" and to the respect men receive from others (1983, 14). Echoing Bartky's analysis, Frye goes on to say:

Like men's emotional restraint, women's physical restraint is required by men. But unlike the case of men's emotional restraint, women's physical restraint is not rewarded. What do we get for it? Respect and esteem and acceptance? No. They mock us and parody our mincing steps. We look silly, incompetent, weak, and generally contemptible. Our exercise of this discipline tends to low esteem and low self-esteem...The woman's restraint is part of a structure oppressive to women; the man's restraint is part of a structure oppressive to women. (1983, 15)

Or as Bartky (2010) puts it, women cooperate in making themselves "object and prey" when they comply with the norms of femininity. Thus we see how complying with the comportment norms of femininity puts female candidates such as Hillary Clinton at a terrible disadvantage, while complying with the norms of masculinity puts male candidates at an advantage.

By contrast with the way that Hillary's announcement embodied many of the norms of femininity, Trump's announcement performs key aspects of masculinity: independence (including a lack of concern for others' opinions), combativeness in defense of what is right, serving as a champion by winning, virility, and strength. Indeed, in a later appearance on *Dr. Oz*, Trump made sure to get Dr. Oz to discuss how high his testosterone is. This turned out to be a big applause line. Trump went on to say that when he looks in the mirror, he sees a 35-year old

man and that when he plays golf with NFL player Tom Brady, “I feel the same age as him” (de Moraes 2016). Add to the previous list not only strength and aggressiveness and virility, which the general public strongly associates with testosterone, but also youth and general vitality. These are classic traits of what R.W. Connell, in her groundbreaking work on Western masculinities, termed “hegemonic masculinity.”

‘Hegemonic masculinity’ is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable. (2010, 236)

An effective way of dropping a masculine person’s social status is by accusing them of not being masculine in the right way, but instead embodying one of what Connell calls the ‘subordinate masculinities.’ One can do this in many ways including accusing a man of being too like a woman, or accusing them of being homosexual. Hegemonic masculinity is not only independent, heteronormative, aggressive, virile, and youthful, but also white. As Patricia Hill Collins argued, part of hegemonic masculinity is wealth and property, a set of social positions long closed off to black men. Thus, Collins argues, race is an important aspect of hegemonic masculinity (2004, 193). So important is it to approximate hegemonic masculinity as closely as possible, that gay men (Sanchez et al. 2009; Tattelman 2005; Wright 2005) and black men (Collins 2004, 190) can find themselves intensely embracing the aspects of hegemonic masculinity which are open to them: virility, youthfulness, aggressiveness, muscularity, independence, strength, and domination over women. Devising alternative masculinities may be a necessary step forward (Heasley 2005; Mutua 2006; Neal 2006), but it has its costs. Because of the need for men to position themselves within the hegemonic masculinity instead of within subordinate masculinities, violence and the language of violence is used to draw and enforce these boundaries, not only against women but

also between men. As Connell notes, “violence can become a way of claiming or asserting masculinity in group struggles” (2010, 241). Trump’s insistence on Making America Great Again through economic domination rather than trade agreements, and through expanding America’s standing military and its array of military equipment, is precisely in this vein. Coupled with a “rich vocabulary of abuse” against men who are too feminine or gay (“sissy”, “wimp”, “candy ass”, “mama’s boy”) or who are black (“boy”), it is possible to police gender most effectively (Connell 2010, 238). Many of these terms derive their bite by accusing the man in question of being too like a woman. They thus reinforce the low value of women.

We can see this in the way that two prominent men responded to Trump publically: then-President Barack Obama, and then-rival Gary Johnson. Let us begin with Johnson. The astute reader will recall that in the waning days of the campaign, an audiotape was revealed of Trump discussing the liberties that he as a wealthy and famous man could take with attractive women: without waiting for permission, he could just “grab ‘em by the pussy.” (Farenthold 2016) But slang for female anatomy is not the only way this word is used. In fact, it has a second life as precisely the kind of “rich vocabulary of abuse” Connell discusses which is so often used to police masculinity. In that sense, the word “pussy” means a man who is not genuinely courageous, essentially an unmasculine man, a man who is like a woman’s sexual anatomy: to be used by others.

This is precisely the sense in which Gary Johnson, Libertarian Party nominee, deployed it. During his first debate, Johnson said “Donald Trump’s a pussy.” Later, given a chance to explain himself, Johnson said it was a “misfire” and then proceeded to reinforce his own masculinity over and against Trump’s with reference to a number of feats that also clearly reveal his wealth:

But you know what? I've climbed the highest mountain on each of the seven continents, I'm going to do a three-thousand mile mountain bike ride here, upcoming. Trump's a pussy...If it gets down to being in the presidential debates and he's got anything to say about me, which I'm sure he will, I'll just start off with the fact that he's a pussy.

Reflecting on Johnson's utterances, J. Wilson wrote at *A Libertarian Future* that

If people are looking for some machismo in their candidate, Johnson is a much better choice...Donald Trump is a pampered, overweight, urbanite who's driven around in limos and waited on hand and foot...Gary Johnson is right to call him a pussy. (2016)

This rhetoric uncritically accepts hegemonic masculinity, and polices it in typical ways. In addition, Wilson's affirmative response details a number of features about Trump that go against the norms of masculine persons as strong, independent, hard workers. The use of "urbanite" as an insult draws its power from its opposite, namely the image of a man who works with his hands and provides for himself and his family in an admirable, physical way. Having seen the gender mechanics of Johnson's attack on Trump—who, himself, performs masculinity as a major part of his political persona—let's take a look at Obama's.

During late summer and early fall of 2016, Trump began working to lay the ground for contesting election results. He repeatedly tweeted, spoke at rallies, and said in interviews that if he loses the election it would be because it was "rigged", and that there will be massive voter fraud. On October 18 of 2016, President Obama responded to these claims outside the White House, saying:

It doesn't really show the kind of leadership and toughness that you'd want out of a president. You start whining before the game's even over? If whenever things are going badly for you and you lose you start blaming somebody else? Then you don't have what it takes to be in this job. (TimesVideo 2016)



IMAGE DESCRIPTION: This image shows a screenshot of a New York Times video of Obama. He is frozen in mid-sentence, his close-cropped hair grey against his dark skin. He is wearing a black suit, white shirt, and patterned grey tie with an American flag pin on his lapel. The header says "Obama to Trump: Stop Whining"; the caption reads "Speaking at the White House with the Italian prime minister, President Obama responded to a journalist's question about Donald J. Trump's claims of a rigged election by saying Mr. Trump should "stop whining.""

Image Credit: Al Drago/ The New York Times.

Here Obama, like Johnson, uses language that is particularly telling against men. Part of being masculine is that one is supposed to be tough, not show vulnerability, and be stoic. Whining is precisely against these normative traits. And thus, to accuse a man of whining is to accuse him of not being masculine in much the same way that boys are told growing up to not be a "cry-baby." This, too, is policing masculinity.



When directed at women, language also shows their subordinate status. Consider the term “bitch”, commonly directed at Hillary Clinton. As many have noted, “bitch” is almost always used to insult women who are too uppity, who refuse to cooperate, who don’t put others’ emotional and physical well-being always above their own. This is one way femininity is enforced and regulated, but it is inextricable from masculinity, for physical and other forms of violence against women also sustain hegemonic masculinity: “Intimidation of women ranges across the spectrum, from wolf-whistling in the street, to office harassment, to rape and domestic assault... Most men do not attack or harass women; but those who do are unlikely to think themselves deviant.” (Connell 2010, 238) For this reason, today’s hegemonic masculinity is often referred to as “toxic masculinity.”

Now, we almost have the tools we need to approach Trump’s own use of the word “pussy.” As I mentioned earlier, a recording was released of Donald Trump and entertainment host Billy Bush talking with each other in 2005. Just before they pull up in a bus to meet a soap opera star, the following conversation ensues (Fahrenheit 2016).

BUSH: “Sheesh, your girl’s hot as shit in the purple.”

TRUMP: “Whoa! I better use some Tic Tacs just in case I start kissing her. You know I’m automatically attracted to beautiful—I just start kissing them. It’s like a magnet. [nervous or hysterical laughter from Bush] Just kiss. I don’t even wait. And when you’re a star they let you do it. You can do anything.”

BUSH: “Whatever you want.”

TRUMP: “Grab them by the pussy. [brief pause, Bush laughing] You can do anything.”

Now, it might be argued charitably that this was 11 years prior to the election. So what was the modern Trump response to the release of the tape? He issued a statement saying “This was locker room banter, a private conversation that took place many years ago. Bill Clinton has said far worse to me on the golf course—not even close. I apologize if anyone was offended” (Fahrenthold 2016). As many have noted, this is a very bad apology. Genuine apologies don’t put the onus on the listener for having been offended, but rather take responsibility for the utterance by the wrongdoer acknowledging the wrongdoing. As Nick Smith (2008) writes in *I Was Wrong: The Meanings of Apologies*, one may reasonably question whether admissions that “mistakes were made” or that the speaker “regrets if anyone took offense” qualify as apologies at all (Radzik 2015). At no point does Trump actually issue a genuine apology. Instead, he normalizes his behavior by saying that his opponent’s husband does worse, and that this is “locker room” talk. He apologizes that anyone was offended, not that he talked or thought about women in these ways. And why should he feel that he must?

Trump is enacting the norms of hegemonic masculinity: he takes what he wants, he is independent, he is aggressive, and he is sexually successful. And as Connell said, men who assault or harass women hardly think of themselves as deviant. Sociologist Michael Kimmel (2008), who studies masculinity, expands on hegemonic masculinity usefully. He describes the way in which dominant masculinity norms structure men’s social status so that it depends on *how they are seen by other men*, as Connell also acknowledged. It is no accident that Trump said this on a hot mic to Billy Bush, a younger and conventionally attractive man. Kimmel notes that a large part of men’s social status with other men depends on how good they are at “scoring” which is to say, at collecting sexual conquests of women. This is not concerned with consent so much as with sexual access to women and posturing.

The time-honored way for a guy to prove that he is a real man is to score with a woman. It indicates both his desirability and his virility and proves that he's succeeding in the often complicated task of attaining manhood. The problem, however, is that for guys, girls often feel like the primary obstacle to proving manhood. They are not nearly as compliant as guys say they would like them to be. By declining guys' sexual advances and not allowing guys to use them as currency, they are often as much of a threat to masculinity as they are a booster. (Kimmel 2008, 170)

Trump's 2005 claims play into exactly this sociological picture of ignoring consent and of the role of scoring, and posturing about scoring, in shoring up masculinity. But his justification of the behavior as locker room talk also plays into the sociological picture of masculinity. As Kimmel says, "What I learned in the locker rooms of my youth was 'Tell her anything if it'll get you laid.' I can still hear my friend Billy... 'The most important thing is to keep going. If she pushes your hand away, keep going. You only stop if she hits you'" (2008, 217). In interviews with men, Kimmel finds the same patterns again and again: fundamentally, this kind of sexual posturing is not about interest in the girl (2008, 219). It is about capturing the esteem of other men. Both Trump's 2005 utterance and his 2016 publicity statement about it show a desire to perform and embody hegemonic masculinity.

We see how typical and dominant these attitudes about sex and locker room talk are not only by considering Kimmel's work, but also by considering the reaction to Trump's 2005 and 2016 statements. As much as men who assault and harass women may not think themselves deviant, observers also may not think them deviant. Indeed, while many people were outraged—

a rallying cry of many women was “this pussy grabs back”—others considered it normal behavior and typical locker room talk. On his show *Anderson Cooper 360*, CNN’s Cooper interviewed Trump supporters on October 11, 2016, who had no problem with his behavior. Said one woman: “It was just a man being a man in a men’s world talking to men.” In response to the female interviewer asking “How many of you are willing to write this off as locker room banter...?” all of the ten women on camera raise their hands. One woman named Amy Hillock elaborates:

I have two brothers, my dad, military family. I’ve heard words worse. I’ve seen things worse. The word is a little derogatory. I wish if he had said it, he said it another way. But you know, he wasn’t saying it to females, he was saying it to men.

Locker room, [is like the] bus... (CNN 2016)

Another woman says she would have found it offensive if said around her, but again dismisses it as just locker room talk, the boys’ club (CNN 2016). All of the women in the video appear to be white.

The women interviewed here do not fully distinguish between the descriptive and the normative. By saying that it is normal locker room talk, and both adopting and confirming the language of Trump’s 2016 response to the tape, they are describing what they know to be true: that men are very often this way with each other. But that this is so does not make it right. That next normative, analytic step doesn’t take place in their discourse. And for many men and women in the United States for whom this is typical, and for women for whom sexual harassment is the cost of being around men in public, this is simply the way things are. As Judith Butler has noted, when gender is performed, it is “not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization” (1999, xv). Consistent performance of the

norms of gender makes all other ways of being appear unintelligible, and makes them seem intrinsic: “what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts... an hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures” (Butler 1999, xv). The doing of gender produces gender, and that produced gender makes established ways of doing gender seem, well, both unalterable and right. It is no wonder at all that we refer to locker room behaviors as “just boys being boys” and sometimes despairingly describe them as incorrigible (literally, they cannot be corrected). In addition, as Frye (1983) has noted, it is a fundamental component of efficient exploitation that those being exploited buy into and adopt the norms that endorse their exploitation. Women’s locker room talk often consists of policing femininity according to norms that are not good for women. What’s more, as both de Beauvoir (1949) and Frye (1983)—both white women philosophers—acknowledge, white women often ally with white men, even against other women, as this represents their greatest chance of security. Perhaps we should be unsurprised that 53% of the white female voters in the United States voted for Trump (Lett 2016). Given all of these considerations, it is no wonder at all that some substantial subset of women have adopted and live according to, and are unable or unwilling to critique, the inextricable norms of femininity and hegemonic masculinity.

These analytic tools are essential for understanding the 2016 election, and how gender norms have been directed at, and exploited by, the campaigns. Taking them together with Bartky’s discussion of comportment—the specific repertoire of gestures that makes people recognizable masculine or feminine—we can move on to analyze several telling images of how both Trump and Bernie Sanders navigated their physical interactions with Hillary Clinton.

Consider the following images depicting Trump’s behavior at the September 26, 2016 presidential debate, and Sanders’ during the primaries. Watch closely for steering behavior, in

which a man patronizingly uses his hand—often on a woman’s back—to guide her body through space as though she cannot do so on her own. Look also for what Bartky describes as “the economy of touching” which is out of balance in favor of men: men touch women more often and on more parts of the body than women touch men (2010, 408).

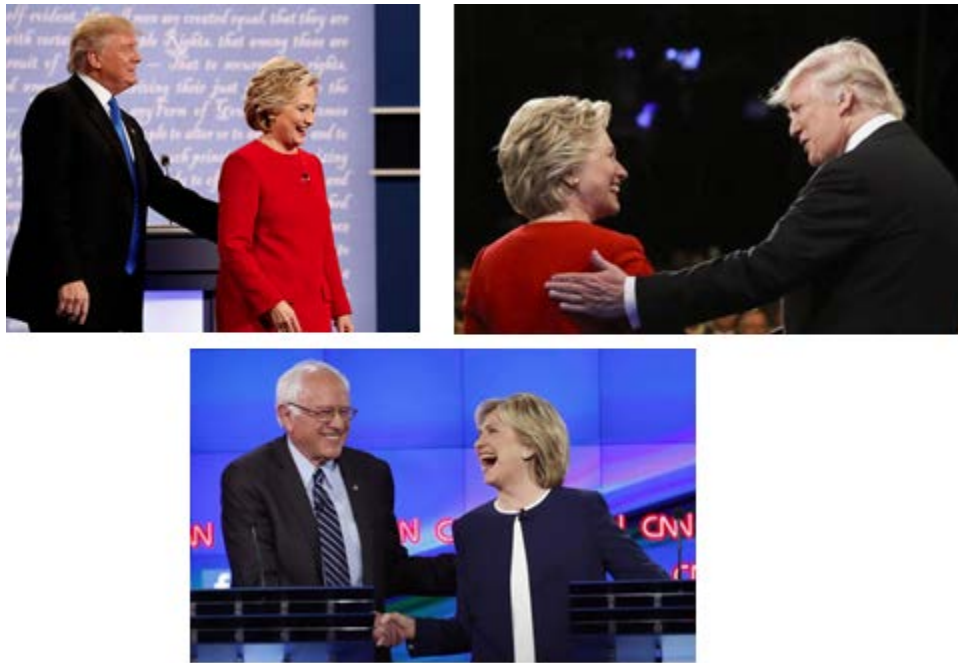


IMAGE DESCRIPTION: In all three images, we see variations of steering behavior and the economy of touch. The top images both show Trump and Clinton. Clinton is wearing a red pantsuit and Trump is wearing a dark suit with a blue tie. In the left image, Clinton is walking toward the front of the stage while Trump awkwardly extends his arm to maintain contact with her lower back as she does so. In the right image, the photographer stands behind Trump and Clinton at the same event. Clinton and Trump are looking at each other and smiling. Trump has his arm extended to touch her upper back. In the lower image, we see Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton during the primaries on a stage. Clinton is wearing a dark blue suit with a white shell underneath, while

Sanders is wearing a navy blue suit with a striped blue and pale blue tie. The two are smiling. Clinton is looking at Sanders and her mouth is wide open. Both face the camera and Clinton shakes Sanders' hand, each using their right hands.

Sanders' left hand is behind Clinton's back, touching her shoulder. This is almost exactly the same set of conditions we see in the top right photo with Trump where the photographer is behind the pair.

Careful reflection on these images shows recurring patterns with both of the men whom Clinton spent the most time debating in this campaign: both touch Clinton in addition to shaking her hand, on her back, and Trump engages in classic steering. These patterns will be familiar to most people who share mainstream American experiences with gender norms, steering, and the economy of touch. In addition, during one of the debates, Trump followed Clinton around the stage even when it was her turn to answer questions. While this was likely to ensure she never had screen time without him in the picture, it came across to many viewers as creepy and stalking. At a minimum, it reveals that he felt entitled to be present and visible during her designated time to be answering questions. He refused to yield attention to her. This, like the steering, is a dominance move and as such is entirely consistent with the interplay of masculinity and femininity as dominance and subordination described by Connell, Bartky, and Frye. Femininity and masculinity are inextricable: to be truly masculine, one must not be seen as feminine and must exert dominance over those who are.

As we have seen, the campaign and its key performances are shot through with gender norms. Now, we see it all the way down to the level of positioning on stage.

I have considered what each candidate did to make themselves appear fit candidates for President, how they played upon gender norms or were undermined by them. There are many

more theorists we could deploy in a longer-form analysis. Indeed, there are many more examples I could have drawn upon from this particular election or from the treatment of Clinton and Palin in 2008, of Geraldine Ferraro in 1980, and of many other path-breaking politicians including Republican Olympia Snow. Running for national office is a level of scrutiny unlike any other. But what I have found most intriguing in writing this examination is how much it is like the daily scrutiny we all face for our gender performances. It is not that the candidates were running for President that makes the difference, but rather their gender and the mechanisms of gender. The difference between running for President as a man and running for President as a woman makes all the difference in the world.

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