

**An examination of how family structure and support
affect a woman's candidacy for public office**

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MPP Essay

Submitted to

Oregon State University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Public Policy

Presented September 4, 2020

Master of Public Policy Essay
by Michelle A. Steinhebel presented
on September 4, 2020

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I reflect back on the last two and a half years, I am filled with gratitude to those who have helped me get to where I am in my academic journey. First, I must express my sincere gratitude to my committee members Professor Rebecca Warner and Professor Kelsy Kretschmer, and especially my committee chair Professor Brent S. Steel. Having completed my bachelor's in political science at OSU in 2009 (with Professor Steel as my advisor) – and now having him serve as my committee chair for this final project in graduate school – truly is an honor.

Beginning graduate school in my mid-30s as a mother of two children in a multigenerational household would not be possible without the support of my husband, Jon Steinhebel. Whether it was grad school or running for public office, he has always been there encouraging me to reach for my goals and dreams; lend an ear and walk through the problems with me; and help in whatever capacity possible along the way. I am truly grateful for his support of me in this endeavor.

Finally, as a woman in elected leadership, I want to acknowledge the countless women who have come before me, and the many who will come after. In Hillary Clinton's words:

“I know we have still not shattered that highest and hardest glass ceiling, but some day someone will and hopefully sooner than we might think right now. And to all the little girls who are watching this, never doubt that you are valuable and powerful and deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve your own dreams.”

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ABSTRACT

The year, 2020, marks the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment's ratification, granting American (primarily white) women the right to vote, however, women remain underrepresented in elected offices across the United States. In comparison to men, women face several additional challenges related to gender when attempting to reach the upper echelons of political power. These challenges stem from a complex web of historical, social, and institutional barriers that work together to prevent more women from running for political office. This paper examines gender roles related to family structure and support that influence a woman's decision to run for public office. Some challenges women candidates face when running for office include traditional family roles and unpaid, household work; upbringing influences; motherhood and fatherhood penalties candidates face while campaigning; the impact of "women's issues" on a campaign; and political party influence and recruitment. Using a 2008 dataset from the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, nine tables are constructed that focus on family structure and support and how it may influence a decision to run for office. The theory of Social Construction of Target Populations (SCTP) is applied to evaluate the data. Through the political theory, the author posits that women face more social barriers than men when attempting to gain access to the "advantaged" category where policy benefits are experienced the most. Using SCTP as a lens, social institutions reinforce the cultural and societal messaging that women are "dependents," "deviants," and "contenders." Public policy to increase the number of women in political office should focus on addressing social constructs, such as family structure and gender roles. European shared-leave policies for child-rearing is offered as a policy option to normalize caregiving for both fathers and mothers.

Introduction

Women running for public office in the U.S. today continue to face a catch-22. Social norms from time barely in the rearview mirror pressure women to be soft-spoken, caring mothers, focused on raising families not on their professional work. This expectation of being a caregiver leaves women who aspire to political office in a position where they have to project socially-defined masculine traits, such as leadership and strength, while incorporating their role as a mother or a caregiver. At the same time, studies have shown that women, regardless of socioeconomic status, shoulder the brunt of household chores compared to their male partners (Stalsburg & Kleinberg, 2015) and are socialized to view ambition negatively (Schneider, Holman, Diekmann, & McAndrew, 2016 and Fox & Lawless, 2004.) The research question for this essay focuses on the role gender plays when a woman runs for political office. Specifically: “How does motherhood and family structure affect a woman’s candidacy for political office in comparison to men?” To evaluate this question, we draw on data from a women’s recruitment study published in 2008 from the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers University (Sanbonmatsu, Carroll & Walsh, 2008).

Why is it important to have gender parity in the political realm? One of the most important reasons is because women tend to promote legislation focused on “women’s issues.” When women are without political power, these issues are neglected and result in further inequities in American society. These legislative topics include policies that affect women in many ways such as legal protections for women including in the fields of reproductive rights, employment, and violence against women; equal pay legislation; child support laws (which often benefit single mothers); access to income support programs (SNAP, welfare benefits, etc.); and much more (Caiazza, 2002). Regardless of political party, women bring more attention to these

“compassion issues” than their male colleagues, subsequently extending these priority differences into legislation they sponsor and support (Dolan, 2005). Examining the 2010 election, which was the height of influence of the Tea Party, a conservative Republican offshoot, Schreiber (2012) looked at the top five policy priorities for all candidates, Republicans, Democrats, and Tea Party endorsed women candidates. While all candidates were concerned with the economy, health care, and energy, gender did play a role in how women were viewed and where women candidates placed their priorities. For example, Tea Party candidates were known as “Mama Grizzlies,” a term representing the protection that mothers do for their cubs, but in this analogy it is to protect the people from the government (Stalsburg & Kleinberg, 2015). For Democratic women candidates, health care and education ranked higher in terms of policy priorities, which are areas that may have a significant impact on a woman’s financial outcome in life. Accessibility to higher education can increase income regardless of gender, and health care – health insurance in particular – can turn a woman’s life upside down if they must pay high insurance premiums or are burdened with large medical bills. Health care remains critically important for women when it comes to reproductive health care, as 21 percent of children are being raised in single mother households compared to only four percent of solo male households (Livingston, 2018). Given the influence both health care and education may have on a woman’s life it is not surprising these areas are of interest to women in both major political parties.

Unfortunately, legislation focused on women’s issues tend to affect America’s most vulnerable populations, and without gender parity in politics, these topics are less likely to be fully addressed. Disparity in the gender composition of legislatures sets up a society that is not economically efficient, nor fair. Instead of both men and women having access to the upper

echelons of political process and power, women and their interests are less likely to have economic gain due to the policies passed by those with access to power.

This paper aims to explore how family structure and support can influence a woman's decision to run for public office. Gender equality must be achieved to give both men and women an equal opportunity to political power, which can positively influence American lives from education, housing, health care and much more. However, in order to reach gender parity, we must first recognize that stereotypes about gender impact women in politics – from that initial decision to run, to family structure, to even their upbringing as a child. This paper will focus on that initial decision to run and aims to contribute to the women in politics literature by examining a dataset from the Center of American Women and Politics at Rutgers. Researchers surveyed men and women state legislators and mayors to help map their pathways to public office (Sanbonmatsu, Carroll & Walsh, 2008). The CAWP data will be evaluated using Social Construction of Target Populations theory (Schneider & Ingram, 1993), which posits that individuals are characterized into certain stereotypes based on their power and the social and cultural messaging that support those stereotypes. Following a fuller description of the theory, examination of existing literature regarding women and their burden of family responsibilities; gender socialization among children; and how politics and party affiliation can influence a woman's decision to run for office. Following this review of the literature review, we will present data from the CAWP research project at Rutgers to address our research question on the impact of family structure on women's decision to run for office. We follow a discussion on how the Social Construction of Target Populations theory can help make sense of these data. Finally, a policy option to help combat gender stereotypes and increase the number of women in politics will be recommended, followed by the conclusion of the paper.

It is admittedly optimistic to assume men and women will have equal access to political power once the number of men and women are equal in all local, state, and federal elected offices. Similar optimistic policy endeavors, such as the U.S. Equal Pay Act of 1963, have been passed and championed on without reaching the intended result. In terms of that policy, a woman will still make about 85 cents less in comparison to a man's dollar (Graf, Brown & Patten, 2019). With this legislation on the books, why hasn't pay parity been achieved? While legislators can pass well-intended policy when there is a policy window, societal and cultural values must catch up to give the legislation any teeth. The same will likely be true for any policy solution to increase the number of women in elected positions. The Social Construction of Target Populations theory, explored in the next section, offers two general explanations as to why gender parity remains an American issue. First, the theory helps frame why so few women run for political positions, and second, why when women are elected, they are often viewed more negatively than their male counterparts.

Social Construction of Target Populations

We make assumptions about people based on appearances, material items, and ultimately, stereotypes. When we see a young father in the park playing with his little girl, we may stop and admire this great dad. In this moment, he is interacting and caring for his child. When we see a young mother in that same park, no praise or scorn comes to mind, rather we just see a mother out with her kids. We do not pause; this is where society expect her to be. Socially, we have received many messages over our lifetime about what a parent looks like based on gender (caregiver vs. provider) that only when we witness something out of the ordinary do we reflect on our assumptions of this out-of-place individual.

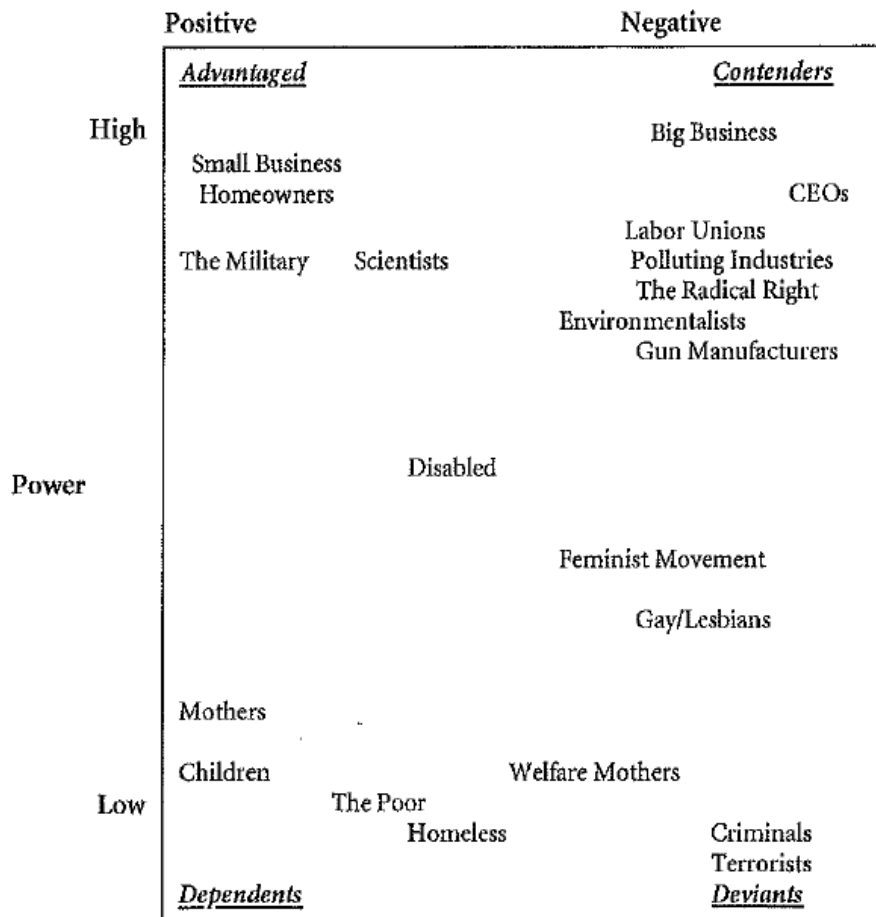


Figure 1 – Columns indicate political power and rows indicate if one is positively or negatively constructed by social institutions.
 Graph from Ingram, Schneider, and DeLeon, 2007

This idea of sizing someone up based on stereotypes can be described more thoroughly through Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram's (1993) Social Construction of Target Populations. This theory is helpful to understand the dilemma women face when running for higher office. Social Construction of Target Populations can be used as the lens that identifies groups of individuals by the political

power, they hold and the socially-constructed messages, or stereotypes, that surround them. These stereotypes are created and reinforced through media imagery, history, culture, politics, and other social institutions (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). On the horizontal axis, the authors designate who is positively or negatively constructed. Examples of positive constructions include buzzwords indicating people are "deserving," "honest," or "hard-working." Words associated with populations who are negatively constructed include antonyms of the positive constructions, as well as "stupid" and "selfish." On the vertical axis, we see the authors' measurement of political power, depending if one has low political power, such as children, or high political power, such as homeowners. The "target populations" piece of the theory is used to identify

“groups actually chosen to receive benefits and burdens through the various elements of policy designs” (Ingram, Schneider, and DeLeon, 2007). In short, those with the most political power typically benefit from public policies.

In Figure 1, we can see how Schneider and Ingram (1993) assign populations to four groups: advantaged (strong in political power, positively constructed), contenders (strong in political power, and negatively constructed), deviants (weak in political power and negatively constructed), and dependents (weak in political power and positively constructed). For examples of the last category, the authors include children, mothers and the disabled as examples of the population. This group is positively viewed but has little political power. Because those in the dependents category have lack access to political power, they are less likely to receive as many policy benefits as those in the contenders or advantaged category, and what benefits they do receive are typically in jeopardy of funding cuts (Ingram, Schneider, and DeLeon, 2007). Those cuts are typically to areas such as health care, education and women’s issues. For all the groups, depending on their category (powerful/weak, positive/negative perception), this serves as the framework in which others interact with them.

The theory’s authors ask the questions who wins and who loses from a particular policy; who participates; and what is the policy’s effect on democracy? Social constructions and power influence the logic of policy and policy design, as well as those who participate in that process. Revisiting Figure 1, we see women in the “dependent category” where they are low in power, but positively constructed. We see this catch-22 with the aforementioned conservative “Mama Grizzlies” who attempt to join their role as a mother with that of a strong candidate for office and move into the advantaged/power category, yet we see this strategy largely fail as they are then moved into the deviant category because they are not conforming to patriarchal gender norms. It

is also apparent when women without children run for office do poorly in campaigns, as they are social “deviants” for not confirming to society’s “normal” expectation of women being caregivers (i.e. mothers). Finally, women with children pay a motherhood penalty when they run for office by being viewed as “contenders.” Although they may seek political power in the advantaged category, these women are penalized for being ambitious (a pejorative term here), which is considered a more masculine trait. The motherhood expectation leaves some voters, and sometimes the candidates (see Table 3), to ask themselves “who will take care of their children?”

Arguably all women, but especially mothers, are socially constructed as dependents. This leaves women as disadvantaged to ascend to the advantaged category. Instead, when women attempt to climb the ladder of power, they are moved to the contender and deviant categories. Examples of women in the contender category include women in leadership, as they may have power, but are viewed negatively because their power many times comes at a cost in their family life. Also, women in power are negatively viewed because they are not conforming to gender stereotypes and instead are viewed as overly ambitious. In Figure 1, we see Schneider and Ingram place women pushing for equality (i.e. power) – feminists – in the deviant category. Regardless of political party, women legislators consider themselves leaders; many Democratic women consider themselves feminists; and while some mothers may be dependent, others have fulfilling careers outside their home but are likely still viewed as dependent. Unfortunately, all three groups of women find themselves in categories outside the advantaged category.

The Social Construction of Target Populations theory is particularly helpful in exploring gendered roles. In Kelly Odenweller and Christine Rittenour’s (2017) research investigating gender stereotypes, the authors find the public’s perceptions of what they call “stay-at-home mothers” and “working mothers” are drastically different. The “stay-at-home mothers” can be

described as mothers who work in unpaid, work-at-home positions, primarily focused on domestic and family duties. (Breaking with the terminology of the authors, I will refer to this group of women as “work-at-home” mothers hereafter.) “Working mothers” may be described as women who are employed in a paid position outside of the home. Odenweller and Rittenour (2017) surveyed 322 childless men and women (100 men and 222 women) and 350 mothers with a 10-minute online questionnaire exploring the prevalence and stereotypes associated with work-at-home and employed mothers. They found the following stereotypes overwhelming tied to work-at-home mothers: caregiver, caring, family-oriented, involved in children’s lives, and loving. Employed mothers had the following stereotypes associated with them: busy, determined, hardworking, multitasking, and tired. The studies found that an ideal mother is one who “practices intensive mothering” (Odenweller, & Rittenour, 2017) with work-at-home mothers being held closest to that standard. The authors went as far as to label employed mothers “deviant mothers.” The authors were not specifically using Social Construction of Target Populations theory in their study, however, placing working mothers in a “deviant” quadrant fits with the work of Schneider and Ingram (1993). An example of the theory’s flexibility is evident here, as in certain contexts, those same working mothers are looked upon positively as a “super mom” rather than a “working mom,” a term that takes on a negative connotation.

How does the Social Construction of Target Populations theory analyze how family structure impacts a woman’s decision to run for public office? People size up themselves based on their own evaluation, but also consider others’ evaluations of them. Based on an individual’s participation in a target group, others form their socially constructed opinions regarding the individual. In turn, individuals within a target population form their view of their government, as well as how much they participate within it, based on their interactions as part of these groups. If

society continues to tell mothers they are dependent; female leaders that they can only be contenders; and feminists that they are deviants, we can't expect serious strides in the number of women in politics. These power structures and gender roles are reinforced in family life as well, and collectively contribute to a lack of women in elected positions.

In the following literature review, prior research will help provide the framework for understanding how family structure and support help influence a woman's decision to run for office. In terms of structure, whether a woman is married or has children under 18 may affect the amount of time a woman has to dedicate to a political career. For support, we will see how family structures help shape the level of support women receive compared to men. Lastly, we will cover how political party membership can influence a potential legislator's decision to run for office. I expect these four areas – gender, political party, family structure and family support – to have the most influence in a woman's decision to run for public office.

Literature Review

This literature review will first cover American history of women in politics then examine how the structure of a family relates to traditional gender roles in terms of household and family work. The review will also cover familial gendered upbringing of girls and boys, and the motherhood penalties women in leadership often pay in comparison to fathers. This paper will provide an examination of how female legislators tend to champion policies related to women's issues, and how campaign imagery is used in both male and female political campaigns. Lastly, we review research examining how other countries challenge traditional

notions of gender, and how political parties can influence how women present themselves as candidates, as well as the impact parties can have on recruitment of female candidates.

Women's involvement in politics has evolved quickly since the suffrage. American women gained the right to vote with the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, exactly a century ago. While a handful of revolutionary women were able to gain access to mayoral and state legislative positions in the late 1800s and early 1900s prior to the 19th Amendment's ratification, they were not in the position to vote for themselves. Men have had at least a 133-year head start in terms of participation in the American political process (using the ratification of the U.S Constitution in 1787 as the measurement). Much of this head start has led to structural barriers from gender stereotypes, especially in regard to women being family caregivers.

It should not surprise us to learn that women – just like in the 1900s – still complete most of the daily unpaid, household work (Stalsburg & Kleinberg, 2015). In 2007, researchers found that women completed an average of 13.2 hours of household labor each week, while men clocked in at 6.6 hours, which is less than half of the women's time spent (Fuwa & Cohen, 2007). This housework includes task such as routine cleaning, laundry and food preparation. The household labor tends to be shared more equally when women have higher levels of education, but an imbalance does remain (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). By taking on the bulk of the household, unpaid labor, women have less time to participate in more demanding careers, as well as the political process due to these archaic, traditional roles. This unbalanced division of household labor between genders weakens the value of women in society and remains one of the largest obstacles in achieving gender equality within our culture (Poeschl, 2008).

Welch (1976) posits that these traditional roles result in women being less likely to participate in the political process. Again, reiterating the time crunch, the thought is that women

serving in traditional, family caretaker roles have little time to participate in the political process, as well as participate in professional and social spheres (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Furthermore, women who do not work outside of the home were again disadvantaged by not having the opportunity to engage in political debate and discussion among their colleagues (Welch, 1976). While it's worth noting that stay-at-home mothers now have more opportunities to engage in politics via social media and the internet than during Welch's research in 1976, women still are underrepresented, particularly in the formal policymaking process.

These structural issues women face in political participation do not start when they settle into families, but rather are learned early in life. Welch (1977) examines structural factors relating to women running for office and found that early socialization of girls downplays political ambition, while commitment to family is reinforced (Mueller, 2017). Throughout her meta-analysis literature review, Mueller found that family plays a critical role in forming political ideologies, as well as political views and encouragement for entering the process. But even this encouragement into political knowledge is gendered with parents being more likely to encourage their sons to pursue careers in politics than their daughters (Lawless & Fox, 2013). This gender disparity in political knowledge shows: in a survey of high school students, researchers found young women had lower levels of political knowledge compared to young men (Mueller, 2017). The same survey found that female respondents learned about politics by discussing it with their parents (and at lower levels than male respondents), while male students learn about politics through discussion and debate with classmates.

These historical and childhood experiences should be considered when examining how being a mother may affect a woman's campaign, especially in comparison to a male candidate. Stalsburg (2010) takes a direct look at being a mother or father and running for office by in a

survey of 317 undergraduates in a political science course. She finds that mothers running for office who have young children are viewed less favorably than women with older children or no children. In general, however, women who enter politics are less likely to have children, and when they do they have fewer than the national average (Stalsburg & Kleinberg, 2015). Additionally, women who do have children tend to run for office when their kids are older. In comparison, for male candidates having young children appears to be irrelevant in their propensity to run for office. In terms of having young children, 26 percent of male state legislators have a child under 17, but only 12 percent of women state legislators (Stalsburg & Kleinberg, 2015). Data aside, potential candidates also view having young children while running a campaign as a hindrance, as they will have to balance family and politics. The majority of women agreed that young children may be a hinderance to a campaign (65 percent), while few men (3 percent) agree (Stalsburg & Kleinberg, 2015).

When we turn our focus to political campaigns, we see a gendered response and strategy based on women's issues. When women run against men, they highlight issues such as defense and agriculture, which are considered as more masculine political topics, but when they run against women, they are less likely to emphasize these positions (Dolan, 2007). This suggests women are acting strategically, and benefitting from gender stereotypes when applicable, and countering those stereotypes when needed. However, men also act strategically in this fashion. When men run against other men, they were found to be more likely to highlight traditional women's issues than men who ran against women (Dolan, 2007). The one topic women addressed more than men was abortion, although as Democratic women were more likely than Republican women in the early 2000s to run for office, Dolan acknowledges that this may be a function of party rather than a function of gender.

In terms of the images female candidates project to the public, women downplay their role as mothers to seem more aggressive, assertive, and tough, which are traits that are more likely to be associated with men, according to findings by Stalsburg & Kleinberg (2015). When compared to male candidates running for U.S. House and Senate in 2008 and 2010, women were less likely to include photos of their children and families on their campaign webpages. The authors posit women exclude photos of their children in comparison to men because it can lead to concerns regarding time management between being a mother and being a legislator. Men with children do not seem to have the same penalty, as it is assumed that his spouse is shouldering the caregiver duties. By including family, men can project a “human persona” – a leader not only among their communities, but within their families (Stalsburg & Kleinberg, 2015). With women, we are reminded that while this woman is running for or serving in an elected office that they have a family who may be neglected by their primary caregiver.

In addition to their campaign imagery, women must also be vigilant in monitoring their media coverage as well. News articles, TV segments, photographs and more can influence how a woman is perceived by the electorate, based on the portrayal of the woman as conforming or not with gender roles (Bligh, et al., 2012). Many times, especially at the national level, pundits focus on the likeability of a female candidate or legislator, rather than her qualifications. Navigating the likeability issue (conforming to traditional notions of gender) while portraying competency for office (noncongruent trait associated with women) puts women in a difficult situation where the two narratives compete at the expense of the other.

Looking outside the U.S., children do not seem to always be a liability, at least once the legislator takes office. In a British study of MPs websites, regardless of a legislator’s gender or party ideology, references to children and/or spouse were commonplace (Campbell & Cowley,

2018). The authors also found that there is no disadvantage related to gender in a woman running for political office based on small group feedback. While this were the findings in Britain this research may not be transferable to the U.S. due to cultural norms. Additionally, the sample population (604 MPs with websites) was low, and it is hard to draw full conclusions based on the narrow amount.

With more women running in the Democratic Party than in the Republican Party, we cannot ignore the role party plays in campaigns and political office. Stalsburg (2010) finds that political party influences a voter's perception on women candidates, with Republicans less likely to vote for a female candidate compared to Democrats and Independents. Additionally, for those women who do run on a Republican ticket, Schreiber (2012) finds that those women fare worse in election than Democratic women. This is partially because they are perceived as being "too liberal," and not conforming to conservative norms for women. That bias is even more accelerated when it comes to childless women. In this case, Republican women with children tend to do better than Republican childless women. The findings from Schreiber (2012) reveal that – regardless of party – women tend to not run as women or mothers, rather as politicians. Schreiber concludes that this may be salient strategy given voter expectations of gender and leadership norms (masculinity equals power), but also reveals that those issues must still be important for women to consider when seeking political office.

However, it is not just that more Democratic women run for office compared to Republican women, the partisan gap between the two genders within the two parties look dramatically different. In 2013, the U.S. House of Representatives Democratic Party neared gender parity, with Democratic elected women outnumbering their Republican elected women three to one (Crowder-Meyer & Lauderdale, 2014). The authors suggest that social and cultural

issues related to gender equality have been made a centerpiece of the two U.S. major political parties, with the Democratic Party aiming to liberalize gender views and the Republican Party celebrating more traditional roles for women. This should come as no surprise as the mantra of President Donald Trump's election (and reelection) campaign is "Make American Great Again," a slogan honoring America's 1950s. This era was a time when the country experienced an economic boom, but the results of it were felt unequally as women rarely worked outside of the home – and those who did were paid much less than men – and segregation was a cornerstone of U.S. politics.

Recruitment within political parties is essential to increasing the number of women in politics. Especially for state and federal legislative positions, many candidates are recruited by political gatekeepers, such as party organization leaders, elected officials, and political activists. These gatekeepers seek candidates who are highly educated and in professional careers. However, research finds that even when women are on equal footing with men in respect to experience, women are less likely to be recruited as intensely as men and have less contact and encouragement to run (Fox & Lawless, 2010). This is likely because leadership for both major parties are male dominated. In a four-state study on political recruitment, Nivens (1998) found that party leaders belittled and directed female candidates into low-profile races. Additionally, as women still complete the lion's share of unpaid housework and childcare, political operatives believe they have less time to focus on a campaign or career as a legislator (Fox & Lawless, 2020). That same research found that party leaders often point to women's non-career obligations as a primary consideration that they are more likely than men to decline a run for political office. While much scholarly research is dedicated to highlighting the strides, women have made in politics, political bias related to gender norms persist.

Methodology of CAWP study

As previously stated, this research will focus on data from a 2008 research study from the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers University, which surveyed men and women in state legislatures and those serving as mayors (Sanbonmatsu, Carroll & Walsh, 2008). The study was dedicated to examining the pathways to office for American state legislators in all 50 states. All women state legislators were surveyed, as well as a random sample of male legislators. Women mayors of cities with populations more than 30,000 were surveyed, as well as a random sample of men mayors. Researchers used a questionnaire and solicited responses via mail, web and phone. The questionnaire explores family structure and support to run for office; party support in candidacy; reasons a legislator ran for office; previous legislative experience; political views; and much more. The questionnaire also includes demographic information such as age, education, race, and marital and parental status. The study had a response rate of 36.5 percent for state legislators and 48.2 percent of mayors of large cities (figures include both genders).

The data used in this essay have some limitations. As the responses were only collected from current legislators, it does not include women and men who ran unsuccessfully for office and how they reached their decision to run for office. It also does not include lower levels of public office, such as school boards and city council positions. Additionally, there may be undiscovered reasons or influences, not related to family and support, that helped weigh the decision to run for office. While these limitations should be acknowledged, it does not detract from the richness of the CAWP data or its appropriate use as the centerpiece in this MPP essay.

Analysis

Based on the literature review, I would expect family structure and support to affect a woman’s decision to run for office. Traditionally gendered roles persist in family structures, where women continue to complete the bulk of unpaid housework (Stalsburg & Kleinberg, 2015 and Fuwa & Cohen, 2007). Women with young children likely have an increased burden for housework, as the younger the child is, the more housework (laundry, cleaning, feeding, etc.) may be required. These factors make the support from a woman’s spouse or partner be a leading factor in her decision to run for office and take on more responsibility in a demanding profession.

The data displayed in Table 1 examine the relationship between marital status, gender and political party. The results indicate that there is a statistically-significant relationship between gender, political party, and marital status. In Table 1, we see that of the legislators surveyed, the majority of men and women are married, however men are married at higher numbers than women. Republican male legislators reported being married at 92.2 percent, which is considerably higher than female Democrats at 69 percent for a difference of 23.2 percentage points. Republican legislators are married more than their Democrat counterparts, and Democrats are more likely to be single, never married compared to Republicans.

Table 1: Gender and Marital Status of Legislators

<i>Question:</i> If currently married or living as married, would you say that your spouse/partner...	Male Republican	Male Democrat	Female Republican	Female Democrat
Married or living as married	92.2%	84.6%	75.9%	69.0%
Divorced or separated	3.7%	6.6%	11.6%	13.9%

Widowed	1.4%	2.2%	10.0%	10.9%
Single, never married	2.7%	6.6%	2.5%	6.2%
N=	296	318	241	532
Chi-square=89.25, $p=.000$				

(Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, & Walsh, 2008)

Regardless of political party, women legislators are more likely to be divorced/separated, widowed, or single, than male legislators. With women contributing more household labor, women legislators may be married at lesser percentages than men because the single-family home structure benefits women in these positions, especially with no young children. Traditionally, women are the caregivers in a family (Parker & Wang, 2013) and when there is one less person to care for, such as a spouse or partner, she has more time to focus efforts on her career and personal enrichment.

Table 2 examines the relationship between having children under 18 at home and gender and political party. One would expect women aspiring to an elected role to be less likely than men to have a child under 18. The data show a statistically significant relationship between gender, party and the dependent variable of having a child under 18. We see in Table 2 that women are less likely to have a child under 18 than men. Conversely, this means men have a child under 18 at home more than women. Women spend approximately 13.5 hours a week doing childcare and 17.8 completing housework, while men spend about 7.3 hours and 9.8 hours, respectively (Parker & Wang, 2013). Given this gendered split of house and childcare duties it is unsurprising that female legislators are less likely to have a child under 18 compared to male legislators. Also, as we saw in the literature review, women who run for office that have young children are viewed less favorably than with women with older or no children (Stalsburg, 2010).

In addition to the household and childcare burden, this may contribute to a woman’s decision to run for political office.

Table 2: Gender and Presence of Children 18 and Under at Home

<i>Question: If you have children, what is the age of your youngest child?</i>				
	Male Republican	Male Democrat	Female Republican	Female Democrat
No children under 18	78.6%	77.3%	84.4%	86.5%
Child under 18	21.4%	22.7%	15.6%	13.5%
N=	266	278	211	482
Chi-square=13.77, p=.003				

(Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, & Walsh, 2008)

Table 3 examines the relationship between gender, political party and having children being old enough for the legislator to feel comfortable not being home as much. The Chi-square test results in a statistically significant result. All legislators felt that having a child old enough for he/she to feel comfortable not being home as much was either somewhat or very important in the decision to run. However, a sizeable gender difference occurs. Women are much more likely to say “very” important, with Republican women at 81.5 percent and Democrat women at 71 percent. Men are about 20 percentage points apart from the women in their party. While male Democratic legislators had the lowest share of the “very important” designation, this group also had the highest percentage of ranking children’s presence at home “somewhat important” at 38.7 percent.

Table 3. Gender and Presence of Children

<i>Question: Below are various factors that have been suggested to be important in influencing decisions to run for office. Please indicate how important each factor was in affecting your decision to run the first time for the office you now hold: My children being old enough for me to feel comfortable not being home as much.</i>
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	Male Republican	Male Democrat	Female Republican	Female Democrat
Very Important	59.0%	47.0%	81.5%	71.1%
Somewhat Important	28.5%	38.7%	13.0%	18.9%
Not Important	12.6%	14.3%	5.5%	10.0%
N=	239	230	200	370
Chi-square=68.36, <i>p</i> =.000				

(Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, & Walsh, 2008)

It is important to highlight here that as a group and regardless of party, women identify this aspect in their decision to run as “very important” (81.5 percent for Republican women, 71.1 percent for Democrat women), which is a much larger share than their male counterparts (59 percent for Republican men, 47 percent for Democrat men). In addition to the childcare burden, I posit that some of this difference must be societal pressures of guilt some women struggle with to become what culture deems a “good mother” (Guendouzi, 2006). Culturally, American society expects mothers to be accessible to children, creating a situation where family structure (presence of children) can produce a barrier via conflictual feelings regarding motherhood. Additionally, being away in a high-demand job (such as politics) can amplify those feelings of motherhood guilt. In terms of the electorate, this societal ideal of motherhood provokes both positive and negative reactions. On one hand, questions of balancing motherhood and politics can cloud the process, leaving voters to compare their own feelings of traditional mother roles against the idea of a woman in power. On the other hand, some traditional skills associated with motherhood such as patience, compassion, and multitasking, may be viewed as unique strengths to a political role (Campbell & Cowley, 2008).

Table 4 explores the relationship between gender, political party, and the approval of a spouse or partner in the candidate’s decision to run for public office. Here we find that the relationship between gender, party and the approval of a spouse or partner influences a decision to run for public office is not statistically significant. This may be due to a lower number of respondents the question applies to, as respondents indicating the question was “not applicable” or did not provide an answer were removed from the analysis prior to creating Table 4.

However, Republicans report the approval of their spouse or partner is “very important” at higher rates – 85.5 percent and 82.4 percent, respectively – in comparison to male and female Democrats – 81.3 percent and 77.3 percent, respectively. Democrat women appear to weigh this support less than their peers regardless of gender and party with 16.7 percent deeming this “somewhat important” and 6 percent “not important” at all.

Table 4. Gender and Approval of Spouse or Partner

	Male Republican	Male Democrat	Female Republican	Female Democrat
Very Important	85.5%	81.3%	82.4%	77.3%
Somewhat Important	12.1%	14.7%	14.1%	16.7%
Not Important	2.5%	4.0%	3.4%	6.0%
N=	282	278	205	419
Chi-square=9.38, <i>p</i> =.153				

(Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, & Walsh, 2008)

Although not statistically significant, there is some support in the literature for a relationship between gender, party and support of a spouse or significant other when running for

office. With women taking on the bulk of the household work and child rearing (Fuwa & Cohen, 2007) – especially in traditional family settings – it becomes an important factor more for conservative men and women to have the approval of their spouse or partner for this endeavor. To balance the division of work (in this case a political career) and family responsibilities, Republicans – especially Republican women – may have to consider a run more closely than Democrats. A Norwegian study found that women who have partners who complete little to no housework may lead to relationship issues (Barstad, Goldscheider, Bernhardt, & Lappegård, 2014), underscoring the need for Republican women seeking office to feel they have the support of their spouse or partner prior to a campaign.

While this essay focuses on the “decision to run,” the survey also includes a question related to current support from a partner. We include the data for this question in Table 5 to see how it relates to gender and party. The findings are statistically significant and indicate a relationship between gender and party and spousal or partner support for public office after a legislator is elected. Regardless of party, both men and women feel they have a very supportive spouse or partner in their endeavor. For women, those figures are about 10 percentage points higher (84.2 percent for both Republican and Democratic women) than their male colleagues (74.3 percent for Republicans and 73.6 percent for Democrats). I am unsure how to account for this 10 percentage point difference, other than possibly the (gender assumed here) female significant others of the Republican and Democrat legislators possibly did not accurately estimate how much time away the position would require their partner to be absent from home. It is also possible that women enter into a political race already with a supportive partner as this is an area she may be challenged on, so having a partner’s support is critical from the beginning.

Table 5: Gender and Spousal/Partner Support to Run for Office

Question: If currently married or living as married, would you say that your spouse/partner...

	Male Republican	Male Democrat	Female Republican	Female Democrat
is very supportive of your holding public office.	74.3%	73.6%	84.2%	84.2%
is somewhat supportive of your holding public office.	20.6%	21.9%	12.6%	10.9%
is indifferent toward your holding public office.	2.6%	1.5%	2.7%	2.2%
is somewhat resistant toward your holding public office.	2.6%	3.0%	0.5%	2.7%
	N= 272	269	183	367
	Chi-square=24.28, <i>p</i> =.004			

(Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, & Walsh, 2008)

We now turn away from support to see if legislators experienced any discouragement when they decided to run for office. As we see in Table 6, there is a statistically-significant relationship between gender, party and the likelihood of receiving discouragement, although the differences are not large. The gender split is most apparent within the Republican party, where 24.2 percent of men received some discouragement from running compared to 35.5 percent of women. In the literature review, we saw that Republican women fare worse in elections than their Democratic counterparts (Schreiber, 2012) because they are “too liberal” as they are stepping outside of gender norms. Additionally, I posit this gap of gendered discouragement is also partially due to a rejection of the “Mama Grizzly” persona espoused by conservative female candidates. As men and women attempt to climb to the advantaged section outlined in the Social Construction of Target Populations theory, we see women – even conservative women –

discouraged to reach for those upper echelons because a “Mama Grizzly” doesn’t personify a stereotypical mother.

Table 6: Gender and Discouragement to Run

<i>Question: When you were making your initial decision to seek elective office the very first time, did anyone try to discourage you from running?</i>				
	Male Republican	Male Democrat	Female Republican	Female Democrat
Yes	24.2%	30.9%	35.5%	32.1%
No	75.8%	69.1%	64.5%	67.9%
N=	293	314	242	530
Chi-square=8.89, <i>p</i> =.031				

(Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, & Walsh, 2008)

In addition to discouragement in general, the CAWP survey also asks respondents to identify who was discouraging when exploring a decision to run. Those responses, and their relationship to gender and party, can be examined in Table 7. In particular, Table 7 asks whether a spouse or partner, or a family member, was the source of discouragement. Unfortunately for both considerations, Table 7 has a Chi-square statistic that indicates the results of the data are not statistically significant at the 5 percent *p*-value, and we cannot reject the null hypotheses. While Table 6 is similar in the question structure, Table 7 may not meet statistical significance in part due to the low number of respondents in the data. However, from those who did respond, we still see that women who are surveyed report facing the most discouragement, but especially from a family member other than a spouse or partner. While the spouse/partner discouragement percentages for both genders and parties remained within about 5 percentage points, Republican women faced discouragement from family approximately 28.6 percent and Democratic women 24.6 percent. Unfortunately, the data here lacks identifying information on who the other “family

member” was that discouraged women Republican and Democrats to run for office. This identifying information may also be a factor in why the data fails to produce a statistically significant result.

Table 7: Gender and Family Discouragement

<i>Question: Who tried to discourage you? (Please check as many as apply.)</i>				
<i>Percent listing as a source of discouragement</i>				
	Male Republican	Male Democrat	Female Republican	Female Democrat
My spouse or partner	12.7%	8.3%	8.3%	11.4%
N=	71	96	84	167
Chi-square=1.40, <i>p</i> =.706				
A family member (other than spouse)	14.1%	20.8%	28.6%	24.6%
N=	71	96	84	167
Chi-square=5.17, <i>p</i> =.160				

(Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, & Walsh, 2008)

After considering family support and discouragement, we turn now to the way legislators reportedly see themselves making their initial decision to run. Respondents were asked if it was their idea to run; if they had seriously considered running and someone suggested it; or if they had not seriously considered a run until it was suggested by someone. In Table 8, we see strong support for a statistically significant relationship between party and gender, and its effect on the genesis of the idea of running for office. For men, 40 percent of Republicans and 43.7 percent of Democrats say that it was entirely their idea to run for office. However, for women it is clear they typically are recruited to run. Approximately 47.1 percent of Republican women and 51.3 percent of Democratic women had not thought about running for office until someone suggested she do (Table 8). Reflecting back to the literature review, a woman’s childhood upbringing likely

has an influence here. From childhood, we see that boys are encouraged to be involved in politics more than girls (Welch, 1977 and Lawless & Fox, 2013). Girls are socialized at a young age to avoid politics and ambitious activities, as well as avoid conflict, and the percentages in Table 8 illustrate that upbringing still plays a role in the lives of adult women.

Table 8: Gender and Most Influential Person

	Male Republican	Male Democrat	Female Republican	Female Democrat
<i>Question:</i> In thinking about your initial decision to seek elective office the very first time, which of the following statements most accurately describes your decision? (please select only one.)				
It was entirely my idea to run.	40.0%	43.7%	29.8%	26.3%
I had already thought seriously about running when someone else suggested it.	29.8%	28.8%	23.1%	22.4%
I had not seriously thought about running until someone else suggested it.	30.2%	27.5%	47.1%	51.3%
N=	295	316	238	532
Chi-square=67.13, $p=.000$				

(Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, & Walsh, 2008)

Additionally, research on political ambition may shed some light on these figures.

Political ambition for women has been consistently measured in levels lower than men (Schneider, Holman, Diekman, & McAndrew, 2016 and Fox & Lawless, 2004.) With politics laden with masculine undertones, the power structure is more focused on singular power rather than a more communal structure. Women, who are more commonly identified as the household caregivers compared to men, are more communal in nature and may avoid political office because the perception of personal power over communal (Schneider, Holman, Diekman, &

McAndrew, 2016). However, when a woman is invited into the political landscape, they are more willing to consider candidacy (Fox & Lawless, 2010). This is likely because women as a group are less politically ambitious, but they also lack confidence in terms of feeling qualified enough for the position. In a 2004 study on gender and the decision to run for office, male candidates were twice as likely than their female counterparts to identify themselves as “very qualified” for an elected position, by 26 percent to 14 percent, respectively (Fox & Lawless, 2004). However, when women are confident, Fox and Lawless found that it is the greatest predictor of a woman running for office is if she feels confident in her qualifications for the position. This means that party recruitment for these positions, as well as receiving encouragement from a colleague may increase a woman’s confidence, therefore increasing her consideration (and ideally likelihood) in running for office.

Understanding not only how a legislator came to the decision to run, but who encouraged them in that process is also worth exploring. Table 9 is an expanded version of Table 8 but asks respondents to pinpoint who the most influential person was providing encouragement to run. Although the Chi-square statistic produced a statistically significant result, confirming the relationship between gender, party and the most influential person who provided a source of encouragement to the candidate, it is not a strong relationship. For Republican men and Democratic women, the most influential source of encouragement came from a party official or an officeholder. However, for Republican women, their second source of encouragement (after an officeholder) was their spouse or partner, with 22 percent indicating they were the most influential in their decision to run. These findings are generally in line with other research on women running for office. Fox and Lawless (2010) found that women are less likely than men to receive encouragement from a political gatekeeper, such as a party leader or a legislator. Above

we see that male Democrats and female Republicans and Democrats receive near the same support from party leaders and legislators, but Republican men receive the most with a combined 54 percent between the two categories. Again, this underscores the importance of recruitment as a party strategy, but also shows that encouragement doesn't need to be from a party official, but can be from family, friends and coworkers. The more contacts of encouragement a woman encounters while considering candidacy may help positively influence her decision to run (Fox & Lawless, 2010).

Table 9: Gender and Most Influential Person

<i>Question: Who was the most influential person in encouraging you to run? (please select only one)</i>				
	Male Republican	Male Democrat	Female Republican	Female Democrat
A party official and/or legislative leader from my party	27.3%	21.1%	21.3%	23.1%
An elected or appointed officeholder	26.7%	22.9%	24.4%	24.5%
A member of a women's organization	0.0%	2.3%	5.5%	4.3%
A member of another organization or association	7.0%	7.4%	4.3%	9.0%
My spouse or partner	10.5%	14.9%	22.0%	14.1%
A family member (other than spouse)	3.5%	9.1%	2.4%	6.4%
A friend, co-worker, or acquaintance	25.0%	22.3%	20.1%	18.6%
N=	172	175	164	376
Chi-square=34.62, <i>p</i> =.011				

In general, these results are supportive of the literature on gender and politics. Altogether, only two tables out of the nine fail to reject the null hypothesis that correlates gender and party to family structure and support in a woman's decision to run for public office. In terms of family structure, the data show that married women are less likely to hold public office compared to men, and Democratic women are less likely to be married compared to Republican women (Table 1). The data also show that women who have a child under 18 (Table 2) are significantly less likely to hold public office (regardless of party) when compared to men. Regardless of party, women also factor in a child's age and independence in their decision to run at higher percentages than men (Table 3). When it comes to support for running for office, regardless of party, women report experiencing more support from their spouse or partner in comparison to men (Table 5). The importance of female candidate recruitment is also significant here, with men coming to the idea of running for office on their own (Table 8) compared to women, who typically are recruited by political gatekeepers such as officeholders or party leaders (Table 9). While generalities of the data have made above, party does also appear to influence a woman's decision to run for office in comparison to men. Among the women respondents, Democratic women were less likely to be married, have children, and experience more political recruitment in comparison to Republican women.

Understanding that both family structure and support may affect a woman's decision to run for public office more than her male colleagues is critically important when considering policy options that can increase the number of women in politics. The literature on these topics provides insight that these barriers women face in comparison to their male candidate colleagues are cemented in gender stereotypes reinforced by dated social and cultural values.

Theory and Policy Considerations

From the gathered literature and the data analyzed from the Center for American Women and Politics it is clear there are more than structural and support issues which create greater obstacles for women compared to men as individuals consider a campaign run for political office. In addition to structural issues, we can infer from the data that there also are societal issues rooted in gender stereotypes. The analysis and literature support the assertion that when women are married or have children – especially younger children – there are less likely to hold elected office when compared to men. While some of these obstacles to office are tangible – a child, for example – others are intangible and often values-based, such as the segregation of unpaid, household work women complete at higher time commitments than men. To formulate policy to help increase the number of women in politics, we have to first come to an understanding of how gender is socially constructed or viewed through the lens of American society, and how gender stereotypes contribute to the disparity in gendered political representation.

The Social Construction of Target Populations theory helps provide the lens through which to view our findings. Our data from the Center for American Women and Politics (Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, & Walsh, 2008) sheds light on the pathways to office for women, and paired with existing literature, illustrates how women’s anachronistic and unevenly distributed childcare and household responsibilities can affect women entering the political arena. The identity of “mother” becomes a woman’s primary identity when she has children and aims for a leadership position such as public office (Odenweller & Rittenour, 2017), and as we see from the Social Construction of Target Populations theory, women are considered dependent (Schneider

& Ingram, 1993). These women are looked upon politically as someone in need who we must take care of, not as the legislative leaders who can help shape policy to take care of others. However, when women are elected, they also must balance the masculine trait of leadership while still having the feminine trait of being caring and kind. When they are in the political realm – campaigning or elected – and display knowledge and leadership on issues (masculine traits), they are called “angry” (2020 Democratic Vice President candidate Kamala Harris), “nasty” (2016 Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton), and sometimes others just skip to obscenity laden name calling (Rep. Ted Yoho’s characterization of Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez). Because those socially acceptable masculine and feminine traits are opposite of each other, when women portray masculine traits of leadership, they move into the theory’s contender category, not the advantaged category. Women legislators who push for equality (i.e. feminism) when elected are considered deviant through the theory’s lens.

These stereotypes block women from entering the advantaged category of the theory, which is where we can find political leaders with true political power to influence policy to largely benefit themselves. When women do not have access to the advantaged category (even if they are elected to office), they are unable to gather support for their legislation. Women, regardless of party, tend to focus on what is commonly referred to as “women’s issues” (Caiazza, 2002 and Dolan, 2005). These issues tend to affect women more than other populations, and include areas such as childcare, education, and health care policies. Without access to the socially-constructed power structure that aids in the passage of beneficial policy to this target population of women, how can women ever become “advantaged?” How does one change a social structure in the name of equality?

First, it is important to recognize that men and women are equal and reinforce that the disparity in the number of women serving in elected office compared to men results from social structures and gender stereotypes. Because our family structures message from childhood that women are caregivers, not leaders, at a very early age (Mueller, 2017, Lawless & Fox, 2013 and Welch, 1977) this message is carried on into adulthood — it becomes very taken for granted. When a woman runs for office, she is not conforming to the norm and that can be a challenge for voters to rectify with their preexisting biases regarding gendered leadership. Second, it is important to understand that this gendered view of parenthood, leadership, and politics is not the same in every developed country. In the U.K., legislators regularly feature photos of their children on campaign and legislator websites (Campbell & Cowley, 2018).

Looking outside of the U.S. is helpful when considering what policies may help increase the number of women in politics and work to remove some of the social barriers created due to the reinforcement of gender roles in American society. To reiterate, we see boys and girls receiving messages regarding gender and parenthood roles at a young age. With American mothers taking leave after a baby is born more than fathers, that messaging begins at infancy. In the U.S., parents may take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave after a baby is born. This is typically taken by the mother. Returning to work quickly becomes a dilemma in the U.S., where the parents are also required to look for private day care and may end up essentially “paying to work.” On one hand, returning to work shortly after a child is born may help continued wage growth and career development for a parent, but on the other as the amount of unpaid, household work is taken on typically by women, the burden of childrearing will likely disproportionately affect the woman, leading her to be less likely to take on community leadership roles such as those in the political realm.

While the U.S. does not offer paid leave to parents, many European countries offer a range of protected – and many times paid – leave. For example, France and Spain offers couples more than 300 weeks or about six years of protected job leave (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011). European countries have also attempted to combat gender roles in family structures by offering paid leave for couples that can be split amongst the mother and father. If one parent does not use the time set aside for paid leave, it is often forfeited. In Finland, each parent receives 164 days of paid leave after a child is born, and only 69 days can be transferred from one parent’s leave to another (Finland to give dads same parental leave as mums, 2020). For example, a mother could end up with 233 days of paid leave (plus an extra month calculated in for pregnancy) if the father transfers 69 days to her, leaving the father with 95 days that must be used or forfeited. This “daddy quota” ensures that fathers are spending time with their children early in life. An earlier version of Finland’s leave gave fathers less paid time off to spend with children, but still engrained the practice as becoming a “normal” part of being a father (Lammi-Taskula, 2008).

Shared-leave policies put society in a position where it must think about gender. Fathers who take their time off are able to see from infancy the intensity in parenting that women have been assigned throughout history. Additionally, it gets us closer to a place of understanding and shows others that parents can be effective parents at the same time they are leaders. Women don’t have to “be like men” to be leaders, they just have to be effective. Understanding that gender is socially constructed and learned from family structures, split family leave after the birth of a child is one policy solution to a social problem. While it does not directly focus on increasing the raw numbers of women in elected positions, addressing the social constructs of women needs to be done before passing legislation to enforce parity. As we have seen with the Equal Pay Act of 1963, despite the legislation women are still paid less than men because the

social constructs of women were not fixed with policy. While a policy could increase the number of women in politics (setting gendered quotas, for example), women would likely remain socially constructed as deviants, dependents, and contenders even if access to political power structure are evenly split among genders. A policy solution must address the root cause of these social constructs, and split family leave policies helps set that stage for gender equality.

Conclusion

The literature review shows that while there are correlations between family structure, family support, and a woman's candidacy for public office, these may not be causal factors in her running for office. Even before a woman runs for office, much of her childhood experiences may affect her political ambition and knowledge. Structural and family issues, such as gendered norms introduced in childhood and a lack of political career encouragement, on average, disadvantage women compared to their male colleagues. When it comes to running a campaign, women with children often shy away from making this part of their public identity in fear that this may be a political liability, i.e. if a female candidate/mother is elected, who will take care of her children? Men, however, do not pay a similar penalty, and children may have the opposite effect, making them look like "good dads" – softening their masculine qualities while still retaining those strengths. Interestingly, conservative women have taken the often negative political perception of being a mom and attempted to turn it into a positive with the narrative of "Mama Grizzlies" introduced by the Tea Party and Sarah Palin. However, most of these strategies remained unsuccessful, likely because many conservative voters still hold conservative ideals of women's gender roles.

The theory consideration of Social Construction of Target Populations was included here to provide a framework as to why women may still have issues reaching equality in political

representation. This analysis is meant to provide a backdrop to understanding the issue, as it frames women who aspire to political power as social “deviants” and “contenders” for bucking the traditional caregiver role. This makes women unable to reach the highest level of the matrix’s power structure, regardless if they are elected or not. We see some of this narrative with current legislators such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who, despite winning her election and gaining a seat in the U.S House of Representatives, is called expletives by her colleagues and targeted by conservative media for being an outspoken, young woman despite her election success. Meanwhile, septuagenarian progressive white men such as Bernie Sanders aren’t called “nasty” and receive only a sliver of the barbs reserved for Ocasio-Cortez, Hillary Clinton, or Nancy Pelosi. Similarly, for the conservative side, many openly questioned why Sarah Palin wanted to serve as the vice president when she had five young children at home, including one with Down’s syndrome. When women attempt to move up the Social Construction of Target Population matrix from dependent to advantaged, they instead end up in the deviant category for their ambition and political power.

Parenthood appears to be a complicated realm to navigate for both men and women running for political office. However, regardless if motherhood negatively affects a campaign or not, we are able to look at the gendered political representation at national levels and see that women have yet to reach equality in the upper echelons of political power. Despite comprising half of the U.S. population, women only hold 23.2 percent of the seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and 26 out of 100 spots in the U.S. Senate are held by women (Women in the U.S. House of Representatives, 2020). Additionally, the U.S. has yet to elect a female president or vice president through the country’s electoral college system. Family support and structure appear to affect women more than men in political office consideration, but whether it is a causal

factor or just a correlated one will require more research on this topic. Furthermore, this paper did not address socioeconomic factors such as education, housing, and health care; ethnicity; and religious beliefs, that may affect a woman's decision to run for public office. These institutions likely also play a role in a woman's decision to campaign for an elected position and should be further explored in future research.

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