
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

“I’m no lady; I’m a member of Congress,
and I shall proceed accordingly.”

—MARY THERESA NORTON,
U.S. HOUSE MEMBER FROM 1925–1951¹

When Hillary Clinton ran in the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries, she seemed to have trouble connecting effectively with the public. After months of a campaign that emphasized her toughness and experience, she underperformed in the polls relative to her biggest competitors. While some observers argued that her strong emphasis on experience caused voters to think she was “trying too hard to be ‘the smartest girl in the room,’” others maintained that the focus she had adopted was dictated by the politics of gender: although a male candidate like Barack Obama could be seen as credible without much past experience, a woman candidate would not be.² And while Clinton’s chief strategist emphasized that she had to establish herself as a tough “father” figure for the country and not as the “first mama,”³ she was frequently criticized for being angry, aggressive, and unfeminine and was called an “ice-queen” for her apparent lack of empathy.⁴ As a journalist put it, “she presented herself as a person of strength and conviction, only to be rejected as cold-hearted and unfeminine—as a ‘nutcracker.’”⁵

When Clinton’s campaign then sought to soften her image through more intimate gatherings, more compassion-oriented discussions, and more personally emotive moments to increase her “likeability,” that approach seemed to backfire as well. Her campaign started a Web site “TheHillaryIKnow

¹ “National Affairs: I’m No Lady,” *Time Magazine*, March 20, 1950.

² Judith Timson, “From the Mouths of Critics: A Glaring Double Standard,” *Globe and Mail*, February 26, 2008., February 26, 2008 Tuesday, Pg. L1.

³ See Mark Penn’s “Launch Strategy Thoughts” memo from December 21, 2006, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2008/11/penns-launch-strategy-ideas-december-21-2006/37953>.

⁴ Leslie Jorgensen, “Ice Queen, Bitch, or Sentimental Pushover: Clinton Got It All,” *Colorado Statesman*, September 5, 2008; Peter Nicholas, “Hillary Clinton Cold, Calculating? Not according to Bill,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 2007.

⁵ Waleed Aly, “When It Comes to Being President, Is Sexism the Final Frontier?” *The Age* (Melbourne Australia), June 11, 2008.

.com” that presented videotaped testimonials by friends and supporters to highlight Hillary’s caring and compassionate side.⁶ As the New Hampshire primaries approached, Clinton’s campaign featured stories of mothers of sick children in a series of emotional ads that were designed to portray her in a more caring light.⁷ Clinton’s effort to, as one media analyst described it, “run away from [her] tough, kind of bitchy image” ran into difficulties: no longer too unemotional, she was now pegged by some as being “weak” and a “cry baby.”⁸ As one journalist put it, “when she did show emotion by crying on the hustings, she was branded weak, or accused of playing cynically to the cameras.”⁹

While Clinton attracted a devoted set of core supporters, she also had high unfavorable ratings. With conflicting advice ricocheting from pundits and consultants about how to present herself, she tried a variety of different approaches for connecting with primary voters. In the end, of course, more Democrats voted for Barack Obama, and she lost the Democratic nomination for president.

Hillary’s loss was not the last chance for a woman to appear on a national ticket in 2008. When Sarah Palin was announced as the vice presidential candidate on the McCain ticket for the general election, commentators zeroed in on her low levels of previous experience. Knowledge gaffes in her infamous Charles Gibson and Katie Couric interviews did not help Palin’s case on the credentials front, and some argued that the scrutiny of her experience was exacerbated because she was a woman.¹⁰

While campaigning, Palin proclaimed herself to be a “pit bull with lipstick” and tried to claim both toughness and compassion. Palin attempted to manage the balance between toughness and compassion in part by surrounding herself with her young family and discussing issues such as disability rights while talking tough about issues and her opponents. Like Clinton, Palin attracted a strong cohort of devoted followers while suffering very high unfavorable ratings; in other words, she, too, was a polarizing figure.

Many analysts chalked up the electoral failings of Clinton and Palin to good old-fashioned sexism. With headlines such as “How Sexism Killed Hillary’s Dream,” “This Smacks of Double Standards; Women Kept in

⁶ Leslie Jorgensen, “Ice Queen, Bitch, or Sentimental Pushover: Clinton Got It All,” *Colorado Statesman*, September 5, 2008; Jill Lawrence, “New Clinton Campaign Out to Show Her Likeability,” *USA Today*, December 16, 2007, 4A.

⁷ Lawrence and Rose 2010, 119.

⁸ Timson, Judith, “From the Mouths of Critics: A Glaring Double Standard,” *Globe and Mail*, February 26, 2008.

⁹ Waleed Aly, “When It Comes to Being President, Is Sexism the Final Frontier?” *The Age* (Melbourne, Australia), June 11, 2008. The crying episode was widely thought to have hurt Clinton, until she unexpectedly won the New Hampshire primary, which generated some revisionist news stories about how crying actually helped her with voters.

¹⁰ See, e.g., McGinley 2009, 721.

Place,” and “The ‘Bitch’ and the ‘Ditz’: How the Year of the Woman Reinforced the Two Most Pernicious Sexist Stereotypes and Actually Set Women Back,” commentators frequently reflected the conventional wisdom about women in politics: their credentials and campaign behavior are subjected to double standards that make it harder for them to win political office.

For many, the experience of Clinton and Palin clearly confirmed that the country is still not ready to elect a woman president. Others were more cautious in their assessments. For example, Anne Kornblut, journalist and author of *Notes from the Cracked Ceiling: Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and What It Will Take for a Woman to Win*, sought to answer whether the country is ready to elect the first woman president by looking back over what she described as “a battlefield littered with gender-related detritus, with charges of sexism, the phrases ‘she-devil’ and ‘pit bull with lipstick’ and ‘lipstick on a pig’ and ‘likable enough’ and ‘Caribou Barbie’ and ‘baby mama’ scattered everywhere.”¹¹ At various points in her book, Kornblut strongly implies that gender held back Clinton and Palin, but she ultimately demurs from directly making this causal claim owing in large part to the idiosyncrasies of the particular candidates and races in question.¹²

Kornblut’s reluctance to tell a causal story about the role of gender in 2008 is both understandable and wise. When the campaigns of individual candidates falter, it is impossible to determine the degree to which any single factor—whether it be gender, race, ethnicity, a scandal, or something else entirely—produced the observed outcome with any reasonable level of analytical precision. Did Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin fail in their electoral goals because of gender-related issues or because of other factors that pertained to them as individuals or to their respective races? Perhaps it was Palin’s political inexperience, socioeconomic background, polarizing ideology, the inherent challenge of running as a Republican in 2008, John McCain’s difficulty connecting with voters, his weakness on economic issues in combination with a rapidly declining economy, or yet another factor that hampered her, rather than her gender. Perhaps Clinton was hampered, not by gender, but by (Bill) Clinton fatigue, questionable campaign management and early spending decisions, exaggerations of her past history, the voters’ desire for a fresh approach, Obama’s ability to connect with younger voters, the Obama team’s superior ground organization, or other such factors.

All races involve unique sets of candidates, candidate behaviors, partisan dynamics, and local and national circumstances that can contribute to an electoral outcome. This inherently constrains our ability to look at a given race—or even a given set of races—and draw meaningful conclusions about the role of candidates’ gender. To produce firm answers about

¹¹ Kornblut 2009, 10.

¹² Kornblut 2009, 10.

the role of candidate gender in public opinion about campaigns, we need to be able to effectively isolate it. We need to know how gender affects public views overall—and how it interacts with candidate behavior—while holding constant all the other moving parts in a campaign.

In this book, I isolate two dynamics that many see as crucial barriers to the electoral success of women: gender stereotypes and gendered standards. Many have long suspected that the public makes special assumptions about, and applies special “rules” to, female candidates, and the experiences of Palin and Clinton in the 2008 election cycle led to an explosion of interest in this issue. According to the conventional wisdom, just as gender stereotypes have long caused women to be treated differently in the workplace and in society more generally, they also make it harder for women to win political office. This book provides the first systematic theoretical and empirical analysis of whether gender stereotypes and double standards do, in fact, hold back female candidates on the campaign trail.

My overall conclusion is an optimistic one: while my results show that gender stereotypes still do matter in various ways, the analysis is a striking refutation of the conventional wisdom about double standards in campaigns. I do not find any evidence that the public makes less favorable underlying assumptions about female candidates, nor do I find that the public has more challenging rules for the behavior of women on the campaign trail. My findings solve a puzzle that has vexed this field for decades: if stereotypes and double standards disproportionately hurt women candidates as the conventional wisdom posits, then how can we square this with findings that demonstrate that women receive vote shares that are comparable to those of similarly situated men?¹³ If voters penalize women in politics for being women, women candidates should win their campaigns against men at relatively lower rates. They do not, which is entirely consistent with my overall finding regarding the insignificance of damaging gender stereotypes on the campaign trail.

The primary focus of my analysis is at the legislative level, where far more women run for office. Although this is a common pipeline for *future* presidential candidates, my study cannot definitively rule out that a glass ceiling may remain for women seeking the highest office of the land. That being said, what my findings do reveal is a clear pattern regarding the qualities of leadership and toughness that are typically seen as being especially critical at the executive level: the general public simply does not view women legislators as being less capable than men on traits cen-

¹³ See, e.g., Tolleson-Rinehart and Josephson in Tolleson-Rinehart and Josephson 2000, 5; Erika Falk and Kathleen Hall Jamieson in Watson and Gordon 2003, 48; Burrell 1996, 55; Carroll 1994, 48; Lawless and Pearson 2008; Pearson 2010, 237; Palmer and Simon 2001, 62; Fox 2000, 232; 2010, 194; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994, 67 and 100; Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997; Smith and Fox 2001.

tral to leadership and does not penalize women for acting in a tough and “unfeminine” manner. My study yields some suggestive findings that older individuals might hold different views with respect to women and the presidency; to the extent that this might be the case, the natural process of generational replacement may improve prospects for women at the presidential level in the United States. More generally, if women were significantly held back by gender stereotypes at the presidential level today, it would also be reasonable to expect to find at least some evidence of that dynamic at other levels, and yet my study finds none. In the end, my analysis is thus very encouraging for the long-term future of women in politics at all levels.

Why Candidate Gender Matters

Over the course of a dramatic century for women’s rights, women have progressed from being disenfranchised before 1919 to a much-expanded role in the political sphere. Casting over half of the votes in the U.S., women today are a powerful force in terms of deciding who will be elected.¹⁴ In fact, some in the media believe that the 2012 elections were defined largely by the power of women as voters, with headlines like, “Women take stock after historic vote,” “How women ruled the 2012 election and where the GOP went wrong,” and “How women won it.” With a sizeable partisan gender gap in voting preferences in play, women were critical to putting Barack Obama back in the White House (had it been up to men, Mitt Romney would have been president), and were pivotal to a number of sub-presidential wins and losses, as well.

Female candidates have also made great strides. Until quite recently, women occupied a tiny percentage of Congress—a mere 2 percent of House seats and 1 percent of Senate seats in 1950, and just 4 percent of House seats and still 1 percent of Senate seats in 1980; moreover, many of these early women legislators were in office because they took the place of departed husbands, and not because they won competitive elections entirely on their own personal merits. Women are now far more likely to win office, and to do so without following on their departed husbands’ coattails.¹⁵ And yet the parity that has been achieved for female voters is still an elusive goal for female politicians. As of 1990, women held only 7 percent of House seats and 2 percent of Senate seats. Increases in 1992, the “Year of the Woman,” bolstered those numbers (to

¹⁴ Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 255.

¹⁵ The Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University has produced a several useful resources regarding the change in the number of women in Congress over time; see, http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/Congress-CurrentFacts.php.

13 and 7 percent, respectively), but by 2011 women held 17 percent of House seats, 17 percent of Senate seats, and six governorships. In the current era, women hold roughly one-quarter of state legislative seats, with considerable variation between states.¹⁶

The 2012 elections increased the number of women in national office further, with a record number of both women House members (81) and women senators (20) sworn into office the following January.¹⁷ Several states (Hawaii, Massachusetts, North Dakota, and Wisconsin) elected women Senators for the first time ever, while New Hampshire elected the first-ever all women congressional delegation, along with a woman governor to boot. Describing the 2012 results, Karen Tumulty of the *Washington Post* claimed that, “Twenty years after the election that was heralded as the ‘year of the woman’ comes another one that could be called that.”¹⁸

While representing significant progress over a relatively short time, the ratios of female to male political leaders are still nowhere near gender parity at any level of American government. Vigorous debates could be undertaken concerning what the “correct” or “best” percentage of women in office should be: Should it be the percentage of women in the population? The percentage of women relative to men who work—or work full time—outside of the home? The relative percentage of women who are interested in politics? Regardless, most people would likely agree that, by any measure, there is a significant “parity problem” with respect to the descriptive representation of women, even in the current era.¹⁹

The descriptive underrepresentation of women in public office matters in part because it can lead to underrepresentation of women’s concerns and opinions. Scholars have shown that women officeholders are better able to represent the preferences of women and are more likely to sponsor and vote for women-friendly policies.²⁰ Other scholars have demon-

¹⁶ “Fact Sheet Archive,” Facts, Rutgers: Center for American Women and Politics, http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/resources/FactSheetArchive.php. Sanbonmatsu (2006) points out that substantial variation exists in the descriptive representation of women between states; merely 9% of South Carolina’s state-level legislators are women versus 41% of Colorado’s legislators, with the rest of the states arrayed fairly evenly along the continuum.

¹⁷ Ashley Parker, “Day of Records and Firsts as 113th Congress Opens,” *New York Times*, January 3, 2013. See also <http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/WIC/Historical-Data/Women-Representatives-and-Senators-by-Congress/>.

¹⁸ Karen Tumulty, “Female candidates make history, head for the Hill,” *Washington Post*, November 8, 2012.

¹⁹ I will be referring to the “parity problem” at different points in this book as shorthand for discussing the current percentage of women in office relative to men. See the Hunt Alternatives Fund’s “Political Parity Project” Web site, <http://www.politicalparity.org>, for more information on this issue along with some practical actions that are being taken to increase the descriptive representation of women.

²⁰ See, e.g., Burrell 1994; Caizza 2004; Gerrity, Osborn, and Mendex 2007; Norton 1999; Swers 1998; Thomas 1991, 1994.

strated that women legislators more frequently give speeches on issues that are thought to be of greater concern to women, such as abortion, gender equity, food stamps, and flex time than were their predecessors.²¹ Some scholars argue that the inclusion of more women in legislatures changes decision making by producing a more cooperative, inclusive, and less hierarchical legislative process.²² Women with political power also empower other women in a symbolic sense by simply being in office: participation, efficacy, and political interest have been found to increase substantially among women when they are represented by women.²³ This effect reaches into future generations as well: David Campbell and Christina Wolbrecht found that adolescent girls had a higher level of planned political involvement when they were exposed to more highly visible women in office.²⁴

Given that a marked gender disparity still exists and is likely to affect both the political behavior and the substantive representation of women, it is critical to fully investigate the potential causes of this parity problem.

Harmful Stereotypes and Double Standards as a Potential Explanation for the Parity Problem

The world abounds with information, and humans use a variety of simplification tools such as gender stereotypes in order to more efficiently (if not always accurately) process the regular onslaught of stimuli. Gender stereotypes are commonly used in everyday life; psychological research reveals that strong gender stereotypes are commonly applied to ordinary people, a finding that gives weight to the concern that female candidates may be hobbled by double standards. Studies have found that men are commonly thought to be more decisive, more assertive, more forceful, more ambitious, and less naïve and to have more leadership ability and business sense than women.²⁵ People also tend to hold strong beliefs about how men and women *should* act—for example, women are expected to be less assertive and forceful and more caring and compassionate—and men and women tend to be penalized heavily if they act con-

²¹ See, e.g., Gerrity, Osborne, and Mendez 2007 and Pearson and Dancey 2011. The Pearson and Dancey article is especially interesting because it examines gender and partisanship, and finds that both Democratic and Republican women legislators were more likely than their male counterparts to discuss matters pertaining to women, and Republican women were more likely to discuss matters pertaining to women more than Democratic men in three out of the four Congresses they studied.

²² See, e.g., Weikart et al. 2007.

²³ High-Pippert and Comer 1998; Atkeson and Carrillo 2007; Atkeson 2003.

²⁴ Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006.

²⁵ See, e.g., Lippa 2005; Deaux and La France 1998; Prentice and Carranza 2002; Williams and Best 1982.

trary to those gendered expectations.²⁶ Furthermore, the significance of gender stereotypes extends beyond normal interpersonal relations in everyday life: there is considerable evidence that female business leaders face a different—and, by and large, tougher—set of expectations about their qualifications and behavior than do their male peers.²⁷

But what about the political realm? Do women running for office face tougher expectations by the public regarding their qualifications and behavior than male candidates do? If so, does that contribute to the parity problem? That is the underlying question this book systematically addresses. As a foundation for investigating this question empirically, we first need to understand whether the public makes differing baseline assumptions about male and female candidates—that is, whether people stereotype male and female candidates based on gender from the start.

That question—the matter of whether people use gender stereotypes to evaluate candidates without respect to a candidate’s actual behavior or individual qualifications for office—has drawn the attention of many scholars, including Deborah Alexander, Kristi Andersen, Kathy Dolan, Erika Falk, Richard Fox, Kim Kahn (Kim Fridkin),²⁸ Leonie Huddy, Pat Kenney, Kate Kenski, David King, Jennifer Lawless, Rick Matland, Monica McDermott, and Kira Sanbonmatsu. Although there seems to be broad consensus among academics that the public adopts gender stereotypes in the evaluation of political candidates, the implications of those stereotypes for the election of women candidates are not clear.²⁹ The results of studies in the field range from the idea that baseline stereotypes are very harmful, on net, to the electoral prospects of female candidates to the view that positive stereotypes about women counterbalance any negative stereotypes; a study by Kahn even found that women candidates only benefit from positive stereotypes held by the public, once media coverage is held constant.³⁰ Directly comparing the results of those studies to one another in order to answer with confidence whether women candidates are harmed by gender stereotypes is difficult, however, as the stud-

²⁶ See, e.g., Prentice and Carranza 2002; Tyler and McCullough 2009; Rudman and Phelan 2008.

²⁷ For an outstanding review of findings in this area, see Eagly and Carli 2007.

²⁸ Note that “Kim Kahn” and “Kim Fridkin” are the same scholar, with her more recent work published under the name “Fridkin.” Throughout this book, I refer to her work with the name she published with at the time.

²⁹ With the kind of characterization about the literature on gender stereotypes that is common in work about women candidates, Dolan, Deckman, and Swers state in their 2011 textbook that, “voters presume that female candidates possess certain feminine personality traits whereas men possess certain masculine traits. Female candidates are seen as more compassionate, moral, honest, and ethical than are men. Voters perceive men as tougher, better able to handle crises, more qualified, and more decisive than women” (143).

³⁰ Kahn 1994, 183.

ies rely on a wide range of methodologies (direct questions about views on candidate gender, views of real candidates, or experiments), different kinds of samples (local undergraduates, local temp-agency employees, or U.S. adults), and data collected in different eras.

The issue of when the studies were conducted is critical. Many of the studies still being cited as proof that women candidates have to battle the pernicious effects of gender stereotypes were conducted in the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, when gender relations were at a very different stage in the social world and in the workplace. The public may have very different views about women and leadership today. In contrast, the data for the present book were collected in April 2009—that is, after the 2008 election, an election that may well have altered the way some people think about female candidates. Thus, this book provides a starting point for understanding gender stereotypes in the post-2008 era.

An examination of the baseline stereotypes that the public may apply to male and female candidates in the current era is only the first piece of this study. It is an important first step because it permits a dialogue with much of the previous literature on the topic and, more generally, because it provides a foundation for understanding how candidate gender affects public views about candidates before people start reacting to specific candidate behaviors or qualifications. The specific issue addressed here—whether women candidates are held to different standards for their qualifications or behavior that make it harder for them to win office relative to male candidates—has been neglected by the literature to date.

One of the goals of any political campaign is to consolidate existing positive opinions of the candidate held by the public while undermining any harmful ones by highlighting appealing information about him or her; this is all usually done while also trying to highlight any negative information about the opponent in order to encourage voters to view the opponent in a relatively more negative light. By concentrating primarily on the starting assumptions that the public might apply to candidates without systematically examining how such views might change in response to new information that they might get about a candidate during a campaign, the current literature on gender stereotypes cannot reach answers to many important questions. At present we know almost nothing about whether people react to the behavior of candidates through a gendered lens, nor has anyone studied whether people might have different standards for the qualifications of women to hold office. As such, we are leaving much of the story about how gender might enter into the public's evaluations of candidates almost entirely unexplored.

Some academics such as Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Deborah Tannen discuss the possibility of double standards—both frequently argue in media interviews that women candidates do face higher standards—but

they are the exception rather than the rule: most scholars generally do not address the issue.³¹ Although there have been a few attempts to analyze how people react to the individual characteristics or behaviors of male and female candidates (specifically, there have been a couple of tests of candidate gender and toughness, and a couple of tests regarding candidate gender and reactions to financial scandals or sex scandals),³² no one has analyzed this dynamic across multiple characteristics or behaviors in order to provide a systematic portrait of how the public reacts to candidates in a way that allows us to understand whether the public might have more challenging standards for women candidates that might be contributing to the parity problem.

There is, nevertheless, a pervasive conventional wisdom in the public sphere about female candidates: they face tougher expectations about their qualifications and are penalized for certain behaviors more than their male counterparts. The conventional wisdom is regularly included in news headlines: “Women’s ‘Double Bind’: Competence, Femininity Collide in Candidates’ Paths”; “Rules of the Game Stacked against Women Candidates”; and “Stuck in Second: The Double Standard Is Alive and Well; It’s Just More Nuanced.” And the text of news articles is no less strident in advancing those kinds of assumptions.³³ Moreover,

³¹ As just one example, Deborah Tannen maintained in 2007: “Our image of a politician, a leader, a manager, anyone in authority, is still at odds with our expectations of a woman. To the extent that a woman is feminine, she’s seen as weak. To the extent that she puts it aside and is forceful, aggressive and decisive, she’s not seen as a good woman” (cited in Ellen Goodman, “Rules of the Game Stacked against Women Candidates,” Opinion section, *Daily Herald*, December 11, 2007). Kathleen Hall Jamieson stressed in one recent interview that female candidates “are supposed to be warm and accessible, because that’s what’s perceived to be gender-appropriate. But they also need to be tough and competent. The minute they appear that way, their warmth and accessibility are called into question” (quoted in Jocelyn Noveck, “Clinton’s Task: Being Likable AND Tough,” *USA Today*, January 10, 2008). To Jamieson’s credit, she is the scholar to date to directly focus on gendered leadership standards across multiple dimensions. However, her book *Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership* (1995), focuses primarily on case studies and does not systematically evaluate public attitudes.

³² Huddy and Capelos (2002) and Smith, Powers, and Suarez (2005) study gender and scandals. Sapiro (1981–82), Leeper (1991), and Huddy and Terkildsen (1993a, 1993b) study candidate gender and toughness. In all cases, the studies examine a particular kind of behavior rather than multiple kinds of behaviors, and in most cases the studies are speaking to different issues than mine (using, e.g., entirely different kinds of dependent variables) and/or use different methodologies (i.e., no control groups from which to draw clear comparisons about the role of gender).

³³ See, e.g., “Women (candidates) are still held to a double standard, and they tend to buy into it themselves” (Kate Zernike, “She Just Might Be President Someday,” *Week in Review*, *New York Times*, May 18, 2008) or, “You don’t have to look too far to see what happens when women fail to adjust for the double standards and higher thresholds for female candidates” (Nicolle Wallace, “How Bachmann Is Outrunning Palin—and Hillary,” *Outlook* section, *Washington Post*, August 7, 2011).

political consultants frequently invoke the conventional wisdom in public discussions about women candidates.³⁴

The widespread silence of scholars on this topic means that the conventional wisdom in the media goes largely unchecked. As such, our collective “knowledge” about whether harmful double standards exist for female candidates primarily consists of speculative comments confirming the conventional wisdom that are made by political practitioners, pundits, and journalists.

Despite the fact that most of those headlines and observations likely come out of perfectly good intentions—at the very least, they all reflect the fact that suspected gender dynamics in campaigns can now be discussed openly rather than kept in the shadows, where they used to reside—there are reasons to believe that the perpetuation of the conventional wisdom may actually help to create negative outcomes for women in politics. If it is indeed true that women candidates face a tougher playing field with respect to winning over the public, it *should* be discussed widely because such discussion could itself help to level the playing field. But if there is not actually a biased playing field, a focus on how women are disadvantaged vis-à-vis the public might negatively influence how women run or keep them from ever trying to run for office and thus produce substantially more net harm than good for the progress of women in politics.

I argue that those misperceptions may very well have important effects on whether women choose to run for office, and how they go about running if they choose to do so. In particular, Lawless and Fox (2010) convincingly argue that the paucity of women running for office is caused, in part, by a lack of confidence on the part of potential women candidates that they have what it takes to win over the public. They also find that potential female candidates have pervasive concerns that women have to be much better than their male counterparts to have a chance at winning; specifically, they find that nearly nine out of ten potential women candidates believe that it is significantly harder for women than for men to win elections.³⁵ Lawless and Fox also find that women are less likely than men to be recruited by party leaders, or to be encouraged by friends, family, and colleagues, to run for office; it may very well be that some portion of this reluctance to recruit and encourage women derives from misperceptions that the American public is not ready to fully embrace female leadership. Furthermore, among those women who do decide to run for office, a belief that they start out a disadvantage may potentially have harmful effects on how they choose to run their campaigns; instead of

³⁴ Nearly all of the quotes by political consultants that I could find on the topic of candidate gender support this point, and many statements by made by consultants are included throughout this book.

³⁵ Lawless and Fox 2010, 124–26, 167. I return to these findings in greater detail in chapter 8.

proceeding with confidence, they may worry more than they should, police their own campaign behavior more than they should, and defer to advisers about how they should act more than they should (advisers who, themselves, may be relying on outdated or inaccurate conventional wisdom). A detailed evaluation of whether double standards exist for female candidates not only allows to better understand the role of women in society and how campaigns work but may also help to improve whether and how female politicians present themselves to the public.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical foundation of this book. It begins by addressing the critical issues of what gender stereotypes are, how they might be expected to affect male and female candidates, and how those stereotypes might interact with candidate behavior in order to produce different standards for candidates. I then outline two general theories that are systematically contrasted over the course of the book: the *double standards theory*, which posits that women face systematic barriers on the campaign trail (and is thus compatible with the conventional wisdom on this topic) and the *leaders-not-ladies theory*, the alternative framework I develop, which posits that female candidates will be judged on the basis of good leadership rather than on the basis of good femininity, and thus do not face higher standards. A particular theoretical contribution of this book is the clear separation of perspectives based on descriptive stereotypes (assumptions about how people *are*) from those based on prescriptive stereotypes (assumptions about how people *should* act or *should* be). While the importance of this distinction in the study of gender stereotypes in business and psychology has long been recognized, research on candidate gender has thus far focused on descriptive stereotypes only.

The underlying theories having been described, chapter 3 then provides an overview of the methodology used in this study. The empirical data derives from experiments that I conducted on a large, representative sample of U.S. adults. With the luxury of 3,000 respondents and six experiments in total, I am able to undertake a very broad assessment of how candidates' credentials and campaign behaviors influence public attitudes while holding everything else constant except gender. Holding constant all of the unique characteristics associated with a campaign makes it possible to isolate the specific dimensions of gender in question and derive generalizable conclusions. Experiments are, quite simply, the only way to systematically examine whether people hold male and female candidates to different standards.

Chapter 4 examines the baseline descriptive stereotypes that exist for male and female candidates in the current era. This analysis is necessary

to determine whether gender stereotypes held by the public cause female candidates to start out at a relative disadvantage. I argue that inexperienced women may best be able to position themselves as outsiders and may therefore be more affected by stereotypes than more experienced candidates (who may be thought of as “insider politicians” and less distinctively as “men” or “women”). I find that gender stereotypes are virtually nonexistent for candidates with a great deal of past political experience. In contrast, some gender stereotypes are applied to inexperienced candidates; however, to the extent that there are any stereotypes, they are all only beneficial to women and thus provide inexperienced women with some specific advantages over inexperienced men. This analysis helps to shed some light on discrepancies in the existing literature regarding gender stereotypes and it also clears the decks of any notion that women politicians necessarily start at a disadvantage relative to their male counterparts vis-à-vis the public, at least in the modern era.

Even if female candidates do not face an inauspicious starting point because of gender stereotypes, certain kinds of behaviors during the campaign could still harm women more than men. Chapters 5–7 examine five different types of campaign behavior that have been posited as damaging women more than men. All of these behaviors were featured prominently in discussions of candidates’ gender in the 2008 elections and in discussions of earlier campaigns as well.

Chapter 5 addresses emotional displays by candidates. Avoiding emotional displays has long been seen as a cardinal rule for female candidates. In this chapter, I examine the two emotional displays that are most prominent in discussions of the role of gender in real-world politics: crying and anger.³⁶ My overall finding is that there is no double standard for these behaviors: men and women are similarly penalized for both crying and anger. Candidates overall are heavily penalized for displays of anger but only minimally penalized for crying (largely because of a push-pull effect in which crying reduces perceptions of strength while increasing perceptions of honesty and caring-related attributes).

Chapter 6 addresses the key question of how the public reacts to candidates who act tough or seem to lack empathy. It has long been argued that women face a double bind: they have to prove that they are tough in order to be seen as leaders, but if they show toughness, they are disproportionately disliked because they are no longer acting in the caring and deferential manner expected of women. I find that female candidates do not, in fact, face a toughness-related double bind; on a couple of critical measures, women candidates actually *benefit* disproportionately by acting in a tough manner. With respect to the other behavior this chapter examines, many have long suspected that the public places a higher value

³⁶ Brooks 2011.

on empathy in female candidates and penalizes them more when they appear to lack it. I find that this concern is not valid: women and men are similarly penalized for acting in a nonempathetic manner.

Chapter 7 further grapples with the question of whether female candidates are held to higher standards on the campaign trail than are their male counterparts by examining a common type of candidate foible, the knowledge gaffe. Many candidacies have suffered greatly in recent electoral cycles owing largely to knowledge gaffes—arguably none more so than Rick Perry following his now-legendary “oops” moment in the 2011 Republican presidential primary debates. Examining gaffes is an ideal final testing ground for the question of whether female candidates are walking an especially difficult tightrope when they run for office. Again, I find that they are not: knowledge gaffes are very harmful but not disproportionately so to the candidacies of women.

Chapter 8 integrates my findings into a wider discussion of what we now know—and what still remains to be discovered—about the parity problem for women in politics. Accordingly, I move beyond the specific parameters of this study to examine the many other potential explanations for the gender imbalance among politicians. In addition to bringing aspects of my findings to bear on those questions, I also call readers’ attention to promising opportunities for future research. I ultimately concur with the findings of Lawless and Fox that lower levels of recruitment of women candidates as well as lower ambition and confidence on the part of potential women candidates provide compelling explanations for explaining existing gender imbalances. I further argue that my findings have the potential to help to rectify a least part of the recruitment and confidence differentials that are holding women back from running for office.

In Chapter 9, I conclude the book with a discussion of why my study indicates we should be optimistic about the electoral prospects of women who decide to run for office and how more women can potentially be encouraged to run for office through wider recognition of the reasons for that optimism. I then examine whether this optimism was always warranted, or whether it might be a relatively new state of affairs. Through an analysis of generational differences in views of women candidates, I gain some leverage on whether the playing field for women candidates represents an improvement over time. I find some evidence of generational differences in views of women candidates at the presidential level. These results suggest that campaign dynamics may indeed be changing between generations, and thus that they may continue to improve for women at least partly through the process of generational replacement. Looking forward, I concur with those who argue that women have a very promising future in American politics.