

Why X Y?

Explaining Variation in Male Support for Politically Active Women

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From 1776: Onward and Upward!

American women have been involved in politics since the country's founding. Evidence of Abigail Adams' influence upon her husband, John, is well documented. Women like Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of the controversial novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, helped further the cause of abolition. The Women's Christian Temperance Union sponsored in large part the movement towards "prohibition," which resulted in the 18th Amendment to the United States Constitution. Though still a subject of debate, most historians generally concede that Edith Wilson, wife to President Woodrow Wilson, handled many presidential affairs and made multiple political decisions during her husband's infirmity.

Even so, not until the summer of 1920, with the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, did American women receive official recognition, when it was acknowledged that "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." Since that time, females have continued to increase their political influence. The women's liberation movement, largely a product of the 1960s' sexual revolution, has continued to expand, bringing more and more women into the twin businesses of politics and governing. In 1984, Geraldine Ferraro ran (unsuccessfully) for vice-president. The 2002

elections brought the total number of women in Congress to 76 (62 in the House of Representatives and 14 in the Senate) – a number up nearly 17% from 2000. There are currently six female state governors, and women mayors now head 14 of the 100 largest cities in the U.S. Two women are serving on the Supreme Court, and the last two administrations have seen an unprecedented number of women occupy high-ranking positions, including Secretary of State, Attorney General and National Security Advisor. In addition, women competed for the presidential nomination of both major parties in the 2000 and 2004 election cycles.

Nonetheless, male attitudes toward politically active women – as candidates, lobbyists, appointees, and campaign workers – remains ambivalent. The 1996 General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago reveals that 19.8% of men believe or are not sure whether “women should take care of their homes and leave running the country up to men.” While these numbers indicate a decisive improvement since 1977, when 39.7% of men held those values, it remains clear that women have yet to achieve complete respect and equality in the political world. Why are some men more accepting of women in politics than others?

The results of this study are relevant to a wide variety of groups and individuals. Organized women’s groups from across the political spectrum (such as Concerned Women for America and the National Organization for Women), issue-based groups (e.g. National Abortion Rights Action League, Susan B. Anthony List), and female candidates for office will all benefit from this research, as they seek to understand and attract more male support for their agendas. Additionally, male candidates for office running against females will also profit from the results of this study. They will be able to better analyze

what segment of the male vote is supporting women, and how to manipulate that.

Furthermore, political parties and political action committees will be interested in this research, as it may help them predict, based on regional demographics, whether a female candidate is likely to capture a large enough portion of the male vote to be successful.

Past research has argued that age, race, education, religion, ideology, and party identification all contribute to a man's view of politically active women. I intend to address this question from the perspective of political psychology, by applying various psychological theories of learning, including modeling (Bandura, 1959), "gestaltism" (Driscoll, 1993), and operant conditioning (Skinner, 1968). Specifically, I will test the hypothesis that the man's mother's education level, the presence of a biological daughter within the context of the man's stable marriage, and military experience all function as key determinants in male acceptance of politically active women.

Early Scholarship

Over the years, much has been written about the intersection of gender and politics. The official entry of American women into politics by virtue of the right to vote launched a whole new area of study. By the 1960s, with the advent of the women's liberation movement, females had begun to see themselves as a separate and distinct group whose actions, attitudes, values, and beliefs were deserving of special consideration. In the 1980s, scholars and analysts first identified the "gender gap," observing a noticeable effect on election outcomes caused by differences in male/female voting patterns.

With the expansion of women's political activity in the last 80 years, it is understandable that a vast amount of literature has now been published on the issue of

women and politics. Articles and books have been written regarding the success and failure of female candidates, how women differ on issue positions, “approach-to-problem-solving” differences between the sexes, and the history of women in politics. However, little of this work deals solely with the male attitudes toward female political activity, and that which does is largely descriptive in nature, rather than predictive or prescriptive. What literature there is on the subject largely argues that women are becoming more commonplace and more accepted in what was once seen as a traditionally man’s world. This is most certainly true. Basic National Election Survey data confirms that conclusion. However, little attention has been devoted to the fact that some men remain “unconverted.” Why this is occurring, and what causes the formation of men’s attitudes regarding women is altogether too-little researched, and deserves to be more carefully studied. This paper will briefly discuss the relevant literature that has been published, and then posit multiple alternate hypotheses, finally concluding with the empirical testing of those hypotheses.

The available literature regarding women and politics separates quite nicely into three main groups. The first of these, which I refer to as “Electoral Women,” seeks to study and analyze patterns among female voters and candidates. The research in this category emerges mainly from highly developed countries such as the United States and Britain, places where women and men enjoy relatively equal status in society. The first major conclusion to come out of this body of literature is that female candidates do not win very many elections. While voters generally do not vote against a candidate solely on the basis of her gender (Kelley and McAllister 1983), single member districts, nonincumbency, and a decreased ability to fundraise (Welch and Studlar 1990) all

contribute to a woman's diminished likelihood of winning. Secondly, the data from these studies indicate there to be a recognizable gender gap with regards to issue positions and priorities (Gupte 2002; Dalto and Slagter 2001; Dolan 1998,).

A second group of gender-based political studies is one I call "International Women." Research in this category analyzes the emerging role of women in developing and democratizing states and societies around the world (Carey 2001). Again, the work done in this area is largely descriptive works of explication, with little explanatory or predictive power. It consists mainly of specific case studies containing little to no empirical analysis (McFarland 2003).

The third and final segment of "women and politics" research is what I have termed "Historical Women." Investigation in this area is, again, mostly independent case study research seeking to tell the gender-sensitive story of a particular time, place, or circumstance in history (Marshall 1996; Plant 2000). Not surprisingly, research here fails to provide much of a blueprint for continuing to expand the role and status of women. That said, the above analysis lists conclusions that are just the basics of gender-based political science research. Much more has been written about various topics, and a thorough review of research through 1993 was written by Rita Mae Kelly and Kimberly Fisher (1993, *Political Science and Politics*).

Despite the lack of research in this area, there are several possible hypotheses (and supporting theories) that may explain remaining male resistance to women in the political arena. It will therefore be important to consider also the possible role of such "usual suspects" as age, race, and political ideology. However, it is my contention that

the explanation for variance among male support for politically active women lies much deeper, in a realm that can only be reached by political psychology.

Political psychology is, at its root, an attempt to apply psychological theories and research methods to “the comprehension and improvement of political processes.” (Kressel, 1993). It is a vital component of the overall study of politics, because as Heinz Eulau maintains, it is difficult, if not impossible to ponder meaningfully the governance of human beings without concurrently discussing human acts, goals, drives, feelings, beliefs, commitments, and values (1963). While political psychology is clearly a subfield of both political science and psychology, it is often difficult to tell where the politics stops and the psychology starts, as Kressel makes clear (1993). Our analyses of politics at every level include psychological theories that are often left unstated and “between the lines.” The goal of this paper is to at least partially identify the psychology inherent in our understanding and study of politics. I plan to test the utility of this approach for explaining variation among male attitudes towards politically active women.

Psychology is rich with theories of learning, and I base my research here on three principal ones: social learning theory, gestalt theory, and operant conditioning. I will begin by suggesting that attitudes regarding women in politics are learned by watching and imitating a “model,” specifically one’s mother. I further hypothesize that a combination of marriage and biological daughter(s) will, based on gestalt-type learning, result in higher support for women in politics, as men apply beliefs from a specific situation to wide class of problems. Finally, I hope to show that the operant conditioning (reward and punishment) based environment of the military contributes to decreased support for politically active women.

John Locke was the first to articulate the theory of *tabula rasa*, or “blank slate,” the idea that each of us is born lacking attitudes, values and beliefs, and that they are acquired over time rather than being inborn or genetically predetermined (1690). Explaining how men may come to value or disvalue women in the political arena requires us to look at how it is that humans acquire attitudes and beliefs in general. To do this, we will examine several theories of learning, including social learning, gestalt theory, and operant conditioning.

Albert Bandura is generally considered to be the founder of psychology’s social learning theory. By examining aggressive behavior among adolescents in relation to family structure and behavior, he found that children learn attitudes about appropriate and inappropriate behavior by watching their parents (1959). A child who sees his parents put on their seatbelts every time they drive learns that seatbelt usage is simply part of the process of driving. I have a friend who insists that empty eggshells must be placed back in the carton until all the eggs are gone. She finds it strange that I do not, since she learned by watching her mother bake that this is what one does with eggshells. Similarly, but conversely, negative behaviors can also be learned. A child whose parents have a penchant for cursing or drug and alcohol abuse come to see those behaviors as normal and acceptable. Harry Chapin’s song “Cat’s in the Cradle,” about a boy whose father never seems to have time for him and who then grows up to treat his family the same way, is a perfect example of social learning.

This theory of social learning, often referred to as modeling, leads to my first hypothesis: that men whose mothers are more educated are likely to have a more positive view of politically active women. The logic for this hypothesis is derived from two

paths. First, regardless of whether or not these women choose to work outside the home, their education indicates their acceptance of the idea that it is appropriate for women to be educated and involved in the world around them. These attitudes, then, would be modeled to the son, who learns that women have a valid function in the political arena. Second, given class and socioeconomic realities, a man whose mother is more educated is more likely to be highly educated himself, and in his educational experience would therefore encounter more women (as fellow students, professors, advisors, etc...) who model for him an active and educated role for women.

A second theory of learning, developed by Max Wertheimer (1938), Kurt Koffka (1935), and Wolfgang Koehler (1940), is known as “gestalt theory.” While this is technically a theory of perception, it is easily and frequently applied to the process of learning. Gestalt theory starts from the idea that learning takes place not through actual events, but through a person’s perception of those events. It proposes that multiple pieces of a puzzle are slowly experienced, analyzed, and then fit into a person’s cognitive scheme, ultimately leading him to an “insight,” or an “aha!” moment, when everything suddenly clicks. Gestalt theorists’ work with animals has shown that we tend to solve problems by applying models that in the past provided solutions to what is now perceived to be a similar problem. For instance, if a person is given a choice between red and blue, and over time learns that red is good, when he is later given a choice between red and green, he will choose red, on the assumption that if it was good before, it must be good now.

The gestalt theory of learning leads to my next hypothesis: men who have biological daughters *and are married to the mothers of those daughters* are more likely to

support the idea of politically active women. Prior to fatherhood, a man may hold what some would consider the antiquated notion that women belong in the home and should remain outside the political arena. “But,” as Gary Allan (2003) put it, “when tough little boys grow up to be dads...” they form bonds with their children and begin to want what is best for them. Particularly with daughters, fathers seem to want to give their children everything that they can, not as a way of earning love, but of showing love. So a father that loves his daughter very much, is proud of her, knows how smart and capable she is, and wants to give her the world, seems more likely to support her career ambitions. If the girl is interested in politics in any form, her desire to be politically active may lead to a generalized acceptance of politically active women by her father.

The hypothesis depends on a strong, positive relationship between father and daughter. David Popenoe (1996) details a strong correlation between marriage and a man’s overall relationship with his children, arguing that without marriage, both father and child receive far fewer of the benefits normally incurred in a strong father-child relationship. If gestalt-based learning leading to higher levels of support for politically active women is considered a benefit (and this certainly makes sense), it seems logical that for such learning to take place, father and daughter must spend a good deal of time together in a positive environment. Divorce clearly reduces the amount of time most fathers spend with their daughters, and the time that is spent together is likely to be less positive and supportive, leading to weaker bonds between father and daughter, and, presumably, less room for gestalt learning to take place. Therefore, it is necessary to qualify the hypothesis that fathers of daughters are more likely to support women in

politics with the essential criterion that those fathers be married to the daughters' mothers.

Operant conditioning is the final theory of learning addressed in this paper. Operant conditioning is essentially consequence based-learning. Although others initially proposed the theory, B.F. Skinner (1938) is responsible for developing and expanding it. The famous Skinner box showed that rats could be taught to press a bar if they were subsequently rewarded with food. Skinner expanded upon this experiment, and came up with four "consequences" that can be used to achieve desired behavior: positive reward (adding something good), negative reward (removing something bad), positive punishment (adding something bad), and negative punishment (removing something good). Thus, rats, people, and other "teachable creatures" learn desirable and undesirable responses through repeated experience of an altered post-response environment.

The theory of operant conditioning supports my final hypothesis: men who have served time in the military will be less likely to endorse the idea of politically active women. So-called "boot camp" and other aspects of military training are clearly based on the idea of operant conditioning, as undesirable behavior is punished. The process of military training can potentially lead to what may be termed an "over-masculinization" of these men. They can become desensitized to the idea of "social acceptability," (Higgins, 2003) and learn to value only strong, masculine personalities as appropriate figures of leadership. Therefore, men who have been trained in this fashion and developed an overly masculine worldview are likely to be more hostile to the idea of politically active women.

I will test the three hypotheses discussed above (mother's education level, biological daughter combined with a stable marriage, and military experience) using logistic regression analysis. Additionally, I will consider the effects of race, political ideology, and age, in order to see whether psychology provides a better explanation for male attitudes toward women in politics than the traditional, more shallow, categorical variables.

Lights! Camera! ACTION!

The datasets that will be used in this survey come from the 1994 General Social Survey, conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. As my dependent variable, I use a variable whose values (agree, disagree, not sure, and N/A) serve as responses to the statement, "Women should take care of running their homes and leave running the country up to men" (FEHOME). However, since only those respondents giving the response "disagree" can be firmly identified as holding generalized support for women in the political arena, while those who respond with either "agree" or "not sure" can at best be said to be ambivalent about the issue, I chose to recode the data into a nominal variable measuring only firm support or lack thereof (FEHOME2). A quick glance at the data in Table 1 indicates that in 1994, fully 18.5% of males indicated a lack of support for women in politics. This is interesting in that responses to the broadly-worded question indicate that nearly one-fifth of the male population remains opposed to women in politics, regardless of the role (as candidate, elected official, lobbyist, etc...), despite the long history of women's involvement in a multitude of political areas.

Table 1 Data Frequencies and Central Tendencies

	% of Respondents	Mean	Median	Mode
<i>FEHOME2</i>				
Support women in politics	81.5%			
Do not support women in politics	18.5%			
Highest year of school completed by mother		11.16	12.00	12
<i>Parental Status</i>				
Married with daughter	18.1%			
Anything else	81.9%			
<i>Vet Status</i>				
Vet	35.8%			
Not a Vet	64.2%			
Age of Respondent		44.87	42.00	34
<i>Race of Respondent</i>				
White	84.4%			
Black	11.4%			
Other	4.2%			
Respondent's Political Ideology* *1 = extremely liberal 7= extremely conservative		4.34	4.00	4

I intend to test the impact of three independent variables. The first variable measures the highest grade level completed by the respondent's mother (MAEDUC). This variable will allow me to test the hypothesis that a woman's education level is related to her son's support for politically active women. Initial examination of this data at Table 1 reveals that while the mean years of education is 11.16, both the median and the mode lie at 12, indicating that half of the respondents' mothers obtained education beyond high school, while half did not.

A second variable measures number of years the respondent spent in the military (VETYEARS), and provides data to test the impact of military training on male support

for women in politics. However, because my hypothesis argues that military training in and of itself, rather than length of service, decreases support for politically active women, I have recoded this variable to measure only whether the man spent time in the military, not how long he was there (YESNOVET). This allows me to combine the responses of all lengths of time spent in the military (less than 2 years, 2-4 years, more than 4 years, not sure how long) and separate them from respondents who indicated they spent no time in the military. A brief analysis of this data at Table 1 shows that 35.8% of men report spending time in the military, a number significantly higher than those who do not support women in politics, leading to an early conclusion that my hypothesis regarding “military men” and their support for women in politics may at best be weak.

Finally, I combine data regarding marital status, sex of children, and relationship to children into one nominal variable. I do this by recoding data among the variables measuring the respondent’s marital status (MARITAL), the gender of his children (KDSEX1-KDSEX9), and his relationship to those children (KDREL1-KDREL9). The new variable measures nominally whether a man is both married and has a biological daughter (MARKID). A frequency analysis reveals that 18.1% of men are married and have a biological daughter; interesting since, as noted earlier, the proportion of men *lacking* support for politically active women is a remarkably similar 18.5%. Whether this will prove relevant or not remains to be seen, but it is nonetheless intriguing.

To compare my hypotheses against others, I will also test male support for women in politics as it relates to age, race, and political ideology, using the variables AGE, RACE, and POLVIEWS (as indicated on a 7 point scale, “very liberal” to “very conservative”). Brief analysis of these variables at Table 1 indicates the mean age of

male respondents to be 44.87 years and the median age to be 42 years. Additionally, race was consistent with generally expected values, with 84.4% of male respondents identifying themselves as white, 11.4% as black, and 4.2% as other. Finally, identification of political ideology fell into a roughly normal curve, with the mode and median both being 4 (“moderate,”) and a slightly higher mean of 4.34.

In order to test these hypotheses, I will use LOGIT regression analysis. With regards to the RACE variable, I will classify it as a categorical variable within the regression software in order to analyze the impact of each response category (white, black, and other). Running the calculation in a stepwise fashion, I will examine the Wald statistic for a significance level of less than .05 and examine which order the variables break out in to determine the individual significance of each variable as well as its contribution to the final, overall equation. Those variables that are listed first in the output will have the strongest impact on the final model. Additionally, I will check both the Cox & Snell and Nagelkerke R^2 values of statistically significant variables to determine how much change in the dependent variable a change in the independent variable accounts for. Finally, the significance of the chi-square will indicate how much value the overall equation has for predicting change in the dependent variable.

Ta-Da!

After running the logistic regression analysis, I obtained the results in Table 2.

Table 2 – LOGIT Results (.05 significance accepted)

Variable	Wald Statistic	Significance
MAEDUC	3.678	.055
YESNOVET	.256	.613
MARKID	2.005	.157
AGE	2.778	.096
RACE	2.231	.328
RACE (1)	1.573	.210
RACE (2)	.268	.605
POLVIEWS	1.103	.294

As shown, none of the independent variables had a significant Wald statistic. The closest, mother’s education level, was still .005 above the accepted .05 level. Frustrated by the lack of significance among any of the tested variables, I decided to rerun the regression accepting a .10 significance. This resulted in the data reported in Table 3.

Table 3 – LOGIT Results (.10 significance accepted)

Variable	Wald Statistic	Significance	Cox & Snell R²	Nagelkerke R²
MAEDUC	3.558	.059	.019	.032
YESNOVET	.138	.710		
MARKID	1.127	.288		
AGE	1.254	.263		
RACE	1.407	.495		
RACE (1)	1.123	.289		
RACE (2)	.253	.615		
POLVIEWS	1.221	.269		

Under these conditions, mother’s education level qualifies as significant. The Cox & Snell and Nagelkerke R² values indicate that somewhere between 1.9% and 3.2% of a man’s attitude toward politically active women is determined by his mother’s education level. In this model, the significance level of the chi-square was .062. While this is not acceptable under the standard convention of .05, it is significant at a .10 level. I decided to accept this, applying the same standard to my independent variables as to the overall

equation. The established significance of the chi-square indicates that as one of my independent variables is significant (although not strongly predictive), so too is the model of the entire equation.

In general, only by expanding my accepted possibility of error beyond convention was I able to find support for any of my hypotheses. I am, however, confident that mother's education level does have some bearing on male support for politically active women, in part because the initial significance level of .055 is only slightly above the conventionally accepted standard of .05. However, the second analysis (containing R^2 values) shows that while a woman's education level may indeed impact her son's feelings towards politically engaged women, it does so only to a minimal degree, accounting for merely 1.9% to 3.2% of those attitudes. While I wanted very much to find support for my political psychology "theories of learning" hypotheses, I am surprised that age did not play a role in determining support for politically active women. This seems to indicate that the "women's liberation movement," of which acceptance of women in the political arena was a major goal, has been internalized and accepted across various generations without regard to age or the political ideology.

So Now What?

The results of my data analysis indicate that my hypotheses were incorrect. Only by extending my acceptable rate of error beyond the conventional level was I able to substantiate whatsoever any hypothesis. However, using a .10 significance rate allowed me to show that a woman's education level does indeed have an impact on her son's likelihood to approve of politically active women. While the amount of that impact is, albeit, small, it is significant nonetheless and provides opportunity for further study.

What we are left with after this study is a question that still has not been satisfactorily answered. Discovering why some men are more supportive of politically engaged women than others is an important quest worthy of continued research. While many demographic variables, most notably religion, religiosity, and occupation, could well provide the answer, there remains plenty of opportunity within the field of political psychology for additional hypothesizing, in part because this area of study has the potential to fill a large gap in paradigms of American politics. Following the erosion of behavioralism within the field of political science in general, rational choice emerged as the dominant framework from which to study American politics. It countered the behaviorist notion that the state does not exist, showing clearly that institutions and the mathematical model of political actors do help to explain political behavior. However, what rational choice fails to recognize is that political actors are human beings who, while acting within a given set of institutions, are still beholden to their humanity. The men and women responsible for making decisions are people like everyone else – they have hearts, brains, and souls that may lead them to make choices that appear irrational when viewed from a purely economic perspective. Political psychology can help to explain this behavior by examining alternative decision determinants, while still acknowledging that those decisions are made within the confines of an institutional framework. With regard to the specific topic of this study: although extended and/or alternate theories of learning could be explored (e.g., does a highly educated man model support for politically active women to his sons?), so too could theories of personality; histories of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse; and understandings of power and authority.

While it is clear that not much of a relationship exists between my dependent variable and tested independent variables, it is important to note that many of my results can perhaps be linked to problems with the data used. For example, the creation of such specific variables as a man's marital and parental status, which combines three different dichotomous variables, leads to a very small sample of men who actually fulfill all three requirements to be labeled positively on that variable (marital status, parental status, relationship to child). This sample size makes it much more difficult to draw meaningful relationships among and establish valid conclusions about the data.

It is a well-established tradition in the scholastic community that negative results are still results. Therefore, although my hypotheses by and large failed to hold up under empirical testing, they provide valuable information nonetheless. Knowing that men of certain backgrounds (highly educated mothers, married with daughters, and military experience) are no less likely to support or not support politically active women allows groups interested in the political success of women to focus their efforts elsewhere. In addition, the idea that none of the demographic variables were related to approval of women in the political arena seems to indicate that the "women's movement" has taken hold across the population, independent of age, race, or political ideology. This suggests a need to investigate other potential sources of attitudes against women in politics, and serves to disarm those who would claim that certain groups (e.g. conservatives, white males) are "sexist."

Ultimately, although this paper did not really help to determine what *does* contribute to a man's animosity towards women in politics, it does establish several factors that do *not*. This will remain useful and important information as later scholars

seek to advance the cause of politically active women, particularly from the political psychology paradigm.

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