Girls Just Want to Run: How Campaign Coverage Impacts Political Ambition

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ABSTRACT

Despite their recent success in elections, women continue to lack a presence in Congress. Previous studies demonstrate that stereotypical language in campaign coverage and differences in political ambition for men and women may account for this disparity. These findings establish this study's central inquiry: To what extent is stereotype activation in campaign coverage for U.S. Congressional races related to young adults' political ambitions? To assess the correlation, a two-part experimental survey was used to gauge levels of political ambition for male and female students at a Texas public high school. It was concluded that stereotypical language in campaign coverage does not possess a significant impact on political ambition.

Introduction

The reign of Queen Elizabeth I was considered the Golden Age of England. However, despite the nation's prosperity, the queen regularly faced scrutiny from renowned religious leaders who claimed it was absurd for a woman to possess such a title (Briscoe, "BBC - History - Elizabeth I: An Overview"). These sentiments were not a result of a new phenomenon and can be explained by a concept termed "stereotype activation". According to earlier studies on stereotype activation theory, some stereotypes may get "over-learned" as a result of their societal prevalence and become immediately activated whenever someone comes into contact with members of a stereotyped group (Radvansky et al., 2009). In recent years, researchers have started to examine this concept in the context of gender roles and leadership.

Despite women's recent success in congressional elections, gender disparities in the United States Congress persist. In fact, as of 2023, women make up roughly 29% of the House and 25% of the Senate (Leppert and DeSilver, 2023). Previous studies attempted to determine whether this occurrence is related to stereotype activation theory and concluded that media coverage of congressional races may play a role in perpetuating gender stereotypes (Bauer). Various researchers assert that feminine stereotypical traits (i.e. warm, nurturing, and sensitive) have the potential to harm a candidate's electoral prospects (Corbett et al., 2022; Bauer, 2015; Burns et. al, 2022; Schneider, 2016). This is typically contextualized by the concept of traditional gender roles, which imply masculine stereotypical traits (i.e. outspoken, decisive, and assertive) are more likely to be associated with leadership (Fisk and Overton, 2019). This research will continue to assess the relationship between media coverage and voters' perceptions of female candidates in congressional elections in the United States. A synthesis of social psychology and political science will be used to explain how specific concepts, such as stereotype activation interact with voter sentiments.

Existing research provides a range of observations regarding the use of stereotypical descriptions in media coverage and women's success in political elections. These studies, however, pay little attention to the supply side of the issue. Scholarship has shown that women have less political ambition or desire to pursue a political career than men (Schneider et al., 2016). This study will attempt to fill the gap by investigating whether there is a correlation between stereotypical depictions in the media and young adults' beliefs about their leadership abilities. In the United States, media coverage on cable and other local networks has become Americans' primary news source (Mitchell et al., 2016). Thus, it is essential to determine whether the depiction of male and female representatives has an impact

on young adults' desire to fulfill leadership roles. Hopefully, these findings will assist in motivating media organizations to value gender equity and encourage the career advancements of women in leadership. Furthermore, the findings of this study can be applied to promoting gender equity in the media in other male-dominated fields, such as business and STEM.

Literature Review

Multiple peer-reviewed studies have been analyzed to ensure the credibility of each source. Keywords used while researching include gender stereotypes, U.S. Congressional elections, stereotype activation, and mass media.

Female Candidates Lack Voter Support

Researchers indicate that female politicians are often less favored than their male counterparts because voters believe there are "practical barriers" to becoming successful political leaders. Once again, stereotype activation theory is used in this context to demonstrate how the association between female candidates and feminine stereotypes may hinder success.

A study conducted by the sociology department at New York University sought to demonstrate that pragmatic bias, defined as "withholding support for a member of a group because one believes success for members of that group is difficult to achieve," influences women's electoral prospects. In the context of the 2020 Democratic Party presidential primary, a survey of 2,052 U.S. registered voters was conducted to identify several dimensions of pragmatic bias that voters say influence women's perceived electability. The participants gave their opinions on a variety of categories including biased media coverage. According to the results, female candidates were consistently more likely to be perceived as less favorable to their male counterparts. The researchers accredited these findings with gender biases in the culture as a whole, such as higher standards for candidates to prove themselves (94%), biased media coverage (77%), and harsher (87%) and more effective (79%) criticisms by political opponents (Corbett et.al).

Stereotypes in Media Coverage Impact Voter Evaluation

To further analyze the biased media component, researchers also examine how campaign coverage plays a role in shaping voter perceptions of candidates. A study conducted by political science professors at the University of Utah investigates the impact of gender stereotypical information on voters' assessments of former Alaskan governor Sarah Palin. The study aimed to demonstrate that the media can encourage stereotypical action by describing a candidate with traditional gender roles. A sample of registered voters in Los Angeles was given news articles and then asked a series of questions to determine whether they associated Palin with masculine or feminine stereotypes based on the report. The study included four articles. The first two were on the feminine side, "Palin as a Mother" and "Palin on Social Issues," and the last two were on the masculine side, "Palin as an Executive" and "Palin as an Attacker." The findings show that the voters overwhelmingly associated Palin with feminine stereotypes in the articles that aligned with traditional female gender roles (Burns et. al, 2022).

Some scholars suggest that traditional female gender roles may benefit female candidates in particular circumstances. Compared to male candidates, female candidates are seen as more sincere, less aggressive, and better suited to manage "compassionate issues." (Sapiro, 1981). Although this statement is valid, this theory neglects gender socialization (i.e. providing boys and girls with distinct experiences and valuing certain behaviors over others). This is an important concept to address because it implies that trait associations influence society's evaluations of roles best suited for a specific gender. Nicole M. Bauer, Associate Professor of Political Communication at Louisiana State University investigates how voters rely on gender stereotypes when evaluating a candidate's leadership abilities. She assumes that feminine stereotypes such as "affectionate, kind, helpful, and sympathetic" imply that women are better

suited for communal roles, such as caregivers (Bauer, 2015). Conversely, men are thought to be the best fit for agentic roles, which are defined by dominance and aggression and imply being an economic provider or leader. The study included the distribution of two fake news articles about a male and female Senate candidate. The first article used stereotypical feminine phrasing to describe both candidates, such as "warm, nurturing, and sensitive," whereas the second did not. When the two articles were compared, the results showed that the feminine stereotype version decreased support for both candidates but had a greater impact on the female candidate.

Disparities in Political Ambition

Researchers have also discovered that women are more likely to be discouraged by how politics and politicians are portrayed, thus, reducing their desire to run for political office. According to a team of political science professors from Miami University, "masculinized ethos," or whether a profession is perceived as favoring male aims over female ones, is prevalent in politics (Schneider et al., 2016). They assert that the culture of politics is often associated with "power-related goals," such as handling conflict and self-promotion. This is significant since women have historically been socialized to pursue "community goals" like helping others and furthering mankind. Thus, the traditional division of labor plays a part in women feeling excluded from the political sphere. To test these presumptions, political professors at the University of Virginia surveyed a sample of 4,000 college and high school students to analyze the relationship between traditional gender roles and the students' desires to pursue a political career. Male students rated themselves as 50% more qualified to serve as mayor and more than three times as likely to run for president. Female students, on the other hand, were more likely to indicate their qualifications to become secretaries and teachers. Furthermore, Kent State University psychology professors expand on this by proposing a concept called "costly failure" to explain why women are often less enthusiastic about running for office. They imply that women are often viewed as "outsiders" in politics because traditional feminine roles contrast the power-related goals associated with politics. Thus, they are more vulnerable to scrutiny during campaigns. The pre-existing research has concluded that women are less likely to pursue a political career because they have been conditioned to believe that feminine characteristics are incompatible with the tasks of a leader.

Summary

Several studies have shown that stereotype activation is encouraged by the media. Additionally, these studies suggest that the activation of feminine stereotypes can harm women's electoral prospects (e.g. Corbett et. al, 2022; Bauer, 2015; Burns et. al, 2022; Schneider, 2016; FOX & LAWLESS, 2014; Fisk and Overton, 2019). Due to gender socialization, a negative association between feminine roles and leadership currently exists.

While it has been determined that the media plays a role in stereotype activation, these studies neglect to consider whether this phenomenon influences the disparities in the political ambitions of young adults. To connect the existing research and account for the gap, this study will assess the relationship between stereotypical information in campaign coverage and Cinco Ranch High School students' beliefs about their leadership qualifications.

Methods

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between stereotype activation and students from a Texas public high school's political ambition. The research was intentionally designed to address the following research question: *To what extent is stereotype activation in campaign coverage for U.S. Congressional races related to young adults' political ambitions?* The goal is to determine whether the media's perpetuation of traditional gender roles negatively impacts young women's political ambitions.

To evaluate this inquiry, a two-part experimental survey study was conducted. By using an experimental survey, it will be possible to evaluate relationships between the manipulated variables; thus, providing more conclusive findings about the hypothesis than correlational research. According to the literature review, previous studies have used experimental surveys to corroborate the existence of stereotype activation. There is, however, no evidence that those findings have been extended to show how stereotype activation is related to political ambition. Therefore, this study will also include a survey to evaluate pre-existing political ambition and students' sentiments toward gender roles and leadership. The multiphase component of this study is significant because it will help reveal new insights about the connection between gender stereotypes and political ambition that would not have been revealed if only one method (e.g., an experimental survey) had been used.

Subjects

The subjects who participated in the experimental surveys were students from an AP Seminar and Peer Assistance Leadership class in a Texas public high school. This demographic was selected concerning the age group. Political ambition can be effectively measured since high school juniors and seniors are typically contemplating future pursuits and/or have already had the opportunity to participate in student leadership organizations. Additionally, the use of these students proved to be an accessible and representative sample since the instructor was willing to allow participation. The classes also consist of students with varying interests and genders. The combination of these components assists the generalizability of this study to juniors and seniors in public schools across Texas.

Experimental Surveys

The initial survey was based on the methods used by Bauer (2015) with a few modifications. The goal of this survey is to examine the effects of stereotype activation. In particular, how feminine traits influence public views of leadership qualities. Unlike the original model, partisanship was not considered in the modified approach because most participants are not eligible to belong to a political party. Thus, the 2 x 2 design only includes Wave 2 and excludes party identification (Figure 2). Using the factorial design, stereotypes or no stereotypes were controlled for candidate gender.

Wave 2 was applied to four fake news articles regarding a male and female candidate for the U.S. Congress. Because previous research has shown that media coverage has a significant impact on shaping voter evaluations of candidates, a simulated news article was significant (Fridkin and Kenney, 2011). The articles were divided into two conditions. The first was the neutral condition, where each candidate's article described them without using feminine traits. The second was the stereotyped condition, where each candidate's article described them with feminine traits. The stimuli used trait connection to influence stereotypes (see *Appendix A*). In the stereotyped condition, congressional candidates Sue Foster and Tom Larson are characterized as "nurturing" and "compassionate." The stimuli described a campaign stop the candidate made at an elementary school where they interacted with parents. A similar article was given to the non-stereotype group, but it didn't mention any feminine traits.

Wave 1	Wave 2	
Democrat Male and Democrat Female	Democrat	Republican
Republican Male and Republican Female	Stereotyped Male	Stereotyped Male
	Stereotyped Female	Stereotyped Female
	Neutral Male	Neutral Male
	Neutral Female	Neutral Female

Figure 1: 2 x 2 Factorial Design Bauer (2015).

Measures

I measure stereotype activation using a scale by Rudman et al. (2001) that evaluates implicit stereotyping "along the dimensions of power and warmth." This is significant because this survey aims to evaluate how participants view each candidate in a position of power. Additionally, this method examines "the automatic associations thought to support underlying prejudices," (Rudman et al, 2001). Therefore, it is a suitable gauge of baseline stereotype activation. Common methods of measuring stereotype activation can include asking an individual which gender is more likely to perform a certain action. The goal of this study, however, is not to evaluate assumptions about women generally but to look at how they affect voter impressions when the candidate is associated with feminine traits. To assess a candidate's authority and/or power, the questionnaire asked participants to rate candidates on a scale of 1 to 4, with the following response options: (1) strong-dominant, (2) harsh-hard, (3) soft-lenient, and (4) weak-submissive. For this test, I compare stereotype activation levels between each condition. I hypothesize that candidates in the stereotyped condition will receive higher stereotype activation ratings due to the contrast between feminine traits and power-related goals. Thus, the candidates in this condition will be associated with greater values on the activation scale (i.e. e. (3) soft-lenient, and (4) weak-submissive.) to insulate weaker leadership abilities.

Questionnaire

While the first component of the study intends to prove that stereotype activation occurs when feminine traits are applied, the second survey examines how stereotype activation is translated into Cinco Ranch High School students' beliefs about their leadership abilities. I hypothesize that the association between feminine traits and weaker leadership abilities will decrease the political ambition of female Cinco Ranch High School students. The questionnaire followed the framework of FOX and LAWLESS (2014). Minor modifications were implemented to accommodate the time constraints imposed by the class period during which surveys were distributed (e.g. reducing extensive lists). Figure 3 depicts the questionnaire; the left side shows the questions and the criteria for scoring each point; the right side depicts the response options. The 4-point scoring system devised by FOX and LAWLESS set the scoring criteria (2014). The range shows the score associated with each possible answer to that question (see Figure 3). For instance, questions in a range of 0,1 had only two possible answers: "no" and "yes" The respondent has to select "yes" to receive a 1. 1-4 or 1-5 ranges denote lists (see Appendix C for response choices). Greater values (i.e.≥2 and ≥3) signify political ambition since they imply that respondents credit themselves with more competitive/leadership attributes. These questions were crucial in providing context for any prior indications of political ambition in students. Particularly, if there are any discernable differences between male and female students. The first range of questions gauged whether the students had participated in any competitive experiences. According to previous studies, engaging in sports promotes self-control, self-assurance, motivation, and self-esteem, all of which are connected to political acumen (Ghildiyal). Self-confidence is evaluated to investigate whether candidates perceive that they possess the necessary skills to assume a position of power. As discussed in the literature review, women are traditionally socialized to pursue community goals; thus, this suggestion demonstrates that certain assertive and confident traits associated with political skills may be undesirable for women to possess.

The survey's final section included supplemental questions (see *Appendix C* for supplemental questions; see *Appendix D* for justifications). These questions aim to address the current gap in the research regarding the role of stereotype activation in campaign coverage of political ambition. They intend to examine how Cinco Ranch High School students currently feel about campaign coverage between male and female candidates. Their sentiments are analyzed in the context of the two previous surveys to conclude the campaign coverage's impact. The questions were thoroughly reviewed and approved by the Individual Review Board (IRB). Vagias, Wade M.'s Likert scales were used to generate the response options (2006).

Questions	Criteria	Range
Competitive Experiences Explanation		
Have you run for student government?	1	0,1
Have you participated in debate or mock trial?	1	0,1
Have you fulfilled the role of a team/ club officer?	1	0,1
Have you played on a competitive sports team?	2 ≤	1,4
Self Confidence Explanation		
Indicate the traits that you would apply to yourself	2 ≤	1,4
Indicate the descriptions that you would apply to yourself	3 ≤	1,5

Figure 2: Questionnaire Framework.

Procedures

After the consideration of potential subjects, an email was sent to the AP Seminar/ Peer Assistance Leadership instructor detailing the purpose of the study. The students were provided with a consent form to confirm their participation. Upon agreement, students were provided with a QR code from their instructor to take the questionnaire.

Two class periods of approximately 30 students (i.e. one AP Seminar class and one Peer Assistance Leadership class) were given the experimental surveys and the questionnaire. Experimental surveys were distributed regarding Wave 2. That is, half of the students in each class period received a QR code that corresponded to the neutral and stereotyped condition. To ensure confidentiality, participants were instructed to include their first and last initials so that their names would not be disclosed.

Limitations

After completing the consent forms, the majority of the AP Seminar and Peer Assistance Leadership Students neglected to complete the final survey. As a result, the survey was completed by a total of 4 participants. Because of the extremely small sample size, it is difficult to determine if the outcome of stereotype activation ratings or political ambition is a true finding. For instance, it is possible to incorrectly assume that stereotype activation ratings between the neutral and stereotyped are the same when there is a difference between the groups. Additionally, the students who decided to complete the survey may have had a greater inclination to do so because they had prior knowledge about the topic of gender disparities in Congress. This risks the potential for bias in the responses.
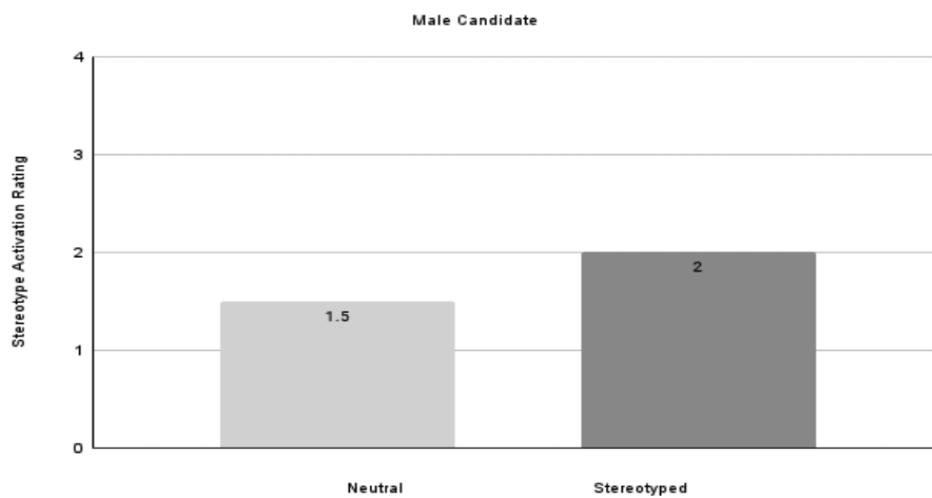
Results

Experimental Survey

The experimental survey hypothesizes that voters will associate stereotyped candidates with higher values (e.g. (3) soft-lenient, and (4) weak-submissive) on the stereotype activation scale i.e.e (1) strong-dominant, (2) harsh-hard, (3) soft-lenient, and (4) weak-submissive); thus, indicating weaker leadership characteristics. For this test, I compare stereotype activation levels between the neutral and stereotyped conditions for the male and female candidates. To assess the data for reliability or internal consistency between scales, I use Cronbach's alpha to confirm the amount of covariance between the stereotyped scales. For reference, a higher level of covariance between items indicates a credible instrument (i.e. values closer to 1). The female candidate $\alpha= 0.9412$ and the male candidate $\alpha= 0.9412$.

Whether the stereotype activation rating increases between neutral and stereotyped conditions is critical for the hypothesis. Proving this theory will suggest that feminine stereotypes may negatively impact the perception of a candidate's leadership capabilities. However, because of the small sample size, the data had a nonnormal distribution, indicating that a Wilcoxon Test was required rather than a standard t-test. This is a comparative statistical test between two paired groups. In essence, the test computes the difference between groups of pairings and examines this difference to determine whether it is statistically significant. Figure 4 depicts the mean stereotype activation rating between each condition for both genders. Both genders demonstrate the same increase in stereotype activation level from an average rating of 1.5 to 2 from the neutral to stereotyped condition. The test yielded a P-value of 1, so the increase between conditions is not significant at p≤ 0.05. Therefore, regardless of descriptive language or gender, the overall conclusion of this table is that stereotype activation does not increase in the presence of feminine traits.
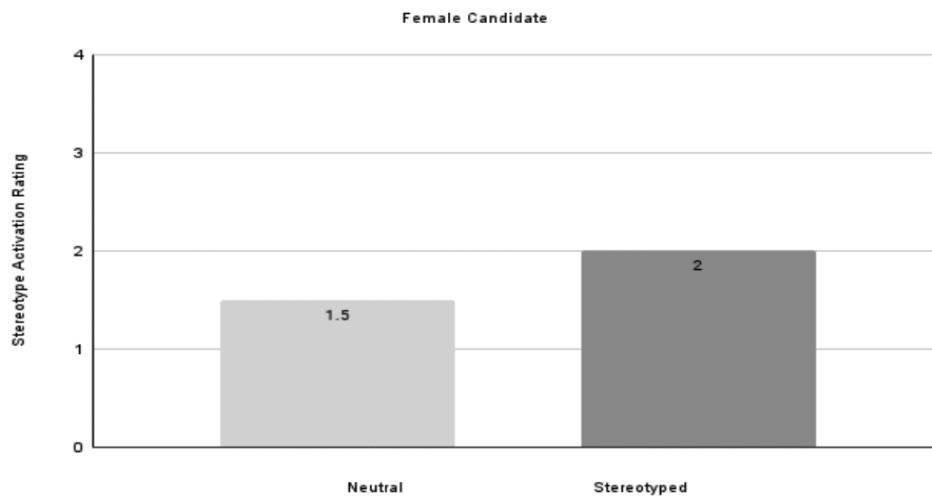
A

B

Figure 3: Wave 1 and Wave 2 Results.

Questionnaire

The second questionnaire hypothesizes that female students will demonstrate less political ambition than male students due to the negative association between feminine traits and leadership abilities. Table 1 depicts the frequency and percentage of criteria met to indicate political ambition for each question. The scoring criteria were determined by the 4-point scale established by FOX and LAWLESS (2014). The range depicts a score that corresponds to a particular response for that question (see *Figure 3*). For instance, the questions with a range of 0,1 were close-ended, with "yes" and "no" answer choices. To score a 1, the respondent must have selected "yes". A range of 1-4 or 1-5 indicates a list (see *Appendix C* for response choices). Political ambition is indicated by greater values since this suggests that respondents attribute more competitive/leadership traits to themselves. Thus, the criteria to demonstrate political ambition must encompass 50%≤ of the response options. Table 1 indicates the number and percentage of individuals that met the criteria for political ambition between high school girls and high school boys. The table illustrates that male AP Seminar students demonstrate a higher frequency of political ambition. The main factors that met the criteria were playing on a competitive sports team(100%) and indicating traits of self-confidence (100%). The main factors that did not meet the criteria were running for student government (25%) and fulfilling the role of a team/club officer (25%).

Questions	Range	High School Boys	High School Girls
Competitive Experiences Explanation		Met Criteria Frequency (%)	Met Criteria Frequency (%)
Have you run for student government?	0,1	1 (50)	0(0)
Have you participated in debate or mock trial?	0,1	1 (50)	1(50)
Have you fulfilled the role of a team/ club officer?	0,1	1(50)	0(0)
Have you played on a competitive sports team?	1,4	2(100)	2(100)
Self Confidence Explanation			
Indicate the traits that you would apply to yourself	1,4	2(100)	2(100)
Indicate the descriptions that you would apply to yourself	1,5	1(50)	1(50)
N		2	2

Figure 4: Gender Disparities in Politically Socializing Forces (Frequency and Percentage Criteria Met).
Note. Total Frequency of High School Boy Responses That Met the Criteria= 8, Total Frequency of High School Girl Responses That Met the Criteria= 6.
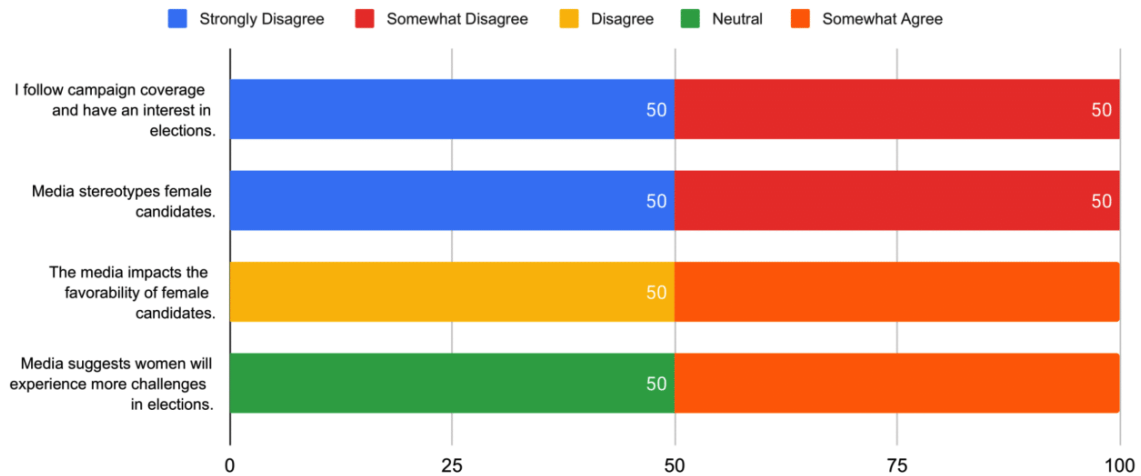
Supplemental Questions

The supplemental questions aimed to connect stereotype activation and differences in political ambition to suggest that campaign coverage can decrease the political ambitions of female students. Tables 2 and 3 depict the Likert scale analysis responses from the male and female participants. The tables present the overall finding that all of the participants do not follow campaign coverage closely. This presents a limitation to the study since the purpose is to analyze how young men's and women's political ambition is impacted by campaign coverage. However, male students were more likely to disagree with the statement "Media applies traditional stereotypes to female candidates". Additionally, female students demonstrated a greater likelihood of indicating that the media negatively impacts the favorability of female candidates.
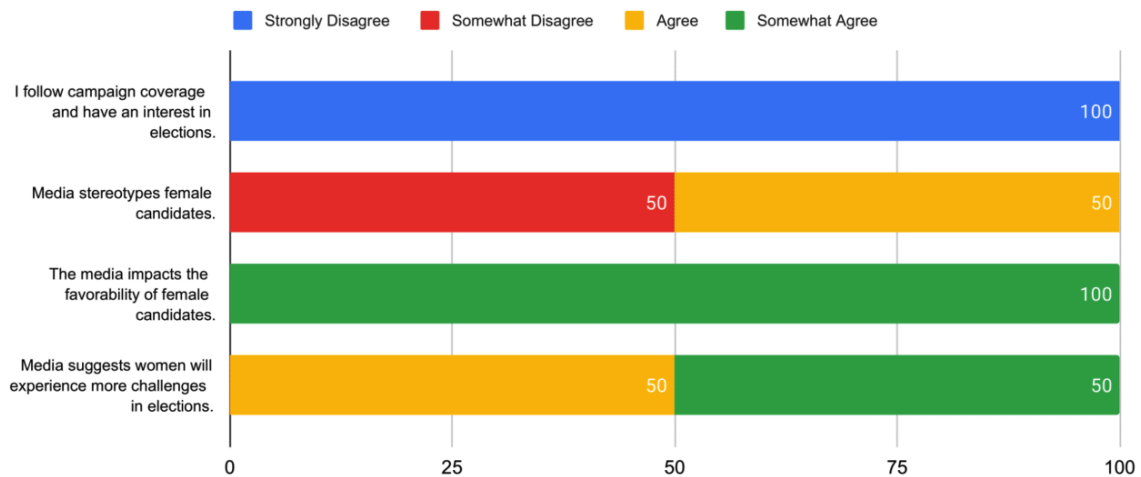
A

High School Boys

B

High School Girls

Figure 5: Supplemental Questions for Political Ambition.

Discussion

This study intended to examine the extent to which gender stereotypes in campaign coverage of U.S. congressional elections impact the political ambitions of Cinco Ranch High School AP Seminar and Peer Assistance Leadership Students.

The results demonstrate that stereotype activation is not impacted by feminine stereotypes. As demonstrated in Figure 4, both candidates increased from a stereotype activation rating of 1.5 to a 2, which yielded a statistically insignificant p-value of 1. This fails to align with the Bauer (2015) study, in which adult participants (i.e. ages 18 to 65+) indicated a significant increase in ratings for the male and female candidates at a p-value≤ 0.001. Once again,

this result can likely be attributed to the small sample size used in this study. However, suggestive conclusions can be established. It is worth noting that this study was conducted primarily among 17 to 18-year-old students rather than adults. This could suggest that younger age groups are less likely to associate feminine traits with weaker leadership characteristics. Stereotype activation in campaign coverage may not have as great of an impact on these students. Additionally, these results may indicate that contemporary gender socialization may present less distinction between feminine and masculine roles. Therefore, the students view an individual with feminine traits as equally capable of fulfilling a particular role like leadership.

When triangulating the data, the perception of evolving gender roles was reinforced in politically socializing forces for male and female AP Seminar students. Table 1 depicts that female students demonstrate the same frequency of traits on the Political Traits Index as male students. This conveys that female students qualified themselves with the same number of leadership traits as male students. In light of the association between women and communal roles, this could invalidate the notion that young women feel like "political outsiders" (Fisk and Overton). The significance of data triangulation in the context of this study is confirmed as it helps to illustrate the relationship between low stereotype activation ratings and limited disparities between how the students qualified themselves as leaders. If this study incorporated a singular method (e.g. the experimental survey), the significance of this association may not have been revealed.

This association was demonstrated by the supplemental questions as well. It is important to mention that each of the students answered that they "Strongly disagree" or "Somewhat disagree" with the statement "I follow campaign coverage closely and have an interest in elections." This presents a significant limitation to the study since the purpose was to analyze how campaign coverage impacts students at a Texas public high school's political ambition. However, the method of campaign coverage in this study aligns with traditional media consumption (i.e. television, and journals). The increasing influence of social media in political elections may offer more nuance to this finding. According to a 2022 study by the Pew Research Center, 97% of teens report using the internet/social media daily (Vogels et. al). An additional study by the organization found that 66% of social media users use the platforms to post their opinions on societal and political topics (Rainie). These findings suggest that although teenagers may not engage with traditional campaign coverage, they could still be exposed via social media. Three out of the four students (i.e. 2 males, 1 female) answered "Strongly disagree" to "Somewhat disagree" to the statement "Media applies traditional feminine attributes to female candidates". Once again, this connects to the experimental survey since students did not associate the application of feminine traits with weaker leadership. Additionally, it strengthens the findings questionnaire as female students did not seem to indicate that their gender impacted how they qualified for their leadership capabilities. When examined together, it appears that the presence of feminine traits does not necessarily impact how the student views a leader's potential.

Further analysis of gender disparities in politically socializing forces revealed that male students possess a higher frequency of met criteria to suggest political ambition. The only difference between the male and female groups was that the males demonstrated a frequency of 1 in two of the Competitive Experience Explanation categories (i.e. running for student government and serving as club officer), whereas the females demonstrated a frequency of 0 in the same categories. This aligns with the FOX and LAWLESS (2014) study which demonstrated that high school and college male participants tended to gravitate more towards competitive experiences. However, this could be explained by a failure to obtain information about the participants' extracurricular activities. For instance, the decision to campaign and serve as a student government/club officer may be impacted by the student's role on a sports team or course rigor.

This study assessed multiple gaps in the previous research. Previous studies have used adult participants to test stereotype activation. This study provides the youth perspective by selecting AP Seminar and Peer Assistance Leadership students as the subjects. The most significant gap assessed was the extent to which stereotypes in campaign coverage demonstrate a relationship with the political ambitions of young adults. The pre-existing research demonstrates that stereotype activation and political ambition are studied as individual variables to explain gender disparities in Congress (Bauer, FOX & LAWLESS, Fisk and Overton). To examine these variables with a holistic approach, this

study evaluates the relationship between stereotype activation and political ambition in the context of campaign coverage. The impact of gender roles on political ambition was used as the explanatory variable. This relationship supported the study's framework.

Conclusion

The pre-existing research indicates that female congressional candidates may be inhibited by the negative association between feminine traits and leadership capabilities. Though the results of this study are minimal and must be regarded as inconclusive, it is important to recognize the disparities presented between the adult and adolescent samples. The addition of supplemental questions, as well as data triangulation, begin to explain why subjects did not associate feminine traits and/or roles with weaker leadership abilities.

The possibility that the younger generation's perception of gender roles is evolving raises new questions about how the nation's youth formed their beliefs about the capabilities of men and women. By examining societal factors that challenge gender norms, we can begin to understand how to teach the next generation to appreciate and recognize an individual's abilities regardless of gender. Additionally, researchers cite "the presence of highly visible female politicians" as an essential way to empower young women to lead (Campbell and Wolbrecht, 2006). Therefore, this study can also emphasize the importance of taking personal action to continue to achieve gender equality. As social media continues to gain prominence as a source of information, it may be especially beneficial to examine this topic in this context. Because campaign coverage is distributed across the country, future researchers should also look to expand the subject pool to account for young adults in all 50 states. Additionally, researchers could examine differences in congressional campaign coverage between each state and compare levels of political ambition.

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