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Stronger together: political ambition and the presentation of women running for office

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ABSTRACT

Does the presence of women candidates encourage other women to run for office? The extant literature is unclear on the question, with some studies pointing to evidence in the affirmative, but others indicating these effects may be null. We draw on the literature on role model effects in psychology to argue that an individual's feelings about a particular candidate may affect whether or not that candidate is actually able to inspire that individual to run herself. Using campaign ads from Hillary Clinton's 2016 campaign for the U.S. presidency, we find evidence that observing Clinton running for office does indeed increase the political ambition of some of her women supporters. At the same time, though, observing her run actually decreases ambition in other women. This effect is much greater than the effect of the context of the political ad, which does not seem to have a significant effect on women's political ambition. Furthermore, because observing Clinton also decreases the ambition of her male supporters, the effect of her campaign may be to shrink the size of the political ambition gender gap.

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How do we convince more women to run for office? The answer to this question is important because we know that the salutary effects of increased women's representation are myriad. The presence of women candidates tends to increase women's – and often men's – levels of political engagement (Atkeson 2003), knowledge (Fridkin and Kenney 2014), activism (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006), willingness to discuss politics (Hansen 1997), and positivity about the political process (Karp and Banducci 2008). And although asking women to run tends to help narrow the political ambition gap (Lawless and Fox 2005; Fox and Lawless 2010), few political elites actually solicit women to run for office (Fox and Lawless 2010). That said, the presence of women candidates may beget more women candidates if being exposed to women leaders increases women's own political ambition; there may be a role model effect. In fact, much of the extant literature (Beaman et al. 2009; Gilardi 2015) indicates that this is true. Yet other studies indicate that this is a null finding. Why might some studies show evidence of a role model effect, whereas others do not?

In this paper, we argue that these conflicting results exist in the literature because researchers have not yet considered the important effects of a target's feelings about a *particular* candidate in how that target might react to that prospective politician's candidacy. Perhaps observing a woman candidate running encourages others to enter politics, *but only if the target already has warm feelings toward that candidate and that candidate's portrayal on the campaign trail*. Extant research on the effect of candidates' entry on women's political ambition cannot answer this question because it relies either on fictional candidates, for whom subjects have no real feelings either way, or a great many candidates, when feelings about particular candidates may or may not "wash out" and appear to be a null result. And although we know that candidate "likeability" matters in terms of how voters feel about voting for a candidate (Redlawsk and Lau 2006; Baum 2005) and that women candidates care about their "likeability" and endeavor to increase it (Hayes and Lawless 2016), we know of no other study tying how voters feel about a candidate to how that candidate might affect their willingness to engage in future political activity, including running for office.

This question has been heretofore impossible to study because previous studies (e.g., Rosenwasser and Seale (1988)) have relied on hypothetical candidates with traits experimenters can manipulate. And although it is true that fictional characters *can* act as role models, that phenomenon tends to rely on recurring characters, like those in a serialized television program, which allows viewers to assess similarities and differences between the character's personality and their own (e.g., Hoffner and Cantor (1991)). Our study, then, represents the first exploration into how warmth observers feel toward a particular candidate – and the presentation of that candidate – tie into how effective that candidate might be in encouraging others to run. We are able to do this because we assess the effects of the candidacy of one particular woman who is both well-known and politically polarizing – Hillary Clinton. Of course, focusing on a real candidate introduces a number of difficulties, the most particular of which is lack of experimental control over the real candidate's characteristics, which is why most previous studies have not done so. We have explicitly chosen to relinquish that control because doing so is the only means by which we can measure the effect of warmth toward a candidate on the political ambition of the candidate's observers.

In our study, we expose subjects to a set of real advertisements from Hillary Clinton's 2016 campaign for president. We then ask subjects about their likelihood of running for office someday. Relative to the control group who saw an unrelated video on bicycle sharing, women who already had strong feelings in support of Clinton reported as much as a 1/2 point rise in their political ambition on a 7-point scale, a result that was shared with neither men nor women who did not support Clinton. Indeed, among women who had negative feelings about Clinton, viewing one of her ads resulted in as much as a 3/4 point decrease in political ambition. Furthermore, we show evidence that at least among supporters, Clinton's run for the presidency could mitigate the gender gap in political ambition.

Our approach relies on the psychology literature on role model effects, which finds that neither all role models nor all role aspirants, are created equal. For example, the ability to perceive a heroic woman as a hero¹ is based in part on the subject's own characteristics (Calvert et al. 2001). Most notably, one must *like* a potential role model for that role model to affect the goals of a "role aspirant" (Morgenroth, Ryan, and Peters 2015). In

our context, then, a candidate may inspire political ambition in another person only if that target person already feels warmly toward the candidate. And this effect is complicated in the electoral setting because some people see those who are in competitive settings (like elections) as less warm and caring (Fiske et al. 2002), thus rendering it more difficult for subjects to muster warm feelings toward those running for office, particularly when the presentation of candidates activates gender stereotypes (Mo 2015; Krupnikov and Bauer 2014).

And indeed, it is this potential effect of warmth toward a candidate that has been missing from the extant literature on role model effects on women's political ambition. This is because much of that literature treats women role models as dichotomous: either there are women running or there are not. In the current study, though, we consider feelings about a particular candidate who is both well-known and polarizing. Of course, this necessarily reduces the generalizability of the claims we make; we do not know what is a generalizable effect of women candidates and what is the effect of Hillary Clinton, specifically. Our study, then, can be seen only as a starting point for the discussion of political ambition among women and warmth toward candidates. We will be able to discern more when parties nominate more women to the presidency, and we can use the methods described here to study the effect of warmth beyond one candidate.

At the same time, the Clinton campaign provides us with a good test of how the performance of gender affects women's political ambition because the candidate performed gender differently at different times in the campaign. At least part of the effect of role models is that they may tend to eliminate stereotype threat, the feeling that one's performance might confirm a negative stereotype about a group to which the subject is a member (Steele and Aronson 1995). For example, in one study, both women who had been told women were good at a task and women who had read about other successful women performed better on a difficult task (McIntyre, Paulson, and Lord 2003). And indeed, evidence shows that politicians can serve as positive role models, including Barack Obama as a role model for young African-Americans (Marx, Ko, and Friedman 2009) and Hillary Clinton for young women (Taylor et al. 2011). Notably, in that study, the effect of Clinton for mitigating stereotype threat is based at least partially on the view of subjects on how much Clinton "deserves" her success. And while Clinton was the first woman running for president, the performance of masculinity of her opponent, Donald Trump, was also *sui generis* (Johnson 2017), making gender a most salient issue in the 2016 election.

Drawing on these previous studies, we study how Clinton's performance of gender affects our subjects' reported levels of political ambition. If telling people that members of their group are actually good at a task (as McIntyre, Paulson, and Lord (2003) does) increases their performance, perhaps showing subjects Hillary Clinton on the campaign trail performing in more traditionally female roles might allow them to re-cast politics as a more female-friendly environment. And indeed, our design allows us to assess these effects of Clinton's performance of gender on subjects' political ambition. This is because the Clinton campaign devised a number of campaign ads that show Clinton in non-traditional campaign settings. Of course, the campaign created traditional ads that show Clinton speaking at a large rally, telling supporters that she would "fight" for them. But the campaign also designed ads that showed other sides of Clinton as well, including ads in which she listens empathetically as supporters tell her their stories and ask for her support. In this sense, then, the Clinton campaign provides us with a real

candidate whose performance of gender varies, thus allowing us to assess the effects of this performance without having to sacrifice authenticity by using actors performing as pretend politicians.

Theory

When women run for political office, they win at least as much as men do (Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994) and they are at least as effective at representing their constituents (Anzia and Berry 2011; Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013). Despite this, gender stereotypes continue to pose a serious problem for women in the voting booth (Mo 2015; Krupnikov and Bauer 2014). Much of the reason that we do not see more women representatives is because fewer women choose to run. There are myriad reasons why that is the case. Women are more conflict averse (Miller, Danaher, and Forbes 1986; Schneider et al. 2016), they are more competition averse (Croson and Gneezy 2009; Niederle and Vesterlund 2007), and women are more election averse (Kanthak and Woon 2015). We also know that women approach politics differently. They have less political efficacy than do men (Verba, Burns, and Scholzman 1997) and are more interested in communal rather than power goals (Schneider et al. 2016), for example. And although gender stereotypes on the campaign trail can play a role in the ballot box when activated (Mo 2015; Krupnikov and Bauer 2014; Bauer 2015), we know little about how those stereotypes affect those who see women candidates as potential role models.

If seeing women run for office encourages other women to run, as Beaman et al. (2009) and Gilardi (2015) find, then the effects of encouraging a woman to run are multiplicative:

Her candidacy increases not only the number of women candidates by one, but also by the number of future women candidates she inspires. And for this reason, it is important to understand the limits of the role model effect on encouraging others to run, since we know from Broockman (2014) and Carreras (2017) that the effect appears not to be absolute.

We consider two ways in which seeing a woman candidate running might affect others to run. First, we explore the effect of the gendered context in how candidates are presented. We know that women's goals tend to be more communal rather than power-related (Diekmann et al. 2010), that this result applies to the specific context of politics (Schneider et al. 2016), and that priming the competitive nature of politics tends to decrease women's political ambition (Preece and Stoddard 2015b). Furthermore, politics is still seen as a man's domain (Lawless & Fox 2005; Krook and O'Brien 2010), where metaphors of "fighting" abound, metaphors of "compromise" are rare, and the incongruity between female gender roles and leadership roles can lead to women in leadership being perceived less favorably (Eagly and Karau 2002) because women are expected to engage in more communal roles, whereas men ought to be more agentic. This dichotomy may cause voters to perceive men as inherently more capable when it comes to politics than men are (Simon and Hoyt 2008). Similarly, women candidates are generally viewed to be more competent on so-called "compassion" issues (Rosenwasser and Seale 1988), an effect that is largely down to the traits women candidates are ascribed to have (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). And indeed, we know that when particular gender stereotypes are activated during a campaign (Mo 2015; Krupnikov and Bauer 2014; Bauer 2015),

this can affect how voters assess candidates, so it stands to reason that these presentations could also affect potential candidates' subsequent ambition as well.

Second, we explore the effects of a subject's feelings about a particular candidate to assess how Morgenroth, Ryan, and Peters (2015)'s findings about how a role aspirant's response to a role model and that aspirant's feelings about the role model are intertwined. Role models, according to Lockwood (2006), indicate to potential role aspirants what is possible for members of a particular group, a "representation of the possible." In this sense, if a woman sees another woman running for office, this causes the woman to learn that running is a possible option for her. Beyond pointing out a possibility, however, role models can also make a particular activity appear to be desirable in the first place (Gauntlett 2005). In other words, observing a woman running for office may show other women that running for office is a valuable means of meeting their goals: Running for office might be a good way to affect change, for example. In this sense, then, the role model represents behaviours or attributes the role aspirant would like to emulate (Kelman 1958; Shamir, House, and Arthur 1993) and observers may alter their views of politics as a solely "man's" domain, suitable only for agentic men, not communal women (Simon and Hoyt 2008).

Hillary Clinton's historic 2016 run for the U.S. presidency provides us with a new opportunity to test both these questions in a way that has heretofore been impossible. Our design, pre-registered with the Open Science Framework, calls for each of our subjects to answer a series of questions about their political views and experiences, view one of four Clinton campaign ads or a short unrelated control video on bicycle sharing, then answer another series of questions, including a question about their likelihood of running for office in the future. By comparing the effects of the treatment ads to that of the control ad, we can discern the effects of the ads on reported future political ambition. The design thus allows us to compare women to men, supporters to non-supporters, and treatments to each other. Most studies on the effects of the gender of candidates (e.g., Huddy and Terkildsen (1993)) use vignettes of fictional candidates, which allows the researcher to manipulate the gender of the candidate to better discern the effect of gender on a candidate. We explicitly lose this bit of control over our experiment by choosing as our candidate the very real Hillary Clinton.

We do this intentionally, however, so that we can take full advantage of the fact that our subjects already have preconceived notions about Clinton before they begin our experiment. Generally, these notions would be considered a contaminant in the experimental setting, but we hope to measure those preconceived notions and estimate directly what effect they will have on ambition. Of course, when candidates are real, citizens form real preferences about them, and these preferences can inform how they react to the candidate and, in turn, how that candidate will affect their own political ambition. Preconceived notions, then, are an inextricable part of political ambition equation. Despite their importance, however, we believe we are the first researchers to add these notions explicitly into our research design, rather than to attempt to design them away.

Furthermore, using Clinton as an example allows us to address both our questions. First, because the Clinton campaign created and uploaded a series of web ads depicting the candidate in non-traditional campaign contexts, we can test the effects of these contexts and the stereotypes they might activate on the political ambition of our subjects. And second, because we measure subjects' feelings about Hillary Clinton prior to

viewing these web ads, we can directly measure how feelings about Clinton prior to treatment correlate with the effects of viewing these ads on political ambition. We explain each of these in more detail below.

We explore the role of context by showing our subjects one of four treatment videos, which vary on how Clinton's performance of gender is depicted. For example, in a video we call "caregiver" (Campaign 2016c), Clinton is depicted as empathetically listening to a supporter describe his struggles to care for his elderly parent. Here, Clinton is enmeshed in a "compassion" issue that voters perceive to be a strength for women (Rosenwasser and Seale 1988) and she is engaging with the supporter as a compassionate listener, which we expect to trigger increased willingness to run to meet communal goals among our women subjects, in keeping with Schneider et al. (2016). We think, then, that this video depicts a side of campaigning for which women may feel *more* qualified to perform than are men. In a second video, "cookstoves," (Campaign 2016dd), Clinton is having a "wonky" conversation about a project she spearheaded as Secretary of State. She is speaking one-on-one, which may be a more woman-friendly aspect of campaigning, but she is doing so on a policy issue (and indeed, one that involves compassion for impoverished women who may face danger from using unsafe cooking practices). In the third video, "bullying," (Campaign 2016a), Clinton is speaking empathetically to a young girl, but is doing so during a large campaign rally. In this sense, the ad may trigger perceptions of running for office as a more traditionally male venture (Lawless and Fox 2005; Krook and O'Brien 2010), although the topic of conversation may be considered compassionate. In the last video, "fight," (Campaign 2016b), Clinton is depicted in the most traditional campaign role which is likely also the most traditionally male. Here, she is using the "fighting" analogy and addressing a large crowd at a rally, critiquing her opponent, Donald Trump. This presentation of Clinton is the most masculinized of the four videos, essentially depicting politics as a traditionally male-dominated competition which could decrease women's willingness to run (Preece and Stoddard 2015a). Notably, this is the sole video in which Clinton mentions Trump explicitly, but he is an implicit presence in all of the videos, as they each provide an implicit contrast of the two candidates. These four treatment videos, then, can be compared to a control video (DDOTVideos 2016), which describes how to rent bicycles from a new automated bike-sharing program.

By randomly assigning one of these videos to each of our subjects and then asking them about their future political plans, we can test the following hypothesis²:

Hypothesis 1 Viewing videos of Hillary Clinton engaged in non-traditional campaigning activities will increase the political ambition of women, but not men.

Specifically, we expect that relative to the control group, for women:

- "Caregiver" will be associated with the largest increase in political ambition, as it shows Clinton listening empathetically as a supporter tells a story.
- "Cookstoves" will be associated with a smaller increase in political ambition, as it shows Clinton talking about policy in a small group
- "Bullying" will be associated with a smaller increase in political ambition, as it shows Clinton talking empathetically to a girl, but doing so in a large crowd
- "Fight" will not be associated with an increase in political ambition, as it shows Clinton addressing a large crowd and using fighting metaphors.

Prior to showing any video, we ask subjects to rank their warmth toward Hillary Clinton (among other politicians and groups) on a 100-point scale. We can, therefore, account for the differential effects of viewing the videos on those who feel warmly toward Clinton with those who do not. Drawing from the political science literature on the presence of women candidates as role models (Beaman et al. 2009; Gilardi 2015) and the psychology literature on the effects of feelings about a potential role model (Morgenroth, Ryan, and Peters 2015), we expect those women who already esteem Hillary Clinton to see a greater increase in their political ambition when they are exposed to one of her ads. Given this, we derive the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2 The effect of viewing the Hillary Clinton videos will be larger among female subjects who are Clinton supporters.

Data and results

We tested our hypotheses by recruiting subjects from Amazon's Mechanical Turk³ in late September of 2016, while the presidential election campaign was in full swing. In order to ensure that we had enough subjects for each condition, we recruited 765 subjects and paid them \$0.50 each. Given our hypotheses about gender differences, we used some screening questions to ensure that about half of our subjects would be women. Consistent with best practices, we also had two attention check questions in the survey and excluded sixty people for failing the check.⁴ Our sample consisted of 302 men and 403 women. Our sample was overwhelmingly white, with 571 white respondents, 48 African-American subjects, 39 Asian-American respondents, and 31 Hispanic/Latino subjects. Slightly more than half of our subjects were between the ages of 25 and 40, with another 25% being from 41 to 55. In terms of ideology, 268 self-identified as liberal or very liberal, with 135 self-identifying as conservative or very conservative. Finally, 92.7% of our subjects report being registered to vote.⁵

We asked our subjects a battery of questions about their feelings toward major political candidates (Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, Marco Rubio, and Bernie Sanders) as well as about other groups such as scientists, bicyclists, the police, and blacks. Consistent with public opinion surveys at the time of the campaign, our respondents did not view Clinton warmly: her average was only 36.9%. However, this is higher than Trump's average of 27.8%.⁶ The highest politician was Bernie Sanders at 55.3%, eclipsing even President Obama's average of 53.8%.⁷

After asking some additional questions about party identification, presidential approval, etc., we then randomly assigned subjects to watch one of five different videos.⁸ Our control video is about bike sharing in Washington, DC. We have four videos about Hillary Clinton, each of which emphasizes a different aspect of her candidacy. First, the "caregiver" video shows Clinton listening empathetically as a supporter tells a story. Second, "cookstoves" shows her talking about policy in a small group. Third, the "bullying" video has Clinton talking to a girl about bullying, but in a large crowd. Finally, in "fight," Clinton is addressing a large crowd and criticizing her campaign opponent, Donald Trump; it is a more traditional campaign portrayal.⁹ We report the number of subjects by gender in each treatment in [Table 1](#).

After the video, we ask respondents questions about political efficacy and, most importantly for our purposes, if they have plans to run for political office in the

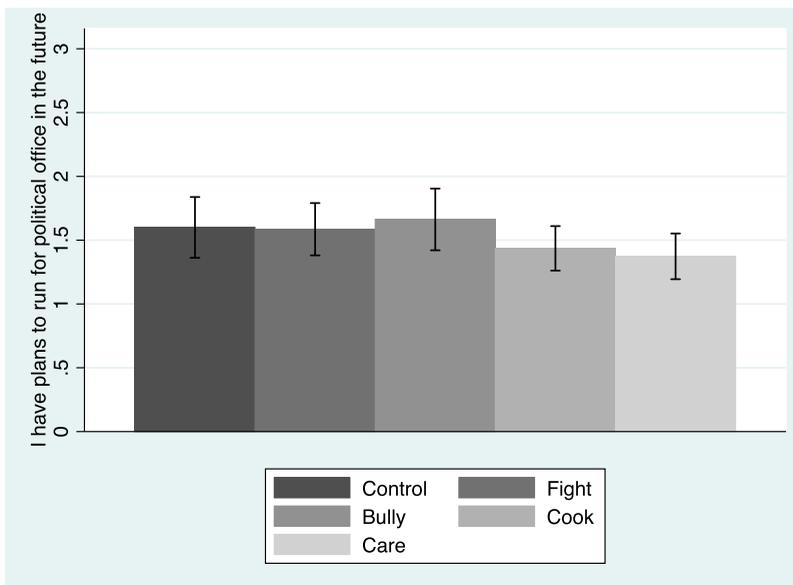
Table 1. Number of subjects in each treatment.

	Control	Bully	Cook	Fight	Care
Women	70	85	88	104	82
Men	63	69	59	64	82

future. The response to “I have plans to run for political office in the future” constitutes the dependent variable in our analysis. Not surprisingly, the dependent variable is skewed: fully 64.8% of respondents answered “disagree strongly” and another 17.2% responded “disagree moderately.” In contrast, only 5.9% agreed with that statement even “a little.” Only the remaining 12.1% were sanguine about their own likelihood that they would run.¹⁰ Clearly, then, our subjects show very little willingness to run for office, even post-treatment. Reflective of similar patterns in the broader public, our subjects do not tend to be politically ambitious.

The results from our test of Hypothesis One can be seen in [Figure 1](#).

This figure shows two points quite clearly. First, as is clear from the results of those who viewed the control video, women do not express a desire to run for office. That said, there are also no significant differences among women in the different treatments.¹¹ While viewing a video of Hillary Clinton campaigning does make women slightly more likely to want to run for office, these differences are not statistically significant compared to our control video. Therefore, in contrast with our Hypothesis One, we find no evidence here that showing women videos of Clinton in non-traditional campaigning activities leads to an increase in political ambition. Indeed, the “care” video, which we hypothesized would increase political ambition by the greatest amount, is associated with a slight decrease in the mean level of political ambition our subjects report, although that effect does not approach statistical significance.

**Figure 1.** Effect of Clinton ads vs. control ad on women’s political ambition (90% CIs).

What happens when we account for the reported differences in our subjects' warmth for Hillary Clinton? It is important to reiterate that our subjects did not hold Clinton in particularly high regard. Among all subjects, her mean feeling thermometer score was 37.1 (out of 100), and fully 36% of subjects rated her at 10 or below, compared with only 6% at 90 or above. For men, the numbers were worse, with an average of 32.8% and 18% scoring her at 10 or below and only 5.4% scoring her at 90 or above. Somewhat surprisingly, the numbers were not much better for women. The average was 40.7 and 31.9% rated her 10 or below and 6.6% at 90 or higher. So, put simply, our subjects did not feel warmly toward Clinton. That being said, Clinton had fairly high unfavorable ratings among voters throughout the campaign so our subjects here are reflective of voters in general.

We divide our subjects into supporters (those who rated Clinton at 50 or higher on the 100-point feeling thermometer) and non-supporters (those who rated Clinton below 50).¹² Defined in this way, supporters comprise about 40% of our subjects, non-supporters 60%; these values remain consistent across gender and treatment. We compare the effects of supporters vs. non-supporters seeing a Clinton campaign video – our test of Hypothesis Two – in Figure 2. Here, we place the graphs of supporters side-by-side with non-supporters within the same treatment to facilitate that comparison.

Most notably, the mean value of our dependent variable either stays the same or *actually decreases* for women who are not supporters of Hillary Clinton. In other words, this indicates that seeing Clinton run for office can actually decrease political ambition among women. The same, however, is not true for Clinton supporters. In contrast, Clinton supporters report an increase in political ambition in most cases. That difference is dramatic enough in the “fight” case to yield a statistically significant difference in women's political ambition between Clinton supporters and non-supporters, since that treatment appears to

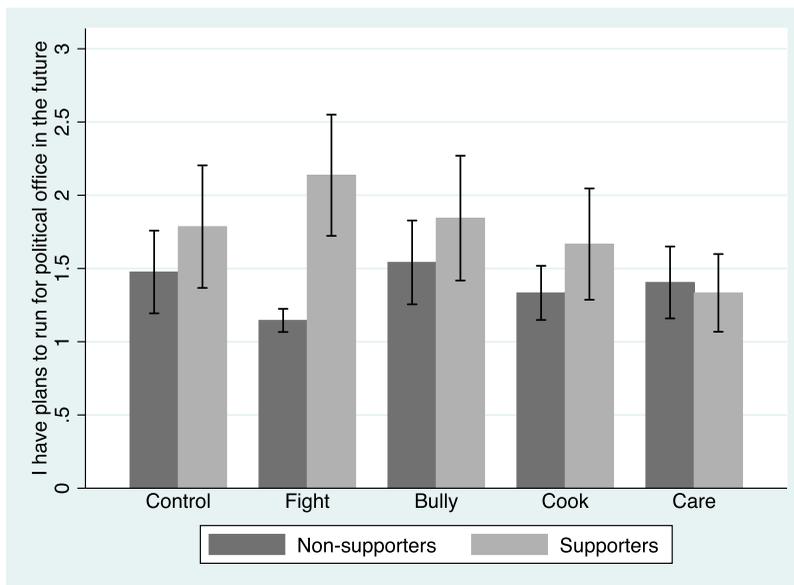


Figure 2. Effect of Clinton ads on women's political ambition, by level of support (90% CIs).

decrease political ambition among non-supporters while increasing it among supporters. Furthermore, among non-supporters, the “fight” treatment results in significantly lower ambition ($p = 0.03$) than the control treatment among non-supporters, the sole treatment that results in an effect that is statistically significantly different from the control. This result provides modest support for Hypothesis Two and also provides an explanation for the null results in the literature on the effect of women in power on other women’s political ambition. For polarizing candidates, changes in ambition may cancel each other out, thus leading to the null result. On the other hand, when candidates are widely popular, viewing them running for office would have a net positive effect.¹³

But [Figure 2](#) also provides further evidence counter to Hypothesis One. Again, we expected the “care” treatment to have the greatest effect and the “fight” treatment to have the weakest effect. For Clinton supporters, the opposite is true and in fact, the effect of the “caregiver” treatment seems to be a decrease in the political ambition of even Clinton supporters. In fact, the difference between “fight” and “caregiver” is statistically significant, although in the opposite direction of that hypothesized. We had expected that the “caregiver” treatment would subvert stereotypes of politics as a “man’s world,” but we instead may have activated those stereotypes in our subjects, actually triggered women’s concerns about family obligations that could in reality decrease their political ambition (Silbermann 2015). If this is true, it indicates that these stereotypes are “hard-wired” and it may take more than just one candidate behaving in a “caring” manner before women will truly see politics as their domain.

What about men?

The focus of our study was on women, as our hypotheses related to the effect of Clinton’s campaign on women. But our general interest is in the gender gap in political ambition, which requires us to measure the effect of the Clinton ads on men as well as women. After all, if seeing a Clinton ad increases ambition somewhat among Clinton’s women supporters, but actually increases men’s ambition by an even greater amount, Clinton’s candidacy could actually *exacerbate* the ambition gender gap. For this reason, we now turn to the effect of the Clinton videos on men.

We see those effects in [Figure 3](#). Notably, there appears, like women, to be differences in men’s political ambition depending on their level of support of Clinton. Specifically, viewing Clinton ads appears to have no effect at all on Clinton non-supporters, but actually seems to *decrease* the political ambition of Clinton’s male supporters, although not significantly so. This is true in all cases except for the “care” treatment, which seems to have no effect on men’s level of political ambition regardless of their views of Clinton herself. Given Hypothesis One, we might have expected the “care” treatment to decrease men’s political ambition if we had successfully created an environment in which running for office was viewed as a “woman’s domain.” This obviously did not happen.

So what are the comparative statics? It is easy to see by comparing [Figures 2](#) and [3](#) that among non-supporters, viewing Clinton ads would certainly not mitigate the gender ambition gap. The ads seem to have no effect on male non-supporters, and have a negative effect on female non-supporters. If anything, then, Clinton’s run for office exacerbated the ambition gender gap among her non-supporters. But what about supporters?

We can see the effect of viewing the Clinton ads on supporters in [Figure 4](#).

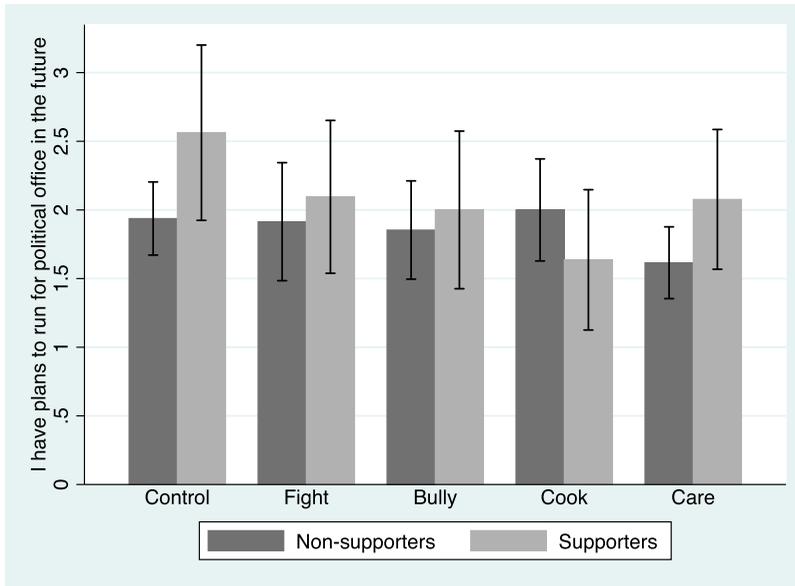


Figure 3. Effect of Clinton ads on men's political ambition by level of support (90% CIs).

Here, the traditional ambition gender gap presents itself clearly in the control group: Men are more politically ambitious than are women. But among supporters, most treatments combine to decrease ambition among men and increase it among women. Because of this, we see that viewing campaign ads for a woman candidate (at least among her supporters) can *erase the ambition gender gap*. Indeed, in the “cookstoves” treatment, the mean level of political ambition among women is actually *greater* than that of men. Again, our results on the “care” treatment point out the dangers of depicting

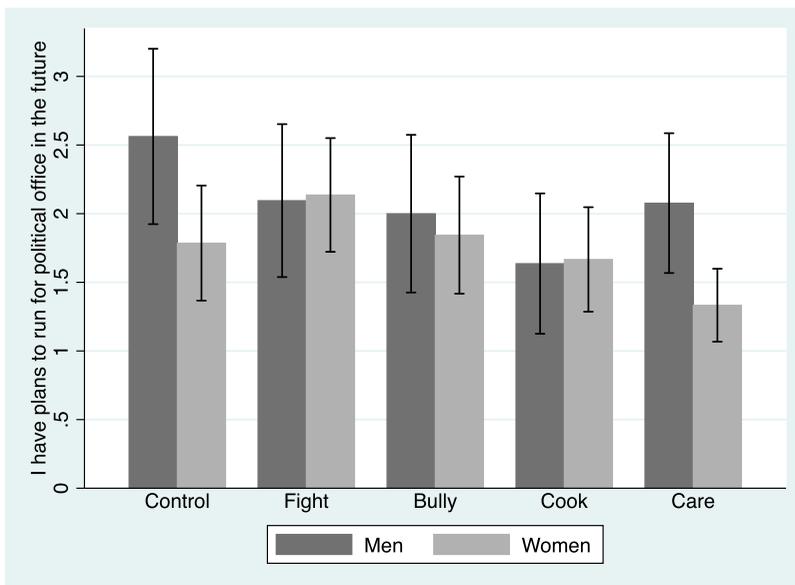


Figure 4. Effect of Clinton ads on the political ambition of her supporters.

politics as too closely related to family, as the gender gap in ambition appears in that treatment as well.

In sum, then, our results show no support for Hypothesis One – that non-traditional depictions of women running for office would increase political ambition among women – but strong support for Hypothesis Two – that feelings about a candidate change the effect of seeing a woman run on the political ambition of women observers. Among those who feel warmly toward Clinton, seeing her run had the effect of mitigating the ambition gender gap. At the same time, her run appears to exacerbate the ambition gender gap among her non-supporters, as it actually decreases the political ambition of women non-supporters. In the next section, we explore the connection between warmth toward Clinton and political ambition in more detail.

Support for Clinton and the ambition gender gap

Our results, then, indicate that it is feelings toward Clinton, not representations of Clinton, that seem to have the largest effect on women’s reported political ambition. We now explore the relationship between feelings of warmth toward Clinton and reported post-treatment political ambition. We do so via an ordered probit with responses to the question “I have plans to run for political office in the future” as the dependent variable. There are seven categories, from “Agree strongly” to “Disagree strongly.”¹⁴ In order to better assess how treatments differ based on subjects’ warmth toward Clinton, we include a series of interactions of responses to the question about Clinton warmth and dummy variables indicating the treatment the subject saw. Because the effect of Clinton on political ambition may differ across party, we also include as a control a party dummy variable, coded 1 if the subject is a self-reported Democrat, 0 otherwise. And given the gender differences outlined above, we run separate regressions for male and female subjects. We present the results of that analysis in [Table 2](#).

The results in [Table 2](#) show that warmth toward Clinton is correlated with greater political ambition, but the effect alone does not reach traditional levels of statistical significance. Furthermore, the coefficients on the treatment dummies, as well as the treatments interacted with warmth toward Clinton, indicate a rather complex relationship that is statistically significant at several points along feasible values of the variables. To untangle this complexity a bit, we derived a set of predicted values based on the probability that a subject answers “Disagree completely” with the statement “I have plans to run for office.” We title that response as “election aversion,” in keeping with the nomenclature of [Kanthak and Woon \(2015\)](#).

First, [Figure 5](#) reveals the effect of the gender ambition gap on those subjects who were shown a control video rather than a video of candidate Clinton. As expected, women in the control group are more election averse than are men, with women’s predicted probability of selecting “disagree completely,” the election averse answer, being greater than that of men for all values of feelings of warmth toward Clinton. It is interesting to note, however, that the difference is not statistically significant at the 0.10 level when one reaches the higher values of warmth toward Clinton.

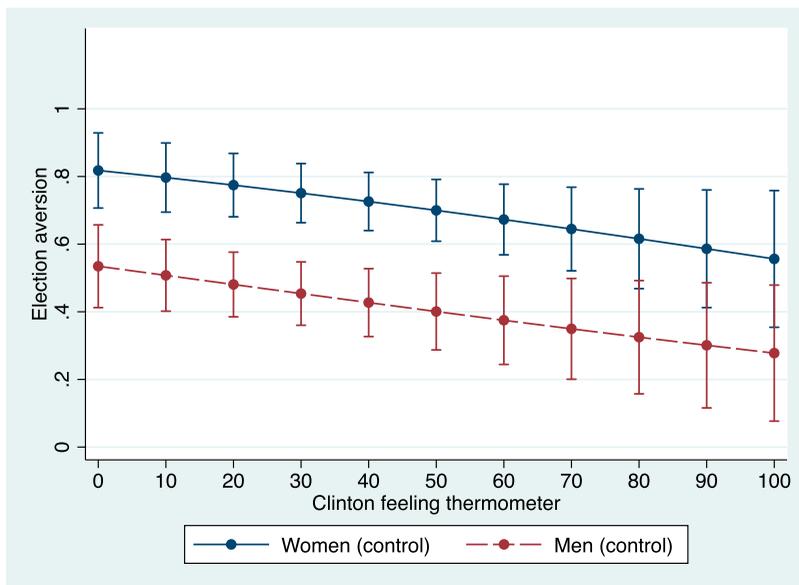
Notably, this effect could be simply due to the fact that there are fewer subjects at the higher values of support toward Clinton. Lending credence to this supposition is the fact that confidence intervals in the higher ranges of warmth toward Clinton are larger than

Table 2. Ordered logit explaining subjects' response to "I will run" question.

	Women	Men
Clinton Warmth	0.00765 (1.62)	0.00677 (1.48)
"Fight"	-0.356 (-1.01)	-0.276 (-0.91)
"Bully"	0.0741 (0.21)	-0.192 (-0.70)
"Cook"	-0.0809 (-0.24)	-0.0687 (-0.25)
"Care"	0.0802 (0.21)	-0.328 (-1.11)
"Fight" * Warmth	0.00609 (0.98)	-0.00128 (-0.20)
"Bully" * Warmth	-0.000625 (-0.10)	-0.00256 (-0.40)
"Cook" * Warmth	-0.00170 (-0.28)	-0.00368 (-0.52)
"Care" * Warmth	-0.00870 (-1.28)	-0.00254 (-0.41)
Democrat	-0.00895 (-0.05)	-0.0971 (-0.56)
<i>Cutpoints omitted for space</i>	**	**
Pseudo R^2	0.03	0.01
N	400	297

Note: t statistics in parentheses.

they are at other points in the Clinton feeling thermometer scale. We cannot tell, then, if the ambition gender gap is related to feelings of warmth toward Clinton. It is possible that the ambition gender gap disappears for those who like Clinton, and over a year of seeing her run prior to our intervention is already "baked in" to their views about running for office. And while this would be a noteworthy finding, a null result does not indicate

**Figure 5.** Ambition gap – control group (90% CIs).

that no relationship exists: We simply cannot be sure from these data. The decline in the ambition gap may simply be an artifact of the data, or Clinton’s run may have truly narrowed the political ambition gap long before we got to our subjects as researchers. Future work involving real candidates who have not been in the public eye as long as Clinton has been may help to address these questions.

Although we cannot be certain given the limitations of these data, predicted values for the treatment groups may be able to provide more information related to this supposition. If Clinton’s run is having an effect on the ambition gap, we should see it via smaller ambition gaps in our treatment groups compared to our control groups. Figure 6 shows us that is indeed the case. Because subjects were randomly assigned to groups, we can be confident that groups are similar. Yet there is greater overlap in the confidence intervals between men and women for every treatment group vis-a-vis the control group. Indeed, the ambition gender gap exists for no values of warmth for Clinton under the “bully” treatment. In other words, there is no statistically significant difference in political ambition among men and women who saw the “bully” video, even when taking into account feelings toward Clinton herself. Furthermore, the effect of the “fight” treatment is so dramatic that there is no difference between men and women in the predicted probability that a subject would select the most election-averse choice.

It is also important to note that the disappearing ambition gap is related at least as much to differences in men’s choices as it is to that of women. The predicted probability of selecting the most election averse response increases for men in nearly every treatment

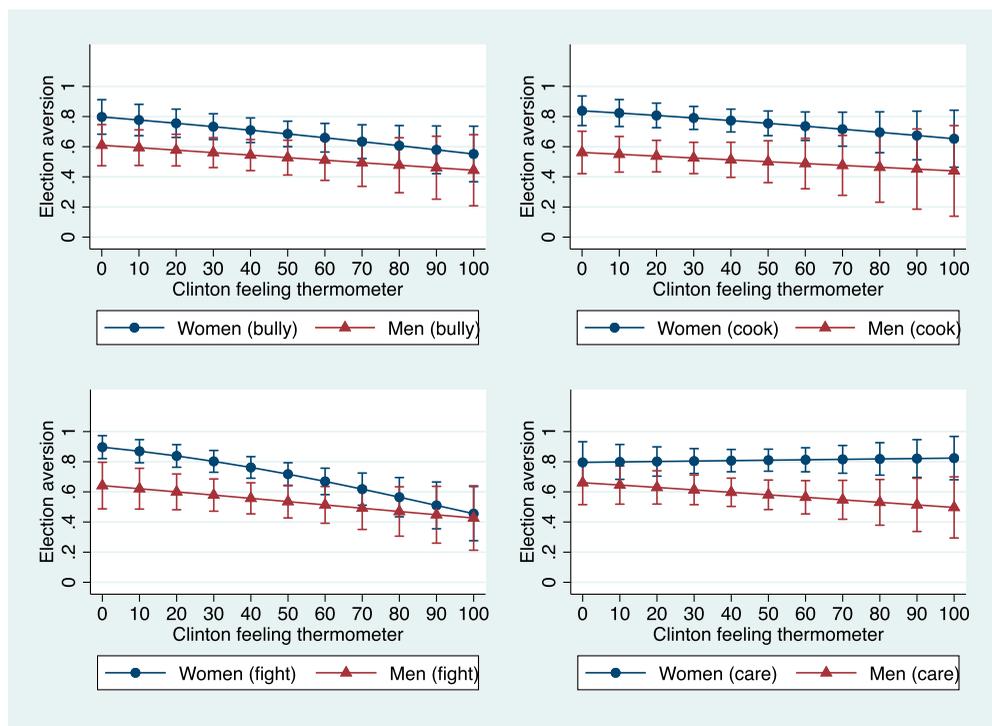


Figure 6. Ambition gap – treatment groups (90% CIs).

for nearly every level of warmth for Clinton, although not nearly significantly so. So perhaps Clinton's run narrows political ambition gap as much by *decreasing* the ambition of men as it does *increasing* the ambition of women.

To reiterate, however, observing greater overlap of confidence intervals does not necessarily mean that exposure to Clinton decreases the ambition gender gap. But the number of subjects in each treatment are relatively the same, even accounting for feelings of warmth toward Clinton. We would expect the graphs to look the same for the treatment and the control groups. They do not. This could be random noise, operating similarly in every treatment group. Or it could be an indication that exposure to Clinton mitigates the gender ambition gap, particularly for those subjects who already support Clinton.

Conclusions

Our results indicate that seeing a woman run for the highest office in the United States can affect the political ambition of the people who see her do so. Merely by asking our subjects to view a short video, we were able to affect the reported future political ambition both for women who supported and did not support Clinton. Notably, though, the results were not all positive. For women who do not support Clinton, viewing an ad may actually decrease political ambition. Notably, among supporters of Clinton, women's ambition increased while that of men decreased, thus mitigating the gender gap in political ambition.

Of course, our choice to focus on the very real Hillary Clinton may serve to be as polarizing in the research community as Clinton is herself in the electorate. We give away some of the control that researchers hope to gain by turning to experiments in the first place. We invite our subjects to take their preconceived notions about Clinton into the experiment with them. Rather than design them away, we measure them and use them directly as an explanatory variable. And indeed, views about Clinton explain a great deal, whereas presentations of Clinton do not. We believe that this result serves as evidence to support the use of real candidates in this type of experiment. People have real views about candidates, and we know from the extant psychology literature that those views can inform whether or not a person will choose a particular role model. Those views are vitally important, and previous research has masked their effects, either through the use of fictional candidates or through measuring the aggregate effects of candidates on political ambition. Our individual approach, along with our focus on a particular candidate, allows us to study this concept directly for what we believe to be the first time. We think this is one of the primary contributions of this study, and we encourage researchers in the future to seriously consider using real candidates in their experiments. Elections do not exist in a vacuum, and utilizing real candidates (and how respondents feel about them) is important to the verisimilitude of experimental research.

Similarly, our results point to the importance of seeing women candidates who represent a variety of political views. Women's political ambitions are stoked only when they actually *like* the woman who is running. Of course, the very polarizing Hillary Clinton is a perfect case in which to study this. But other candidates would likely prompt a similar, although perhaps not as dramatic, of an effect. Although we can rightly claim to have studied the universe of female major party candidates for the United States presidency, future research may help to ascertain how much of the effect we see is specific to Clinton and how much of it will apply to other, less polarizing, candidates.

Our results also point to a potential decrease in political ambition among men who see a woman they like run for political office. This is a fascinating result and merits future study. Too much of the work on women in politics, we think, focuses on what affects women and focuses too little on what affects men. Do these men feel intimidated by a high-quality woman running for office? Does seeing a highly-qualified woman candidate make them recalibrate their views of their own relative abilities? Answers to these compelling questions await future research.

Another open question has to do with the fact that Clinton lost the election. What affect does this have on women's political ambition? Among her supporters, our hunch is that this will decrease their political ambition, despite the fact that Clinton received 3 million more votes than her opponent. If a woman is a fan of Clinton and sees a highly qualified, experienced woman lose to a controversial political neophyte, this is likely to make her less interested in politics and running for office. Of course, this is outside the scope of this study, but it is something that future scholarship should address.

Notes

1. In this study, the heroic woman was television's Xena: Warrior Princess.
2. Note that all hypotheses were pre-registered. The pre-registration plan is available at [https://osf.io/\(omitted to preserve anonymity\)/](https://osf.io/(omitted to preserve anonymity)/)
3. See (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012) for the validity of using Mechanical Turk.
4. Including these people in the results does not change them significantly.
5. Typical of Mechanical Turk surveys, our respondents tend to be more white, younger, and more liberal than the population of the United States. Given that we are most interested in the experimental manipulation, this becomes less relevant; we are primarily concerned with the internal validity of the manipulation and not the generalizability of our findings. That said, despite the fact that our sample should be favorably disposed toward Clinton based on demographics, her favorability was on par with nationally representative samples.
6. Not surprisingly, feelings about Trump were highly correlated with feelings about Clinton (the correlation is -0.41). Despite this, there appears to be little relationship between feelings about Trump and political ambition.
7. Interestingly, the highest group of all was scientists at 78.2%, for which we are grateful.
8. These videos are available in an online appendix.
9. Later in the survey as an attention check, we ask respondents which video they watched, and we exclude those who answered incorrectly.
10. We also asked a question about whether our respondents would "never run for office." The correlation between responses on that measure and our current measure is -0.49. Analysis using the alternative measure yields substantively identical results.
11. The p values for t -tests comparing each treatment with the control are as follows: For Fight, $p = .98$. For Bully, $p = .46$. For Cook, $p = .95$. For Care, $p = .30$.
12. Results are similar at other definitions of supporters and non-supporters. We return to the full 100-point scale in later analysis.
13. This explanation can also account for why the presence of women candidates is not associated with decreases in political ambition. Although this would theoretically occur with a very unpopular elected official, unpopular elected officials are by definition rare because they tend to lose office (or they never gain it in the first place).
14. The data presented here is identical to those that comprise the graphs above. Analysis was completed using Stata 14.2.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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