

The News Media Experience for Congresswomen:

How has sexism and gender stereotypes in the news media portrayed female politicians at the Congressional level?

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Women compose 51% of the American population, but only 23.7% of the seats in the United States Congress are held by women. This paper will analyze how sexism and gender stereotypes in the news media portray female politicians at the Congressional level. Frequently, the news media's targeting does not emphasize their political agenda, instead the media platforms resort to sexist remarks and stereotypes that perceive women to be incompetent for office, while they portray men as competent. Previous scholars have concluded that the media often mention female politician's character and emotional traits (Van Der Pas & Aaldering, 2020, pg.119) along with associating them with "feminine issues" compared to "masculine issues" (Hayes et al., 2014, pg.1197). For this study, the data was retrieved from live news broadcasts and articles that were analyzed in order to determine how often they made sexist remarks or stereotypes toward congresswomen. The quantitative data will be categorized on how often the media references a congresswoman's character or emotional traits, family or appearance references, and associating them with "feminine issues" compared to "masculine issues." This study found that the media mentions a congresswoman's political agenda over her appearance and family role, but they continue to reference them with negative character traits and "feminine issues." These results could potentially explain why female politicians struggle to have positive perceptions from the electoral public as well as why there is a persistent gender gap in Congress.

2020 presented historic achievements for women breaking the glass ceiling in politics. Former Senator Kamala Harris became the first female Vice President and the 117th Congress has a record number of Congresswoman. Despite these achievements there continues to be a large gender

gap in the American legislative branch, specifically considering women make up 51% of the American population ("U.S. Census Bureau..."). The 116th Congress was composed of 23.6% congresswomen, specifically 25% of the Senate were female Senators and 23.2% of the House were female representa-

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tives (“Women in the U.S...., 2020”). The 117th Congress has become historic for women, where there is a total of 25.2% Congresswoman (Rodger, 2020), which was an increase of two percent. Given these statistics, there is evidence that there is a large gender gap in Congress. A potential explanation for the gender gap in Congress could be a result of the media’s usage of gender stereotypes and sexism when reporting on a female politician. The news media has made use of gender stereotypes and sexism when presenting female politicians, such as Hilary Clinton, Sarah Palin, Elizabeth Dole, and Nancy Pelosi. Female politicians have a very different news media experience compared to men; studies have compared the amount of media coverage male politicians receive compared to female politicians, and it has found that men receive more media coverage than female politicians (Bligh et al., 2012, pg.565). Previous scholars have concluded that media outlets will more frequently reference the female politician’s appearance, manner of dressing (Fulton, 2012, pg.304), facial expressions (aggressive, assertive, or confident) (Hayes et al., 2014, pg.1196), personality traits, family roles (Hayes and Lawless, 2015, pg.97), and mainly cover them with “feminine issues” compared to “masculine issues” (Lavery, 2013, pg.889). The media’s presentation causes the audience to be presented with an incompetent evaluation of the congresswomen.

Studies have found that journalists more frequently use gender stereotypes and sexism on live television than on newspapers (Van Der Pas & Aaldering, 2020, pg. 133). According to a survey conducted in 2013, 55% of Americans continue to rely on live television to obtain political information and 9% rely on newspapers (Foster Shoaf & Parsons, 2016, pg.5). The news media’s usage of sexism and gender stereotypes are impacting whether or not the audience will determine the female politician as competent or incompetent. As a result of the American people predominantly relying on live news broadcasts and newspapers to obtain political information, this study will analyze both news media sources. This study focused on how the media is negatively presenting Congresswoman while referencing them with negative character traits over positive character traits, fami-

ly role, fashion choices, and “feminine issues,” over “masculine issues”. It found that the news media will cover the Congresswoman’s political agenda more frequently than mentioning their fashion choices or family roles, but they will more often reference them with “feminine issues” as well as with negative character traits. The findings of this study suggest that the media is disproportionately impacting Congresswoman, which could explain why there is such a large gender gap in Congress, and it could explain why women less frequently pursue a career in Congress.

Literature Review

News Media Usage of Gender Stereotypes toward Female Politicians

The examination of news media outlets have shown that they present their audience with gender stereotypes or gender roles in efforts to present the audience with the idea that female politicians are incapable to fulfill her political duties (Lavery, 2013, pg.879). This presentation has been provided through gender roles, gender traits, and negative depictions of the female politicians. It has been analyzed that media journalists will frequently mention the gender of the female politician throughout their reporting. Additionally, the journalist will stereotypically associate female politicians and electoral candidates on character traits and emotional traits--sensitive, honest, gentle, and compassionate (Van Der Pas and Aaldering, 2020, pg.119). Similarly, Hayes and Lawless (2015) found that the media contains character traits, which they categorized gender traits as negative or positive traits; the categorization of positive character traits included the politician’s reference to competence, leadership, integrity or empathy while negative traits were associated with incompetence (pg.100). It is expected that in this research analysis, the media will reference both positive and negative traits, but will more frequently reference negative character traits of congresswomen. Dunaway et al. (2013) conducted a comparative analysis of the number of times news stories referenced gender traits during Senate and gubernatorial races between

male vs. male, male vs. female, and female vs. female (pg.717). The conclusion of the article is that female politicians are more likely to be referenced in relation to their character traits during female vs. male elections than in male vs. male elections (Dunaway et al., 2013, pg.719). In male vs. male elections trait stories are used 39.77% of the time but in female vs. male elections trait stories are used 53.63%, which is a 13.86-point increase (Dunaway et al., 2017, pg. 719). It would be assumed that the media would focus on the political agenda and legislation of all politicians regardless of gender, but in contrast the media will associate gender character traits when referencing female politicians.

The media has also created issue-based stereotypes when reporting male politicians on masculine issues and female politicians on feminine issues. The media is more likely to associate women in politics with social issues related to poverty, healthcare, environment, and issues that predominantly affect women (violence against women, abortion, etc.) (Van Der Pas and Aaldering, 2020, pg.119) in contrast to the media associating female politicians less with “masculine issues” regarding the economy, foreign policy, defense, military crises, or crime (Hayes et al., 2014, pg.1197). The media is more likely to present female politicians with positive affiliation regarding social issues than the previously mentioned “masculine issues” (Meeks, 2012, pg.180). Meeks (2012) analyzed four women who ran for Senator, Governor, Vice President, and President between 1999 and 2008. The decade’s worth of research was able to evaluate that throughout the elections the media presented female candidates with more gender news variables: gender labels (11.3% more likely), uniqueness labels (2.5% more likely), feminine issues (4.5% more likely), masculine issues (3.4% more likely), feminine traits (2.7% more likely), and masculine traits (4.4% more likely). Given these analyses, it can be expected that congresswomen will more often be referenced in “feminine issues,” but when they are referenced to “masculine issues” they will be presented as incapable or more negatively. The article found that although women have been able to evolve in the political spectrum, gender roles and gender stereotypes within the media realm persist (Meeks, 2012, pg.188). The research conducted by

Meeks (2012) evaluated the media through three campaigns and found that there is a link between gender stereotypes and the type of office the female politician is running for; the media will more frequently target the female candidate who are running for higher political position (Presidency) compared to a cooperative political position (Senate) (pg.186). Furthermore, it has been analyzed that gender stereotypes are more commonly found on live television news than in printed newspaper media (Van Der Pas and Aaldering, 2020, pg. 133).

Throughout the years, congressmen have been elected to Congress, but the political experience they have is very different to the one Congressmen endure. The public mostly relies on news media outlets to obtain political information (Foster Shoaf & Parsons, 2016, pg.5). If the news media is promoting sexism, gender stereotypes, or making gender differences, then they are disproportionately causing the female politician to be at a disadvantage during their campaign and time in office (Van Der Pas and Aaldering, 2020, pg.115). In addition to gender stereotypes having a large influence on the public’s perception of female politicians it also influences the type of legislative agenda female politicians will conduct in order to avoid the media’s stereotyping. Bligh et al. (2012) evaluated the interpretation the public had on two media articles: one that presents women positively and one that presents them negatively. It found that when the public is presented with negative articles, they will evaluate the female politician lower in terms of warmth—the media presented the audience with the perception that the female candidate is competent for the position but is cold and less likeable (pg.587). It was determined that the media’s stereotypes, tone, and focus regarding women in politics will influence their audience’s acceptance, evaluation, leadership rating, voter competence, and campaign donations (Bligh et al., 2012, pg.588). The gender stereotypes and biases that are perpetuated against female politicians have overlooked their competence for the position and undermined their experience and qualifications (Atkinson and Windett, 2019, pg.772). Atkinson and Windett (2019) found that as a result of the gender stereotypes and biases women in Congress experience, they will devote more hours on legislation draft-

ing, present a larger number of legislations, and they will have a more diverse legislative agenda (pg.786). In efforts to counteract the media disadvantages Congresswomen will have to work more diligently in order to prove their competence to the media, colleagues, and the public.

Unfavorable articles are not the only disadvantage female politicians are experiencing, media outlets are also making use of favorable or unfavorable visual images (appearance and nonverbal behavior) when reporting on the candidates (Stabile et al., 2019, pg.495). There has been a steady decline in sound bite length and an increase of visual image presentation (Everitt et al., 2016, pg.1741), which have a higher impact on low political knowledge voters because they are interpreting the non-verbal behavior of the politician instead of factual information (Carpinella et al., 2016, pg.34). Visual images can be categorized as favorable or unfavorable; favorable images present the female politician smiling and confident (Dan and Iorgoveanu, 2013, pg.214), while an unfavorable image will present the female politician pointing their fingers, shaking their fist, or other assertive or domineering body language (Everitt et al., 2016, pg.1742). Media outlets have assumed that the reason female candidates running for Congress, like Linda McMahon in 2010, lost their election was due to their "tough image" interfering with their feminine gender roles (Krupnikov and Bauer, 2013, pg.168). The study conducted by Boomgaarden et al. (2016) examined how favorable or unfavorable text and images impacted the public's assessment of competence and integrity of male and female politicians (pg.2537). Overall the results concluded that the text had an impact on competence evaluation and visual images had an impact on integrity evaluation (Boomgaarden et al., 2016, pg.2540). The data analysis reflects that female politicians were disproportionately impacted with unfavorable images regardless of the text being favorable or unfavorable. Even when those surveyed read a favorable article, the unfavorable image caused them to give the female politician a low integrity rating (Boomgaarden et al., 2016, pg.2541). In a similar survey conducted by Everitt et al. (2016), individuals who were presented with unfavorable images of female politicians perceived them as possessing

fewer leadership qualities than male politicians (pg. 1746). Although gender remarks may not be directly stated, the media's choice of image will impact the perception and presentation of the female politician.

Gender stereotypes and visual images presented in the media have impacted the quality of work the congresswoman will pursue throughout her time in Congress. Congress has been a male-dominated institution, which causes congresswomen to have a legislative performance that will distinguish them in the political arena (Pearson and Dancey, 2011, pg.910). The study conducted by Fulton (2012) found that congresswomen will have higher political participation on the floor compared to congressmen in order to diminish the possibility of experiencing gender discrimination from fellow congressmembers, the media, and the electoral public (pg.308). In order for congresswomen to counteract gender stereotypes they will increase their visibility and voice in the legislative process, which will highlight their political knowledge and competence for the position (Pearson and Dancey, 2011, pg.910). Pearson and Dancey (2011) predicted that congresswomen would more frequently participate in floor speeches that were related to issues that congressmen stereotypically are assumed to have high levels of competence in (pg.911); these male issues include foreign policy, defense, crime, and the economy (Van Der Pas and Aaldering, 2020, pg.719). Furthermore, Pearson and Dancey (2011) predicted that congresswomen would participate in high-profile legislation debates that would likely cause them to be directly quoted on live news media and newspapers (pg.911). The study analyzed the number of times congresswomen participated in one-minute speeches and legislation debates in the 103rd Congress (1993-4) and 109th Congress (2005-6) (Pearson and Dancey, 2011, pg.913). The results were that in the 103rd Congress congresswomen had an average of 18.7 one-minute speeches, while congressmen only had an average of 14.5 concluding that congresswomen are 4.2 points more likely to give a speech. During the 109th Congress congresswomen had an average of 14.9 one-minute speeches, while congressmen had an average of 6.5 speeches resulting in congresswomen being

8.4 points more likely to give a floor speech than congressmen (Pearson and Dancey, 2011, pg.914). The media's gender stereotypes have disadvantaged congresswomen, which is why they have had to raise their political performance in efforts to prove their legislative competence to the media and the public.

News Media Sexism and Gender Bias Toward Female Politicians

The news media usage of sexism and gender biases have undermined the female politicians' credentials, competence, and legitimacy. Lavery (2013) analyzed the gender biases presented in local television coverage of both male and female House candidates and House members. The analysis concluded that although the media has become less biased in the last 20 years, there continues to be gender biases in the media (pg.896). Female candidates are subject to sexism by journalists, mainly by hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism is presented in a resentful way as a result of assuming that women are competing against men, which is resulting in the women not complying with their traditional gender role. Benevolent sexism is the positive evaluation of women who conform with their gender roles of caregiving or neutering, yet it implies that the female sex is weaker and dependent on men (Schlehofer et al., 2011, pg.73). There have been a number of mass media journalists using both hostile and benevolent sexism when reporting and commenting on female politicians. For instance, in 2008 top news networks (MSNBC, CNN, ABC, NBC, and Fox) referred to former Senator Hillary Clinton as first-wife, b-word, she-devil, psychotic, and other sexist rhetoric (Uscinski and Goren, 2010, pg.884). Despite the evident use of sexist phrases, journalists continue to be skeptical and deny the possibility of being sexist (Romaniuk, 2015 pg.452). Romaniuk (2015) evaluated the response of the journalist whenever a co-host or guest speaker would point out their sexism and found that the journalist responded by antagonizing the commentator or reformulating the comment in order to undermine the probability of being associated with making sexist remarks (pg.460). Overall there have been a number of case

studies evaluating the sexist rhetoric made by journalists, and instead of journalists preventing the usage of it they choose to minimize or undermine the probability of doing so.

Journalists who present female politicians with sexism and gender stereotypes have an impact on voter support. As previously mentioned, sexism and gender stereotypes are more commonly presented on live news media outlets compared to newspapers (Van Der Pas and Aaldering, 2020, pg.133). Surveys have concluded that in 2013, 55% of individuals surveyed used television as the main source of political information, while 9% used newspapers and 21% used the internet (Foster Shoaf and Parsons, 2016, pg.5). The study conducted by Bauer (2015) concluded that when the media presents the public with sexism and stereotypes the public will perceive the female politician as less competent for the office and will reduce their support for her (pg.704). If the media would not utilize sexism and gender stereotypes, then female candidates would be perceived on an equal playing field with male politicians (Foster Shoaf and Parsons, 2016, pg.2). The data analyzed by Foster Shoaf and Parsons (2016) also found that the media was 30% more likely to reference their gender, appearance, clothing, female traits, and emotions of female politicians (pg.4-8). The media have more commonly referenced the female politician's family role and have questioned their ability to balance their career and family (Vandenberghe, 2019, pg.7). Foster Shoaf and Parsons (2016) analyzed the number of times popular news outlets and newspapers made reference to Elizabeth Dole, Hillary Clinton, and Sarah Palin families; the analyzed data found that both newspapers and televised media outlets made reference to the female politician's role as a wife and mother 89% of the time (pg.9). Additionally, Foster Shoaf and Parsons (2016) concluded that the public is receiving less substance information about the female politician's policy agenda, leadership roles, and qualifications (pg.11). The news media is making use of sexism or gender stereotypes that are disproportionately causing their audience to question their ability to fulfill their role in public office since they are not receiving qualification information.

Scholars have predominantly evaluated mass

media journalist's sexism and gender biases toward Hillary Clinton. Uscinski and Goren (2010) conducted a quantitative analysis of the number of times the media referred to Hillary Clinton by her first name. The authors hypothesized that Clinton would more often be informally referred to by her first name instead of mentioning her credentials, such as Senator Clinton (pg.887). The findings were that sexism affected her news coverage by referring to her by her first name four times more often than they did her male opponents when running for President in 2008 (Uscinski and Goren, 2010, pg.892). By the media referring to female politicians on a first name basis, it leads to the news presenting the female politicians as less legitimate or less competent than male politicians (Uscinski and Goren, 2010, pg.886); there is a lack of credential information provided to the public, which will cause them to perceive the female politician as incompetent. A study evaluating 24 live news television broadcasts from ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC, and CNN found that the increase of sexist commentary began after Clinton participated in the Democratic nomination debate, where Clinton was the only woman (Romaniuk, 2015, pg. 450). Romaniuk (2015) also found a connection between mass media journalists declaring that "women [in politics] see themselves as victims" instead of admitting the possibility that female politicians are exposed to gender biases by the media, candidate opponents, and the electoral public (pg.454). This connection poses the question: Will female politicians not want to state or react to sexism in the media because it will perceive them as victims or weak? Female politicians are perceived as less competent and not having the toughness or commanding characteristics male politicians have (Dabbous and Ladley, 2010, pg. 183). In order to not victimize themselves and be perceived as tough and equally competent as male politicians, women in politics could be ignoring the media's gender biases. Perceived as tough and equally competent as male politicians, women in politics could be ignoring the media's gender biases.

On January 4, 2007, Nancy Pelosi was appointed as the first female Speaker of the House. At first the media presented Pelosi as "breaking the glass ceiling" for women, specifically women in politics,

but later on the media opted to evaluate Pelosi's performance as Speaker of the House in a sexist manner. Dabbous and Ladley (2010) examined five major newspaper outlets (Washington Post, New York Times, USA Today, the Los Angeles Times, and the San Francisco Chronicle) that covered Pelosi's first 100 hours as the Speaker of the House. The results from the examination found that throughout the first 100 hours Pelosi continued to experience gender biases in the media (Dabbous and Ladley, 2010, pg.182). USA Today and The Washington Post often referenced Pelosi's role as a mother to her family and also referred to her as the "Mother-of-Democrats." It also made mention of Pelosi's "mother of five" voice and facial expression in order to inform her colleagues she "means business" (Dabbous and Ladley, 2010, pg.186). The articles referencing Pelosi as a mother and nurturing is an example of benevolent sexism, which restrain women to their caregiving attitudes and gender roles as caregivers (Schlehofer et al., 2011, pg.73). In terms of language, the Los Angeles Times also described Pelosi in a maternal manner, but she was more frequently quoted in shorter and harsher statements. Toward the end of her first 100 hours as Speaker, the Los Angeles Times described her as a mother who was losing control (Dabbous and Ladley, 2010, pg.188). In addition to Pelosi's rhetoric, the New York Times focused more on the fashion impact Pelosi was having with her pantsuits instead of any of the policy issues or legislative agenda Pelosi was focusing on during that time (Dabbous and Ladley, 2010, pg.187-8). At the beginning of Pelosi's role as Speaker of the House, the media presented her in positive way, but then the media began to diminish her political leadership skills by referencing her as a mother with a hard-fisted ruling attitude that has great fashion taste (Dabbous and Ladley, 2010, pg.190). The sexism mentioned throughout the media regarding Pelosi ignored her political qualifications and undermined her competence for the political leadership position. During Pelosi's first 100 hours the media made reference to her appearance, family, and character traits, and gender traits ("Mother of Democrats") that previous scholars determined would disproportionality caused the public to reduce their support for the politician.

The Minority Congresswoman Experience Through the News Media

22% of the 116th United States Congress is composed of Congresswomen that have minority backgrounds that include Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American. Scholars have conducted research on the female political media experience, but less so on the media's treatment of minority female politicians (Gershon, 2013, pg. 702). Female politicians have had to face gender biases, but female politicians who are minorities most often face a double disadvantage of racial and gender bias by the news media (Ward, 2016, pg.320). Minority Congresswomen are more likely to experience racism and sexism by the media (Reingold et al., 2019, pg.2); these experiences impact the potential political ambition of other minority women (Reingold et al., 2019, pg.1). The media plays an essential role in the political success of minority Congresswomen, the positive media coverage could result in her political profile to be recognized by the public and potentially gain power in her caucus by showing her loyalty to the party (Lucas, 2017, pg.572). Minority congresswomen have a double disadvantage causing them the inability to present themselves as qualified, which is why once in Congress they will more frequently speak compared to congressmen (Pearson and Dancey, 2011, pg.917). Gershon (2013) evaluated the media experience minority Congresswomen had compared to Caucasian Women. The sample studied found Caucasian Congresswomen had higher leadership positions in the House compared to minority Congresswomen (pg.705). It has been analyzed that the news media will have low levels of media coverage and negative tone related converge regarding a minority Congresswoman, but when minority Congresswomen do receive media converge it will be regarding ethnic policy issues that pertain to their ethnic background (Gershon, 2013, pg.703).

Scholars who have researched the racial and gender biases presented to minority female Congresswomen have concluded that they experience gender and racial biases at higher rates than Caucasian Congresswomen. Scholars have concluded that minority Congresswomen will receive less media attention that include a negative tone or connota-

tion, which will intertwine with the gender biases that are also presented (Ward, 2016, pg.321). Minority incumbent Congresswomen and challengers received less media coverage than Caucasian female politicians and other minority male politicians. Ward (2016) did find that minority Congresswomen representing predominantly white districts will receive more media coverage (pg.330). Another examination is that the media coverage for minority congresswomen will increase when the media is referencing policy issues that have a connection with their ethnic background. African American Congresswomen have raised media coverage on issues regarding race or civil rights. Latina Congresswomen experience higher media coverage regarding ethnic issues than African American Congresswoman. Over 27% of the media coverage for Latin American Congresswomen is related to immigration, DACA, and other issues that mainly impact or focus on the Hispanic community (Gershon, 2013, pg. 707). The intersection of gender and race cause minority Congresswomen to be at a larger disadvantage compared to their Caucasian female and male colleagues; the likelihood of minority Congresswomen experiencing negative coverage is 13/100 articles (compared to the 9/100 for Caucasian female politicians) (Ward, 2016, pg.332). Ward (2016) concluded that the media has exploited the racial and gender identities of minority Congresswomen when covering news stories or interviewing them (pg.338). The research conducted determines that not only are minority congresswomen facing gender stereotypes and sexist disadvantages by the media that are impacting their legitimacy, but their racial identity is having an additional impact on the media's audience evaluation of legitimacy and competence.

Research has specifically been conducted to evaluate the racial and gender bias news media outlets have utilized when covering stories regarding African American Congresswoman. Overall, the media relied on gender and racial stereotypes when reporting on or interviewing African American Congresswoman (Lucas, 2017, pg.573); the media also overemphasized the conflict between the Congresswoman's racial and gender identity (Lucas, 2017, pg.592). The evaluation of 689 articles from 27 different newspapers found that the news

coverage of African American Congresswomen was only 36%, while Caucasian Congresswomen received 50%. Furthermore, the comparison found that African American Congresswomen would receive more negative media coverage that would not reference her credentials or experience (Gershon, 2013, pg.706). The media's lack of reference regarding credentials is causing their audience to perceive the African American Congresswomen as illegitimate or incompetent for her role in Congress. Although media coverage of African American Congresswomen is lower than that of Caucasian Congresswomen, their media coverage was raised by three times in 2008. The reason African American Congresswomen had an increase in media coverage in 2008 was because the media was interested in the gender and racial experiences these members had in order to examine the Clinton (gender bias) and Obama (racial bias) presidential campaign experience (Lucas, 2017, pg.592). The media was less interested in their policy agenda, and instead wanted to evaluate their political experience and disadvantages as women of color. The media coverage of African American Congresswomen is not only less frequent, but it is also acquiring a negative and unfavorable tone (Gershon, 2013, pg.710). More than 10% of the articles that reference African American Congresswoman made use of a negative and unfavorable tone (Ward, 2016, pg.334). The media coverage of African American Congresswomen has gender and racial biases, but Latina Congresswomen experience the same news media disadvantages at higher rates.

The news media is more likely to present Latina Congresswomen with gender and racial bias compared to Caucasian Congresswomen and any other minority Congresswomen. Latina Congresswomen hold the least news media coverage with only 26%. Not only do Latina Congresswomen receive the least media coverage, but they also receive the least positive coverage in comparison to Caucasian and African American Congresswoman (Gershon, 2013, pg.706). Ward (2016) conducted a similar comparison and the result findings also confirmed that Latina Congresswomen receive the least media coverage, but they also receive the least positive coverage with only 11% (pg.334-5). Latina Congresswomen received the least commentary regard-

ing their legislation accomplishments resulting in the public being presented with a negative and incompetent legislator (Gershon, 2013, pg.706). The minimized media coverage of Latina Congresswomen will usually be related to Hispanic ethnic issues, such as immigration; over 27% of the total media coverage of Latina Congresswomen are related ethnic issues (Gershon, 2013, pg.707). Latina Congresswomen experience the disadvantages of receiving less media coverage that is more negative (Gershon, 2013, pg.710) and the media will most likely scrutinize the Congresswoman's gender and racial identity to present them as an incompetent legislator compared to Caucasian legislators and other minority legislators (both male and female) (Ward, 2016, pg.339). These negative presentations by the media could potentially cause the Latino Congresswoman's seat during reelection since her constituents are not being presented with a high level of competence in her position.

Hypotheses

In order to further examine the specific ways televised news media outlets and newspapers are making an effort to discredit Congresswomen, there will be an examination of the number of times the media focuses on the legislative agenda of the Congresswoman compared to gender stereotypes or sexism used. For instance, Van Der Pas and Aaldering (2020) research study found that the media will less frequently mention the legislative agenda of the female politicians, instead the media is primarily covering their character and emotional traits (pg.119). In addition, there have been analyses concluding that the media will frequently mention the female politician's family role as a spouse and mother, physical appearance, and fashion choices (Foster Shoaf and Parsons, 2016, pg.9). Furthermore, the media has also more frequently referenced female politicians when covering "feminine issues" than "masculine issues" (Hayes et al., 2014, pg.1197). "Feminine issues" are issues that stereotypically assume women have a better understanding of, such as poverty, healthcare, or education. In contrast, "masculine issues" are issues that are assumed to be better managed by men, such as the economy, military, or foreign policy. Given

these scholar's findings this study concluded the following three hypotheses:

- *Hypothesis 1: The news media is more likely to mention the Congresswoman's fashion choices and family roles compared to their legislative agenda.*
- *Hypothesis 2: The news media is more likely to mention Congresswomen with negative character traits compared to positive character traits.*
- *Hypothesis 3: The news media is more likely to reference Congresswomen with "feminine issues" than "masculine issues."*

Data/Methodology

This study will specifically analyzed the news media's treatment of female Senators in the 116th Congress. The reason this study specifically reviewed the 116th Congress is because there was a record-breaking number of women who were elected to Congress. 130 women were elected into the 116th Congress, which was an increase of 15 Congresswomen compared to the 115th Congress. This increase was able to carry on into the 117th Congress that held another record for women in Congress, but there continues to be a large gender gap. The reason this study specifically focused on Senators is because they receive more national news coverage compared to House representatives. In the 116th Congress 24 women were elected to the Senate, Martha McSally (R-AZ from 2019-2020) and Kelly Loeffler (R-GA from 2020-2021) were appointed by their state governor, making a total of 26 women who held seats in the Senate. Of the total female Senators, this study specifically focused on twelve Senators. These twelve Senators were chosen in a way that would closely simulate the 116th Congresswomen political parties, ethnic background, and years of service in the Senate. Of the 24 elected female Senators, 16 of them were Democrats (67%) and 8 were Republican (33%). In addition, 2 Senators were Asian American, 1 Senator was Hispanic American, and 1 was biracial of Asian and Black American descent. The biracial Senator was Vice President Kamala Harris who was not included in this study because she ran for President and later on as Vice President. The reason

being that scholar Meeks (2012) found that female politicians have higher rates of exposure to sexism and gender stereotypes in the media when they are running for higher political positions, such as the Presidency or Vice Presidency (pg.186). Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), and Senator Kirsten E. Gillibrand (D-NY) were not included in the study because they also ran for the Presidency in 2020. In order to closely resemble the 116th Congress, 3 of the 12 Senators were Republican and the other 9 Senators were Democrat. Asian American Senators Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and Hispanic Senator Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) were also included in the data in order to compare their news media experience to the one their Caucasian counterparts experience.

The data for this study was collected from Westlaw, where there is access to numerous televised news transcripts and newspaper articles from major news media outlets of the United States. The major televised news outlets included ABC, CBS, MSNBC, CNN, and Fox News, and the newspaper outlets include The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times, USA Today, The New York Times, and The Washington Post. The transcripts and newspapers obtained for this study will be from January 3, 2019 to January 3, 2021, which was the entirety of the 116th Congress session. Using the advanced search of Westlaw, the research will include the congresswoman's name and key terms associated with gender stereotypes and sexism. In order to assure the media was using sexism or gender stereotypes, each transcript and article result from the advance search and filters went through a content analysis. Once the content analysis is complete, the data will be collected in a quantitative method to determine how often the news media was gender stereotyping or using sexism against the female Senators. The dependent variables for this study were the twelve Senators, which are presented in Table 1. There was a total of seven independent variables, which included legislative agenda, fashion, family roles, positive character traits, negative character traits, "feminine issues" and "masculine issues." Each of the independent variables were assigned specific key terms that were based on the extensive literature. The specific key terms

for all seven variables can be found on Table 2. In the case study of the first female Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, it was evaluated that media made frequent reference of her pantsuits and attire (Dabbous and Ladley, 2010, pg.190), which is why the key terms for the variable fashion is clothing, skirt, dress, and pantsuits. Foster Shoaf and Parsons (2016) also found that the media would more often reference a female politician as a wife or mother, so the variable family roles include mother, wife, and grandmother (if applicable). Hayes and Lawless (2015) categorized positive traits as leader, competence, and tough (pg.100), and those are the key terms for the variable positive character traits.

Van Der Pas and Aaldering (2020) found that negative traits that perceive female politicians as incompetent are terms that include sensitive, emotional, and incompetent. Based on this study, the key terms for the variable negative character traits include incompetent, arrogant, emotional, and compassionate. “Feminine issues” are issues that stereotypically assumed to be better managed by women, which include poverty, education, health-care, and abortions (Van Der Pas and Aaldering, 2020, pg.119), while “masculine issues” include foreign policy, economy, defense, military crimes, or crime (Hayes et al. 2014, pg.1197).

Not only is there a large gender gap in Congress,

Table 1: Dependent Variables

Senator	Party-State	Service Dates	Ethnicity
Dianne Feinstein	D-CA	1992-present	Caucasian
Patty Murray	D-WA	1993-present	Caucasian
Susan M. Collins	R-ME	1997-present	Caucasian
Debbie Stabenow	D-MI	2001-present	Caucasian
Mazie Hirono	D-HI	2013-present	Asian American
Joni Ernst	R-IA	2015-present	Caucasian
Margaret Wood Hassan	D-NH	2017-present	Caucasian
Catherine Cortez Masto	D-NV	2017-present	Hispanic American
Tammy Duckworth	D-IL	2017-present	Asian American
Marsha Blackburn	R-TN	2019-present	Caucasian
Jacky Rosen	D-NV	2019-present	Caucasian
Kyrsten Sinema	D-AZ	2019-present	Caucasian

Table 2: Independent Variables

Independent Variables:	Key Terms:
Legislative Agenda	Legislation, agenda, bill
Fashion	Clothing, skirt, dress, pantsuits
Family Roles	Mom/Mother, Wife, Grandma/Grandmother
Positive Character Traits	Competence, leadership, tough, commanding
Negative Character Traits	Incompetent, arrogant, emotional, compassionate
“Feminine Issues”	Poverty, healthcare, education, abortion
“Masculine Issues”	Foreign policy, economy, defense, military crises, crimes

but there is also a major racial gap within that gender gap. 24% of the elected Congress Members were women, but out of that total only 15% of them were women of color. According to Ward (2016), minority female politicians suffer from double disadvantage because not only are they exposed to gender biases, but they are also experiencing racial bias (pg.320). Minority Congresswomen receive less media coverage than Caucasian congresswomen, but when they do receive coverage, it is more likely related to issues pertaining to their ethnic background (Gershon, 2013, pg.703). This study will compare the quantitative data obtained from the seven independent variables between Caucasian Senators Stabenow (D-MI), Ernst (R-IA), Hassan (D-NH) and minority Senators Hirono (D-HI), Duckworth (D-IL), and Mastro (D-NV). The reason the three Caucasian Senators will be compared to the minority Senators is because they represent states with similar population to the ones the minority female Senators do. Given the scholar's findings it is hypothesized that the minority senators will experience more gender stereotypes and sexism from the news media compared to the Caucasian Senators.

Analysis

The quantitative data was collected and analyzed in order to evaluate the frequency in which the media is covering Congresswomen with gender stereotypes and sexism during their coverage. The first hypothesis was that the news media is more likely to mention the Congresswoman's fashion and family roles compared to their legislative agenda. The overview of the descriptive statistical analysis that included the data for all 12 Senators suggests the null hypothesis is incorrect. As presented in Table 3, the news media covered fashion 51 times, family roles 30 times, and legislative agenda 341 times. This descriptive analysis found that the news media is 260 points more likely to cover news that focus on the Congresswoman's

legislative agenda than mentioning their family roles and fashion choices. In order to determine if there is enough statistical significance for the first null hypothesis to be incorrect a T-Test examination was conducted. The T-test evaluates the results of the 12 senators and the 2 variables, Fashion/Family roles and Legislative agenda, and determines whether the probability of the relationship is due to chance or if there is indeed a relationship between the two. As presented in Table 4, the T value for the relationship between fashion/family roles and legislative agenda is 4.883. In order to determine whether the data findings of the media

Table 3: Transcripts referencing Congresswomen with Fashion or Appearance compared to Legislative Agenda

	Value
Fashion	51.000
Family Roles	30.000
Legislative Agenda	341.000

Table 4: T-Test for Family Roles/Fashion and Legislative Agenda

	Value
T value	4.883
Significance Value	<.001

being more likely to reference the legislative agenda of the senators than fashion and family roles, there must be a significance value that is lower than .05 or 5%. The reason the significance value must be below 5% is because the test should have a confidence level of 95%. As described in Table 4, the significance value indicates that there is a less than .001 or less than .1% probability that the relationship between legislative agenda and fashion and family roles is due to chance.

The first hypothesis stated that the news media is more likely to mention the Congresswoman's fashion choices and family roles compared to their legislative agenda, yet the quantitative data collected, and the T-Test analysis accepts the hypothesis. The examination in Table 4, determined that indeed the media is more likely to reference Congresswomen with their legislative agenda than their family role as a mother or spouse and fashion choices because the probability that the relationship is due to chance is less than .1%. The findings of this examination conclude that the news media is actually presenting their audience with substantive information related to female Senators legislative agenda and not undermining their ability to be a Congresswoman and a wife or mother at the same time. This is specifically important months prior to reelection because the news media is pro-

viding the electoral public with information regarding what legislative work their Congresswomen is actively focusing on. It is important to note that that the news media disproportionately referenced the Congresswoman with more informative substance that included their legislative process, but there continued to be a number of articles and news broadcasts that referenced their family role and fashion. Although the fashion and family role references were much less than the legislative reference, there is a possibility that there continues to be an impact on the electoral public's perception of how effective the Congresswoman is.

The second hypothesis predicted that the news media is more likely to mention Congresswomen with negative character traits compared to positive character traits. The overview of descriptive statistical analysis that included the data of all 12 senators suggest that it is correct. As evaluated in Table 5, the news media often references Congresswomen with more negative character traits than positive character traits. The news media referenced Congresswomen with negative character traits 137 times, while only mentioning them with positive character traits 92 times. The descriptive statistical analysis of the table finds that the media is 45 points more likely to reference Congresswomen with negative traits than positive character traits.

Table 5: Transcripts referencing Congresswomen with Negative Character Traits and Positive Character Traits

	Value
Negative Character Traits	137.000
Positive Character Traits	92.000

Table 6: T-Test for Negative Character Traits and Positive Character Traits

	Value
T value	2.434
Significance Value	.034

In order to determine whether or not there is a significant relationship between the two variables, negative character traits and positive character traits, a T-Test was conducted. As presented in Table 6, the T value for the relationship between negative character traits and positive character traits is 2.434. In Table 6, the significance value indicates that there is a 3.4% or .034 probability that the relationship is due to chance. As mentioned previously, in order to determine whether a relationship is significant and not due to chance there must be a statistical cutoff that is below 5%, which is analyzed in the relationship between these two variables. The T-Test significant value of 3.4% accepts the hypothesis of the news media being more likely to refer to Congresswomen with negative character traits than positive character traits, since the probability that the relationship is due to chance is below the 5% cutoff.

The findings of this examination suggest that Congresswomen are experiencing character traits disadvantages by referencing them with more negative character traits than positive character traits. Recall that negative character traits included the terms incompetent, compassionate, arrogant, and emotional, which negatively portray the Congresswoman as incompetent for the position. The reason they negatively portray Congresswomen is


because there is a societal assumption that in order to be a successful politician people need to have a tough personality and they cannot be emotional or compassionate. Commonly, women who present themselves as tough or confident in their leadership role are often defined as arrogant, whereas men are often assumed to be doing their job. The news media's more frequent usage of negative character traits could influence the audience approval rates toward Congresswomen. In comparison, the media less frequently referenced Congresswoman with positive character traits that included the terms competent, leadership, tough, commanding. These positive terms present the news media audience with the perception that Congresswomen are competent and capable of fulfilling their political duties. The findings do not undermine the number of times the news media is referencing Congresswomen with positive character traits, but it did find a significant difference between the news media usage of negative traits and positive traits toward female Senators.

The third hypothesis was that the news media would more likely reference Congresswomen with "feminine issues" than "masculine issues." Table 7 presents the descriptive statistical analysis of all 12 Senators and it suggests the hypothesis is correct. The news media reference Congresswomen with

Table 7: Transcripts referencing Congresswomen with "Feminine issues" and "Masculine issues"

	N	Value
"Feminine Issues"	1	471.000
"Masculine Issues"	1	308.000

Table 8. T-Test for "Feminine Issues" and "Masculine Issues"

	Value 
T value	3.834
Significance Value	.003

“feminine issues” 471 times, while only referencing them with “masculine issues” 308 times. This data is equivalent to the news media being 163 points more likely to associate Congresswomen with “feminine issues” than “masculine issues.” For the purpose of confirming the preliminary descriptive statistical analysis, a T-Test was conducted. As presented in Table 8, the T value for the relationship between “feminine issues” and “masculine issues” is 3.834. In table 8, the significance value determined that there is a .003 or .3% probability that this relationship is due to chance, since the relationship is well below the 5% cutoff there is indeed a relationship between “feminine issues” and “masculine issues”. The findings developed in the T-Test result in the study accepting the hypothesis of the news media more likely mentioning Congresswomen with “feminine issues” than “masculine issues.”

The acceptance of the hypothesis concludes that the media is gender stereotyping against Congresswomen in terms of “feminine issues” and “masculine issues”. With the rejection of the first hypothesis, it was evident that the probability of sexism in the form of family roles or fashion is insignificant compared to their legislative agenda, but the media has significantly stereotyped their coverage. While the news media is mentioning Congresswomen with “feminine issues” it is presenting their audience with the interpretation that a female politician is more competent and knowledgeable with issues pertaining to education, healthcare, poverty, and abortion. In contrast, the media less frequently referenced the Congresswomen with “masculine issues,” which is suggesting to their audience that Congresswomen are less competent in issues that

involve foreign policy, economy, defense, military crises, and crimes. Similarly, to the negative character traits explanation, there is a stereotype that as a result of women being a woman or mother, they have better knowledge with topics of education, healthcare, and abortions. The study is not undermining the number of times the news media referenced Congresswomen with the economy, military crises, foreign policy, and crimes, but there is a statistical difference between the news media’s presentation in terms of “feminine issues” and “masculine issues.” Considering the electoral public relies on the news media to obtain political information and based on that form their political opinions, this examination finds that the media is putting Congresswomen at a disadvantage.

Previous scholars have concluded that the minority female politician news media experience is different compared to the Caucasian female news media experience. For instance, Reingold et al. (2019) found that minority female politicians are more likely to be exposed to sexism and gender stereotypes by the news media in comparison to Caucasian female politicians (pg.2). In order to analyze whether minority Senators are exposed to more gender stereotypes and sexism from the news media there was an extra examination of the media’s treatment toward minority Senators Hirono, Masto, and Duckworth and comparing it to the media experience of Caucasian Senators Stabenow, Ernst, and Hassan. Given previous scholar findings, it is hypothesized that the news media will expose minority Senators Masto, Duckworth, and Hirono to more gender stereotypes and sexism compared to their Caucasian colleagues Senators Stabenow,

Table 9: Descriptive Statistics Findings of Each Independent Variable based on Ethnic Background

Ethnicity	Fashion Family Roles	Legislative Agenda	Negative Traits	Positive Traits	Feminine Issues	Masculine Issues
Caucasian	17	100	18	22	120	100
Minority	17	59	33	24	103	75

Ernst, and Hassan. Table 9 presents the descriptive statistical analysis of the number of times the news media referenced Senators Stabenow, Ernst, Hassan, Hirono, Masto and Duckworth with each independent variable of sexism and gender stereotypes. According to the descriptive analysis, the three minority Senators received the same number of family and fashion references as their Caucasian colleagues, which was a total of 17 references. Although, the news media did reference the three Caucasian Senators with their legislation more frequently than the minority Senators.

The descriptive statistical analysis in Table 9 found that the news media reference the Caucasian senator and their legislative agenda 100 times, while only mentioning the minority Senator's legislative agenda 59 times. In this comparison, the news media was 41 points more likely to reference Caucasian Senators with their legislative agenda in comparison to the minority Senators. In terms of negative character traits, the news media referenced Caucasian senators 18 times, but referenced the minority Senator 33. Between the six Senators studied, the descriptive analysis found that the Caucasian Senators were exposed to positive character traits 22 times, but minority senators were exposed to it 24 times. This suggests that the news media is 2 points more likely to reference minority Congresswomen with positive character traits compared to the Caucasian Congresswomen. In terms of "feminine issues" the Caucasian Senators were referenced 120 times and minority Senators were mentioned 103, thus suggesting that Caucasian Senators are 17 points more likely to reference Caucasian Congresswomen with "feminine issues" than minority Congresswomen. Similarly, in reference to "masculine issues" the media referenced the Caucasian Senators 100 times, while only men-

tioning minority Senators 75 times, suggesting the news media is 25 points more likely to reference Caucasian Senators with "masculine issues" than minority Senators.

In order to determine whether there is a significant relationship between a Senators' ethnicity and the 6 independent variables, an ANOVA examination was conducted. The ANOVA test included the 3 Caucasian Senators and the 3 minority Senators and the number of news media transcripts that referenced her with every independent variable. Recall, it is predicted that Minority Senators receive higher rates of gender stereotypes and sexism from the media. In order to determine that there is a significant relationship between ethnicity and the independent variables there must be a significance value that is less than .05 or 5%. According to Table 10, the F value for the relationship between ethnicity and Fashion or Family Roles is 0. In addition, the significance value indicates that the probability that this relationship is due to chance is 100%, which rejects the hypothesis that there is a difference between how the news media treats minority and Caucasian Congresswomen in terms of fashion or family role. Table 11 presents the ANOVA test between the relationship of ethnicity and legislative agenda. The F value of the relationship between ethnicity and legislative agenda is 3.85. The significance value of the relationship is .121 or 12.1%, since it is above the statistical cutoff of 5% it finds that there is no relationship between ethnicity and legislative agenda. In Table 12 the ANOVA results of the relationship between ethnicity and negative character traits concluded similar results to the previous variables. The F value of the relationship between ethnicity and negative character traits is 2.88. The significance value indicates that there is a 16.5% probability that the relationship

Table 10: ANOVA for Ethnicity and Fashion or Family Roles

	Value
F value	0
Significance Value	1.00

is due to chance, thus resulting in there being no relationship between the news media treatment of minority and Caucasian Congresswomen.

Table 13 presents the relationship between ethnicity and ositive character traits. The F value for the relationship between ethnicity and positive character traits is .09. In Table 13, the significance value indicates that there is a 77.6% probability that the relationship between ethnicity and positive character traits is due to chance. This significance finding that is well above 5% concludes that there is no relationship between ethnicity and positive character traits. Table 14 presents ANOVA analysis of the relationship between ethnicity and “feminine issues.” In Table 14, the F value of the relationship between ethnicity and “feminine issues” is .35. The significance value of .558 or 55.8% finds that this relationship is due to chance, since it is well above the statistical cutoff of 5%. This analysis concludes that there is not enough statistical differ-

ence between the news media usage of “feminine issues” against minority Congresswomen compared to Caucasian Congresswomen. Table 15, includes the findings of the ANOVA test of the relationship between ethnicity and “masculine issues.” The F value of the relationship between ethnicity and “masculine issues” is 1.71. The significance value is indicating that there is a .341 or 34.1% probability that the relationship is due to chance. The finding of the analysis concludes that there is no relationship between ethnicity and “masculine issues” since the statistical cutoff is above 5%.

According to the scholarship it was inferred that minority Congresswomen would experience higher levels of sexism compared to their Caucasian colleagues. In order for this to be correct there must have been a significance value less than 5% in every relationship between ethnicity and the 6 independent variables. According to every ANOVA examination that evaluated the relationship

Table 11: ANOVA for Ethnicity and Legislative Agenda

	Value
F value	3.85
Significance Value	.121

Table 12: ANOVA for Ethnicity and Negative Character Traits

	Value
F value	2.88
Significance Value	.165

Table 13: ANOVA for Ethnicity and Positive Character Traits

	Value
F value	.09
Significance Value	.776

between ethnicity and the independent variables concluded that there is no statistical difference between the news media exposure to gender stereotypes, sexism and ethnicity, since the significance value did not fall below the 5% cutoff. For this reason, it rejects the hypothesis of minority Congresswomen being exposed to higher rates of sexism and gender stereotypes compared to Caucasian Senators. These relationship findings do not disregard the three original hypotheses of this study. This study confirmed that there continues to be gender stereotypes and sexism in the news media, since the media is more likely to reference Congresswomen with negative character traits than positive character traits and they are more likely to reference them with “feminine issues” than “masculine issues.” The ethnic comparison between the Caucasian Senators Stabenow, Ernst, and Hassan and minority Senators Hirono, Mastro, Duckworth found that minority Congresswomen do not experience higher levels of gender stereotypes and sexism. In contrast, this study found that there are similar levels of exposure to sexism and gender stereotypes.

Conclusion

In terms of gender, there is an absence of descriptive representation since there is a major gap

between the women in Congress and the current female population of the United States, which is 51%. Not only is there a gender gap in Congress, but previous scholars have concluded that the news media presents female politicians with gender stereotypes and sexism that disadvantage them. This study focused on the national news media outlets from live television broadcasts and newspapers, and evaluated their sexism and gender stereotypes toward Congresswomen. Given these findings, this study developed three hypotheses. The first hypothesis was that the news media is more likely to mention the Congresswoman’s fashion choices and family roles compared to their legislative agenda. The data collected and compared found that the news media is actually more likely to reference Congresswomen with their legislative agenda compared to their fashion choices and family roles. The second hypothesis was that the news media is more likely to mention Congresswomen with negative character traits compared to positive character traits. This study analysis accepted the null hypothesis because there was a significant difference between how often the media referenced Congresswomen with negative character traits than positive character traits. The third hypothesis was that the news media is more likely to reference Congresswomen with “feminine issues” than “mas-

Table 14: ANOVA for Ethnicity and “Feminine Issues”

	Value
F value	.35
Significance Value	.558

Table 15: ANOVA for Ethnicity and “Masculine Issues”

	Value
F value	1.71
Significance Value	.341

culine issues." The study found the null hypothesis to be correct since there was a significant difference between the news media's references to "feminine issues" than "masculine issues." Lastly, there was a racial comparison between 3 Caucasian Senators and 3 minority Senators. It was hypothesized that the news media would expose minority Senators to more sexism and gender stereotypes, but there was no significant relationship between ethnicity and the independent variables analyzed.

The gender stereotypes Congresswomen are experiencing by the media could explain the gender gap in Congress. The research findings suggest that these gender stereotypes and sexism will cause

Congresswomen to be at a political and electoral disadvantage compared to their male colleagues and candidate opponents. Considering most Americans continue to rely on televised news and newspapers for political information, the presented gender stereotypes and sexism can explain why Congresswomen have difficulty obtaining positive perceptions from the electoral public. Furthermore, this news media experience that Congresswomen are enduring can explain why there is a persistent gender gap in Congress, but it could also explain why female politicians have not been able to win a Presidential election.

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