RESEARCH ON GENDER AND POLITICAL RHETORIC

Masculinity, ingenuity, and the double bind

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Karine Jean-Pierre writes, “If 1992 was Year of the Woman, 2018 must be Year of Accountability.” She reminds readers of key events of 1992, including the successful campaign of Carol Moseley-Braun, the first Black woman elected to the Senate, who ran along with an unprecedented number of women the year following the Anita Hill hearings. Fast-forward 26 years and we have another Year of the Woman, fueled in part by reactions to Brett Kavanaugh’s nomination to the Supreme Court, the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, and Donald Trump’s presidential election in 2016. While not a new phenomenon, gender and its relation to political rhetoric is a potent force for change in our current climate. However, we still have much work to do to achieve political parity if we are to answer Jean-Pierre’s call to accountability.

This chapter assesses the state of the art in political rhetoric with a focus on gender and identifies three overlapping arguments: masculinity and bias, inventiveness of individual women, and confronting the double bind. We begin by reviewing seminal pieces as context for our essay as well as key frames through which scholars view women’s political rhetoric. We continue by focusing on sites in which researchers assess gender and political rhetoric, including masculinity and the U.S. presidency. Gender as strategy is a rhetorical resource and constraint women candidates employ creatively, not only in U.S. presidential, congressional, and gubernatorial elections, but also in international political discourse. Finally, reactions to the 2016 U.S. presidential election provide rich scenarios through which to study the intersection of gender and political rhetoric, as evidenced by special journal issues focusing on events such as the Women’s March.

We cast a wide net to identify the sources that populate this chapter. We started with databases such as Web of Knowledge, Communication and Mass Media Complete, and ProQuest, and followed the twitter feeds of @GenderWatch2018, @538politics, @GenderReport, @Women&PoliticsInstitute, and others. Starting broadly with search terms such as “gender and political rhetoric,” we compiled a large number of academic articles, chapters, books, and blogs. From there, we filtered based on limiters that included election years, politicians, and terms such as “Women’s March” and “#MeToo.” Once we assembled a core group of relevant sources, we identified others based on those that cited our relevant sources and also mined bibliographies for other research. Using this process, we landed on the seminal pieces and concepts identified in this chapter, as well as an organizing structure that relies on chronology, case studies, and political offices in both U.S. and international contexts. While our timeframe features prominently the 2008 U.S. election cycle to the present, our chapter reaches further back and includes additional

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sources as important starting points for anyone who conducts research in the area of gender and political rhetoric from a rhetorical methodological perspective.

**Feminist foundations**

We must acknowledge research that informs our work and provides depth for any scholar hoping to add to the conversation surrounding gender and political rhetoric. Though not about political rhetoric specifically, previous research that assesses the growing and important body of feminist communication scholarship lays groundwork for this chapter. According to Susan ZAESKE, research in the area of gender and political communication has its foundation in feminist rhetorical studies that sought to correct the historical record and recover women’s voices and ingenuity. For example, Bonnie J. Dow and Celeste M. Condit undertake a review of feminist communication scholarship in the years 1998–2003 that “is oriented toward the achievement of ‘gender justice,’ a goal that takes into account the ways that gender always already intersects with race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class.” They point out the theoretical rigor and sophistication of such scholarship, even concluding that the area “has been mainstreamed,” while calling for more attention to “the unmarked race, class, sexuality, and geographical categories with which we work.” Their argument remains good advice for scholars today. Michaela D. E. MEYER, building on the work of Karen A. FOSS and Linda ALDOORY and Elizabeth TOOTH, articulates two contributions of feminist rhetoric, which she defines as “writing women in” to the canon and “challenging rhetorical standards.” Meyer concludes by offering advice for the future, advocating for an increased “sense of responsibility in constructing our own agency through theory and scholarly writing.” Focusing specifically on the power of oratory, Vanessa B. BEASLEY’s historical assessment of political rhetoric is instructive even as it calls for more research “about the power of rhetoric across culture and nation” in response to the decidedly Americanist tradition of the current state of public address literature. This chapter demonstrates Beasley’s observation still applies seven years later and indicates where progress has been made: female political figures across the globe are speaking powerfully to call attention to sexist containment rhetoric that seeks to silence their efforts. Other sources, such as Susan A. BANDucci’s work on “Women as Political Communicators” provides still more breadth of research on gender and political communication by drawing on methodological traditions beyond rhetorical studies.

Oxymoron, paradox, and the double bind emerge from the totality of scholarship on gender and political rhetoric as critical to understanding the arguments presented in this chapter. Indeed, scholarship on gender and political rhetoric relies on these terms, noting the perceived incongruities that any woman must confront to advance public political change. Scholars often identify Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation: An Oxymoron” as a starting point for understanding feminist public address. As Campbell notes, “the rhetoric of women’s liberation appeals to what are said to be shared moral values, but forces recognition that those values are not shared, thereby creating the most intense of moral conflicts.” Similarly drawing on the notion of contradiction, Kathleen Hall Jamieson’s “double binds” are not new. Jamieson argues that “Western culture is riddled with evidence of traps for women that have forcefully curtailed their options,” and identifies five double binds that plague women in positions of leadership: womb/brain, silence/shame, sameness/difference, femininity/competence, and aging/invisibility. As Jamieson articulates throughout her work, and as many studies in this review demonstrate with increased clarity, while the binds are culturally constructed to silence women’s contributions, they can be made to self-destruct as more and more women raise their voices and lay claim to public political power. For example, KARRIN VASBY ANDERSON and Kristina Horn SHEELER argue that U.S. first ladies and women governors in their study “managed to employ metaphor creatively, often
capitalizing on its inventional potential to complicate the containment logic and confound the double bind that historically has challenged women’s political agency.”18 The point of entry for scholars of gender and political rhetoric may indeed be a contradiction that demands further examination. One such contradiction is the dearth of female political figures who have inhabited, let alone sought, the highest office in U.S. political culture, the U.S. presidency.

**Masculinity and the U.S. presidency**

The normative way that the presidency has been fashioned discursively in U.S. political culture sets up obstacles for anyone perceived as lacking presidential masculinity. Jamieson’s femininity/competence bind provides context. As she argues, women “who exercised their brains and brawn in public were thought to be tough, … and masculine”; however, those women “deviated from the female norm of femininity while exceeding or falling short of the masculine norm of competence.”19 Caught in a political Catch-22, women who attempt to enter presidential politics as something other than voters or spouses are framed as “bitches” and unfeminine20 on one hand and incompetent on the other.

The masculinity that functions as a primary barrier to entry for female political figures seeking executive level office is well documented and serves as a unifying theme in this essay.21 As Suzanne Daughton writes, “First and foremost, the president is the national patriarch: the paradigmatic American man.”22 The rhetoric of fatherhood often features prominently in the image construction of presidential contenders, linking the performance of fatherhood to images of the president as the father of our country.23 As Ann E. Burnette and Rebekah L. Fox argue, Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum, and Newt Gingrich in their 2012 presidential primary rhetoric “relied on enthymematic reasoning to conclude that, because a father is a strong protector and leader, these candidates’ performances as fathers made them viable presidential candidates.”24 The authors go on to challenge rhetorical critics to question the invisibility of the norm of masculinity/fatherhood as presidential in order to “open the political process to a more diverse vision of leadership.”25

Consistent with the logic of hegemonic masculinity26 framing presidential frontrunners, less successful male candidates are framed in ways suggesting that anyone who might demonstrate characteristics deemed feminine runs afoul of the rigid gender norms of the presidency. For example, Anna Cornelia Fahey argues that John Kerry was feminized during the 2004 presidential election, which simultaneously constructed him as unfit for office.27 Discussing the 2016 U.S. presidential election specifically, Jackson Katz argues that presidential elections are statements about manhood: “specifically, what kind of manhood is most exalted and should be in charge.”28 Katz goes on to describe manhood as embodying strength and stoicism that are performative. Thus, the president is a “pedagogue in chief. He literally teaches—by example—what one highly influential version of dominant masculinity looks like.”29 It is no wonder women (and even some men) have been disadvantaged by the normative nature of hegemonic masculinity that drives cultural assumptions about the presidency. The only examples we have witnessed to date are those casting a certain kind of man in the leading role.

Heightening the heteronormative masculine frame of the U.S. presidency, research on the rhetorical first lady demonstrates the extent to which tradition dictates she embody the ideal of womanhood of the culture at the time, serving as a feminine counter to the masculine president.30 Some studies focus on traditional feminine framing of first ladies or their strategic use of gender in support of their issue positions.31 As early as 1996, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell identified the office of U.S. president as “a two person career,”32 placing the first lady firmly in the center of our understanding of what Trevor Parry-Giles and Shawn J. Parry-Giles more recently
identify as “presidentiality.” Yet Campbell does not see the role of first lady as without challenge, noting in particular the difficulty Hillary Clinton faced as first lady because she did not conform to tradition. Bucking custom, first ladies possess potential for agency and resistance. Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Diane M. Blair see the “rhetorical first lady” as functioning in both feminine and feminist ways while Anderson argues that paradox best defines the role. Further challenging the gendered assumptions of what it means to be a presidential candidate’s spouse, Roseann M. Mandziuk sheds light on the contrast between what she argues is the silencing of female spouses in 2016 in contrast to the masculine ideology that defined the discourse of the potential first “first gentleman,” Bill Clinton.

Gender, 2008, and backlash
The 2008 election in particular demonstrated the extent to which hegemonic masculinity is a potent barrier for women in U.S. political culture. Sheeler and Anderson argue that the 2008 election reveals a cultural backlash against female presidentiality, fueled by a rhetoric of post-feminism. Moreover, the election provided an important moment to assess such a backlash because Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin each claimed a feminist identity, but performed that identity in very different ways. The backlash is evidenced in what Anderson terms pornification: sexist, misogynist, and violent rhetoric used to frame the candidates and undermine their credibility. Lisa Glebatis Perks and Kevin A. Johnson also find evidence of aggressive sexualization of Sarah Palin in 2008, theorizing what they argue are burlesque binds of the MILF frame. Not only was Palin herself hyper-sexualized, but her rhetoric served to heighten the gender norms of U.S. political culture, including her strategic deployment of particular metaphors in the service of frontier mythology or hegemonic masculinity. Not just media framing, but also the vice presidential candidate’s rhetoric itself—her statements, performances, and campaign—played a role in reinforcing masculinity’s lock on politics in 2008.

Assessment of 2008 political rhetoric demonstrated the various ways that Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton confronted and were confronted by gender bias during their campaigns. For example, Erika Falk argues that the strength of the “playing the gender card” metaphor lies in its ability to serve as political shorthand for a host of unsupportable arguments, all of which discipline women like Hillary Clinton who dare to speak about bias and discrimination on the campaign trail. Lindsey Meeks argues that The New York Times covered Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin in stereotypical ways, using “novelty frames” to emphasize their candidacy as opposed to male candidates who received more substantive “masculinized” issue coverage. Rebecca M. L. Curnalia and Dorian L. Mermer discuss Clinton’s “emotional moment,” arguing that it demonstrates the femininity/competence double bind faced by women candidates, while Ryan Shepherd finds that the incident became an important event that sparked conversations about gender bias in political campaigns.

Hillary Clinton, authenticity, and paradox
Scholars have focused on Hillary Clinton in an ongoing area of research that draws attention to the political roles she has assumed and the challenges she has faced while first lady, Senator, presidential candidate, and nominee. Compelling studies uncovering sexist media framing and the cultural constraints of being a powerful political woman (as well as Hillary Clinton’s resistance to those norms) have shared similar findings over and over. Shawn J. Parry-Giles analyzes news coverage of Clinton from 1992 to 2008, pointing out the recurring narratives that frame Clinton as inauthentic. Moreover, Parry-Giles documents the violent rhetoric with which
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Clinton had to contend when she dared step outside traditional feminine gender norms to seek a Senate seat and later the Democratic nomination for president.

The double bind is often the theoretical frame through which Clinton’s political performance is assessed. \(^{50}\) In response to the 2016 election specifically, Anderson theorizes the “first-timer/ frontrunner double bind” that plagued Clinton. \(^{51}\) Unlike male candidates, female first-timers are positioned as symbolic and unproven rather than possessing credibility as political outsiders. Paradoxically, female candidates must garner significant political experience in order to be taken seriously, but as soon as they do so, political ambition is framed as an unnatural desire for power and outsider status can no longer be claimed. Anderson argues that those interested in changing these patterns should not focus on what women have to do to win the presidency, but on what we as voters have to do to change our cultural assumptions about women and leadership.

The research on masculinity and the U.S. presidency begins to articulate the three overlapping arguments we present in this essay. The normative masculinity of the U.S. presidency poses serious challenges to anyone who doesn’t measure up to that unwritten standard. While women such as Hillary Clinton have tried to break the glass ceiling and demonstrated incredibly skillful rhetoric in the process, paradoxically they have not been able to achieve the ultimate goal. While Clinton as an area of study is rich and insightful, many other women who have aspired to and won positions of political leadership are the focus of research forming a solid body of work on the creativity of individual women in the face of cultural constraints. We will discuss these studies in the next section.

**Beyond the U.S. presidency: case studies of resistance and change**

A significant portion of the research on gender and political rhetoric takes the form of case studies of the discourse strategies of political women who have aspired toward offices including and in addition to the U.S. presidency. Some are positive in their assessment, focusing on the communication style of women such as Shirley Chisholm, Elizabeth Dole, or Hillary Clinton. \(^{52}\) Others note the strategic rhetorical work behind any woman’s attempt at public identity construction. Brenda DeVore Marshall and Molly A. Mayhead, in an edited collection, articulate the ways that women such as Barbara Jordan, Patricia Schroeder, Geraldine Ferraro, Wilma Mankiller, and Madeleine Albright use autobiography as a strategic political discourse to create “a personal and civic self situated within local, national, and/or international political communities.” \(^{53}\) Still others expose the resistance political women encounter and their work to change the face of leadership.

Research reveals the obstacles women face when enacting leadership at various levels (e.g., party politics, governorships, U.S. Congress, vice presidential and presidential roles), noting that the barriers and opportunities are different depending on the location and level of leadership. \(^{54}\) Women in legislative bodies have more latitude than women who seek the presidency. Legislative women can subsume themselves to voters and work in collaboration with others in Congress, an expectation that is gendered feminine, whereas individuals seeking the presidency also seek executive level [masculine] authority. \(^{55}\) Beyond gender and candidate discourse, other essays reveal challenges related to gender and voter issue expectations, illustrating the difficulties women face when national security or terrorism are high voter priorities. \(^{56}\)

Strategies of resistance and bringing a broader perspective to what leadership looks and sounds like demonstrate the rhetorical inventiveness of female political contenders. For example, Marshall and Mayhead find that women governors “brought issues of caring, personal experience, empowerment, family, and inclusivity to the statehouse.” \(^{57}\) In another volume with chapters about women representatives, senators, and governors, Mayhead and Marshall conclude
“that women have created and now operate in a rhetorical in-between space that values issues and perspectives traditionally seen as women’s issues.” Moreover, they find evidence of “the dawning of a more collaborative approach to decision making” between women of all parties. Similarly, in a comparison of male and female mayoral State of the City addresses, Mirya Holman argues that female mayors use more nurturing, inclusive frames in their speeches, even though male and female mayors discuss similar issues. Kathryn Pearson and Logan Dancey make an analogous argument about women on the House floor, finding that they are more likely to discuss women during floor speeches and policy debates, regardless of political party identification, than are men. Sheeler argues that Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm confounded the beauty queen metaphor through which she was framed, using “the resources of the unruly woman within a context of gendered reporting” to capitalize on strategic visibility and ultimately win election.

More recently, book-length studies consider the intersections of gender, political rhetoric, and public depictions, noting the increasing role that gendered popular culture plays in the ways that voters think about and participate in politics. Perhaps one reason popular culture is becoming more influential in our understanding of politics is because we see a growing number of strong female characters on television and other venues. Anderson’s edited collection considers programs such as *Madam Secretary*, *Scandal*, *Parks and Recreation*, and *VEEP*, examples of feminist comedians such as Amy Schumer and the women of *The Daily Show*, and other examples of feminist scholarship about popular culture. While some of the programming illustrates the prevalence of stereotypical frames through which to view powerful women, Anderson argues, “feminist interventions in political pop culture are challenging these stereotypes, diversifying the frames through which we observe political women and moving the culture beyond a simplistic understanding of women’s political identity.” According to Shawn J. Parry-Giles in her chapter on the “power paradox,” the examples in Anderson’s collection not only articulate “the continued anxieties that accompany women’s empowerment” but also examine the various “ways in which women in popular culture speak back to power from inside and outside structures of power.” As Parry-Giles concludes, “Until we are able to reconcile the goal of empowerment with the attainment of power, women will continue to be restrained by this power paradox.” Importantly, viewers may envision a more inclusive politics as they grapple with the challenges confronted by these female characters.

**Gender and international political rhetoric**

Women around the world are constrained by the power paradox. Empirical research demonstrates that at the beginning of their careers, women are just as interested in political issues as are men and harbor similar ambitions as their male counterparts, but public perceptions, a legacy of discrimination, media bias, and family responsibilities curtail women’s attempts at obtaining political power. Karen Ross assesses media coverage of female political figures and argues that politics around the world is regarded as a masculine job, despite more women achieving the roles of president and prime minister in recent years. As her analysis demonstrates, novelty and inauthenticity dominate not only coverage of U.S. political women but female political candidates and leaders globally.

What seems clear is that gender-differentiated coverage of politicians is a global phenomenon and a variety of factors are in play, including the circulation and routinization of gender-based stereotypes, the male-ordered nature of many newsroom environments, and the reliance on the ‘usual suspects’ as sources and subjects for news discourse.
Numerous studies confirm Ross's conclusions. For example, research on Australia's first female Prime Minister Julia Gillard demonstrates gendered media framing and negative public perceptions of an ambitious woman, or what Jamieson would identify as the femininity/competence double bind. Katrina Lee-Koo and Maria Maley identify a similarly gendered bind that confronted two Australian political women and that played out differently for each. They argue that the metaphor of the “Iron Butterfly” served to advance positive framings of Foreign Minister Julie Bishop's conservative femininity while Chief of Staff Peta Credlin’s more aggressive warrior persona was at the root of negative public perceptions. Battleground metaphors, which privilege masculinity and undermine a woman's competence, frame coverage of Canadian party leadership, whereas frames through which female politicians are evaluated in the European press tend to focus on their roles as wives and mothers. Australian Prime Minister Gillard went so far as to call out sexist and misogynist treatment in her widely publicized “Sexism and Misogyny” speech. Framing the speech as a strategic attack on men, an outpouring of emotions, and a hypocritical statement, media coverage served to undermine and minimize her charge, vilify her sexually, and facilitate the same gendered stereotypes that she brought to light.

A few studies of international political women demonstrate their attempts to challenge stereotypes. For example, Sharon Halevi conducts a rhetorical analysis of the ways Tzipi Livni’s “womanhood” was presented in the Israeli press in 2008–2009. She finds that while resistance to strict gender ideologies was present, they did not alter masculine assumptions about leadership in Israel. Einat Lachover confirms this claim in an interpretive analysis of media frames, finding that national television coverage of women in local Israeli elections is becoming more complex: both conforming to patriarchal norms of news coverage and also giving voice to feminist concerns. Content analysis demonstrates that even though Park Geun-hye, a female candidate in the 2007 Korean presidential primary, was presented to the public in stereotypical ways,80 she countered that coverage overtly on her candidate website. More hopeful still, Middle Eastern and U.S. media visually framed Muslim women as active participants in political protest coverage of the Arab Spring. Finally, research attempts to posit ways to close the gendered representation gap, such as more gender-friendly policies, childhood socialization, and changing traditional family norms, but scholars argue that none of these changes will take hold until women are more prevalent in politics.

Despite sexist coverage of women in international politics, young women around the world have long looked up to strong female leaders like Margaret Thatcher or Angela Merkel. Research on a new wave of women in right-wing parties, influenced by France’s Marine Le Pen, considers gender and activism in populist movements, such as the Latvian National Front and leaders such as Danish Pia Kjaersgaard. Feminist activism in right-leaning parties has not always been common, as Sylvia Bashevkin argues in her empirical analysis of the feminist rhetoric of Canadian women candidates. She finds that centrist as well as opposition parties were more likely to voice feminist concerns than right-leaning or leading parties; although women in right-leaning parties did not voice antibalstist positions.

While challenging gendered perceptions may not be advantageous for some political women, aligning with stereotypes does not guarantee success. For example, research on campaign and leadership styles suggests that women are more inclusive in their campaign strategies; however, this behavior may not be rewarded when it comes to public perceptions. Yet, in combination with an ethnically diverse country, female leadership has been found to reap benefits. Young-Im Lee conducts a compelling analysis of Park Geun-Hye’s successful campaign for South Korean president in 2012. Lee argues that Geun-Hye relied on feminine stereotypes as well as political experience, campaigning as “the well-prepared female president.” Her case provides an interesting counter to Anderson’s first-timer/frontrunner double bind. Finally, a great deal of
research exists on German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s rhetorical style, assessing the extent to which gender features in her campaign and leadership discourse. These case studies demonstrate the challenges and originality political women around the world bring to their campaigns and leadership roles. Often written from the perspective of strategic choices by individual women running to counter culturally constructed stereotypes and biases, these cases are instructive for any woman aspiring to a position of political leadership. As the next section demonstrates, such strategies are necessary, for we are far from moving into an age in which stereotypes and bias are passé.

2016 and beyond: stereotypes and intersectional rhetorics

Stereotypes have long been a part of politics and the 2016 U.S. presidential election was no exception. The hypermasculinity associated with the presidency was on full display along with attempts from female candidates to deploy these stereotypes to their advantage. Social media, a relatively new form of political communication, cemented its place in political discourse not only with regard to presidential contenders but gubernatorial candidates as well.

Gendered assumptions remained the norm during the 2016 presidential race, as Kelly Dittmar reveals in her discussion of themes in the first year of the campaign. Male candidates doubled down on masculinity, while female candidates did their best to combat negative stereotypes. Just as we have witnessed in previous election cycles, Republican candidates engaged in “locker room talk,” questioning the masculinity of their fellow male candidates and reinforcing the supposition that the presidency is a heteronormative masculine role. Sexist commentary is not party-bound. Bernie Sanders criticized Hillary Clinton’s stance on gun control by saying “all the shouting in the world” would not end gun violence. Republican Carly Fiorina was criticized not only for her speaking style but also her appearance. A journalist from The Guardian, Jeb Lund, described Fiorina’s speaking style as peculiarly peevish, soft talking, and Grinchy. Moreover, then candidate Donald Trump famously remarked: “Look at that face! … Would anyone vote for that?”

Bernie Sanders’ supporters, sometimes referred to as “Bernie Bros”—a derogatory nickname brought to popular usage by Robinson Meyer in The Atlantic—made their own mark on stereotyping. More often, Democratic candidates align with feminist concerns, but the Sanders-Clinton democratic presidential primary race in 2016 complicated this assumption. According to Kelly Wilz, Sanders donned the mantle of street fighter against the wealthy upper class and corporations, channeling a vein of masculinity. This street fighter mantra may have appealed to “a particular version of a political citizen whose investment in the campaign of Bernie Sanders straddled or crossed the line into a misogynist hatred toward Sanders’ main political foe.” These “Bernie Bros,” according to Michael Mario Albrecht, took to social media after Clinton won the nomination to spew gendered vitriol at delegates who voted for Clinton, many of whom were women. The issue illustrates the significance that gender issues continue to play in our contemporary politics, an issue that scholars must understand in all its complexity if we are to move forward toward a more inclusive politics.

Intersectional rhetorics

In some ways, the 2016 election provided a watershed moment for research on the intersections of gender, race, sexuality, and politics. Dara Z. Strolovitch, Janelle Wong, and Andrew Procter consider the political significance of aligning with or resisting white heteropatriarchy in 2016, while Donna Goldstein and Kira Hall see the election turning on a combination of “gendered
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and racialized nostalgia.” Paul Elliott Johnson focuses specifically on the demagogic strategies of Trump’s campaign, finding that it relies on “victimized, White, toxic masculinity.”

When it comes to understanding electoral behavior, intersectionality is an increasingly important factor for scholars to consider. The Democratic Party in the U.S., with its long-term identification with southern whites and association with segregationist policies, saw change along race and gender lines in the mid-20th century. As early as the 1930s, white men moved toward the Republican Party and African American women aligned with the Democratic Party. Gender is not the only determinant of voting behavior; race plays an important role as well. The 2016 election was a perfect example of this phenomenon. More than half of white female voters cast ballots for Trump while the majority of African American women and a plurality of African American men voted for Clinton.

Along with a shifting gender gap, one study posits a change in assumptions about representation. Perhaps due to movement in the intersectional vote share, conservative candidates can be read as aligning with women’s interests, as long as they include appeals and actions fitting categories of egalitarianism, inclusiveness, and responsiveness. A further challenge to conservative female candidates in 2016 was the line between supporting and endorsing candidate Trump. Scott Smith argues that New Hampshire Senate candidate Kelly Ayotte navigated this challenge in her 2016 election rhetoric, although unsuccessfully. By examining Ayotte’s response to the Access Hollywood tape scandal as well as her “discourse of renewal,” Smith finds that she was able to delineate between supporting conservative values and condemning President Trump for his comments about women.

One key reaction to the 2016 election and Trump’s inauguration specifically was the first Women’s March. Scholarship assessing the Women’s March considered critically the agency of women who are not normally cast as political actors and responded to feminist calls for increased attention to the intersections of race, gender, class, religion, and other differences in advancing social change. Held one day after President Trump’s inauguration, the first Women’s March was a grassroots organization that exceeded expectations when nearly 600,000 demonstrators took to the National Mall in Washington, DC. Many thought that because the march was not focused on one issue and was largely organized via social media, attendance and news coverage would be below expectations. To the contrary, Kristine Nicolini and Sara Steffes Hansen review media coverage of the Women’s March, finding that, for the most part, the event was conveyed to the public through four key frames in line with the organization itself: diversity, resistance, activation, and solidarity. Whereas previous protest coverage marginalized protestors, the Women’s March coverage was different in that social media, website, and email communication was central to framing the supportive and intersectional coverage picked up by national media outlets, with the exception of FOX News.

Not only was the Washington, DC march successful, but so were the marches in other cities. However, some scholars criticized the event for emphasizing a narrow interpretation of femininity, arguing that the march marginalized women of color and transgender women. Other scholars find both contradiction and resistance in the march as a form of protest. Anne Graefer, Allaina Kilby, and Inger-Lise Kalviknes Bore assess the “offensive humor” of the signs displayed at the marches, arguing “[p]rotesters and social media users attacked Trump’s patriarchal and racist policies and practices through the use of gendered and raced insults that simultaneously reinforced established notions of ideal White masculinity.” Similarly, Banu Gökariksel and Sara Smith find in the protests an intersectional moment that considers difference in various forms, but that also may reinforce an “imperial feminism.” However, Rachel E. Presley and Alane L. Presswood argue that the march addressed the notion of “intersectional justice” and explore new forms of activism and resistance that emerged.
Momentum continued with the 2018 primary and midterm elections. Female candidates not only performed as well as their male counterparts, but being a woman running for office was an advantage in many races. Some of these advantages came from institutional factors. Women tend to lean further left than male candidates, so they have a built-in advantage in Democratic primaries that becomes a disadvantage in Republican primaries. There also tend to be more female candidates to pull from in Democratic races. Even though women are advantaged in Democratic races, to find success electorally, they often need more experience than the male candidates they run against.

One strategy of the largely Democratic group of women new to Congress in 2018 is what Anderson calls “coalitional amplification.” Anderson described this as the process of “bolstering one another’s messages … and forg[ing] an intersectional feminist practice that [brings] together feminists of different genders, sexualities, ethnicities, classes, and ages.” The Washington Post columnist Monica Hesse takes note of the strategy used by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and others “to lift one another up or highlight each other’s accomplishments.” It remains to be seen whether the same sort of amplification will occur among the record number of women who declared their candidacies not only for the 2020 U.S. presidential election but for Congressional races as well. What is clear is that the media have not changed their playbook, providing women candidates not only less coverage in 2019 but less favorable coverage than the men running.

Conclusion

Arguments in the field of political rhetoric with a focus on gender coalesce in three intersecting areas: barriers of masculinity and bias, inventive strategies of resistance, oxymoron, and double binds. Just like the feminist scholarship that informs this chapter, one strong argument thread here points to the persistence of masculine assumptions that inform our understanding of political office around the world. Normative masculinity functions as a barrier to entry for female candidates and for male candidates who may enact their candidacies in ways deemed insufficiently masculine. This obstacle can be witnessed not only in choice of candidate strategy but also in media frames and even in informing a backlash that disciplines strong political women. Of course, examples are plentiful of women candidates and leaders speaking in ways that not only make visible but also actively resist masculinity’s stronghold on public perceptions of political office, our second intersecting theme. In particular, research on sexist and biased media coverage of women candidates and leaders remains an important thread that must continue not only to point out sexism but also to advocate for more gender-inclusive frames through which to present and evaluate political leadership. Confronting the double bind, our third intersecting thread for understanding research on gender and political communication, illustrates the difficulties of advancing a completely new understanding of political leadership. Like many of these studies demonstrate, stretching the boundaries in one direction may necessarily reinforce old assumptions in another.

Still, where do we go from here? The abundance of case studies on the rhetorical invention of individual women confronting stereotypes and deploying metaphors and binds in new ways suggests important work is being done to advance a more gender-inclusive understanding of leadership. That being said, what else are women to do? And perhaps that question is the problem. Individual women candidates and leaders are resisting and demanding they be taken seriously. We call for continued research that interrogates and seeks to dismantle the cultural constraints that make it difficult not only for women but people of color, and people of different sexualities, religions, classes, and ethnicities to achieve public positions of leadership. The advocacy and intersectional focus of research, especially since the 2016 U.S. presidential election, is heartening and
much needed to advance this kind of cultural shift. Moreover, additional research on contexts beyond the presidency—and more specifically beyond the U.S. presidency—is much needed. Our focus on U.S. contexts may block us from considering other ways of thinking and doing leadership that could advance our own understanding.

Despite its limitations, the research on gender and political rhetoric is rich, compelling, sophisticated, and responsive to ways we may enact a more accountable political culture. As the 2018 U.S. midterm election demonstrated, the face of leadership is changing. And as some of the cases in this chapter reveal, these shifts are taking place across the globe. Still, we have much work to do to dismantle masculinity’s hold on conventional understandings of leadership to bring forward a new chapter in the state of the art of research on gender and political rhetoric.

Notes


14 Campbell, “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation,” 133.


16 Jamieson, Beyond the Double Bind, 4.


18 Anderson and Sheeler, Governing Codes.

19 Jamieson, Beyond the Double Bind, 120–121.


22 Daughton, “Women’s Issues, Women’s Place,” 114.


29 Katz, Man Enough?


32 Campbell, “The Rhetorical Presidency.”


34 Campbell, “The Discursive Performance.”


39 Anderson, “‘Rhymes with Blunt’.”

40 Perks and Johnson, “Electile Dysfunction.”


45 Curnalia and Mermer, “The ‘Ice Queen’ Melted.”


K. H. Sheeler, S. Hawkins, and E. van den Bossche


51 Anderson, “Presidential Pioneer or Campaign Queen,” 525–538.


55 See Anderson and Sheeler, Governing Codes.


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