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## **“Texts From Hillary:” Political Meta-meming, Likeability, and Social Presence**

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### **Abstract**

In the age of viral social sharing, memes have become an increasingly important way for the public to engage in political debate and discussion. Through social media, politicians have an opportunity to participate in meme sharing with their followers, and to gain valuable likeability points with them by doing so. Hillary Clinton is one such politician, who created a meta-meme by participating in a viral meme about her, and was able to have some control over the narrative about her image as a result. The present research examined the uses of and responses to political meta-meming through analysis of both Hillary Clinton's meta-memes and the reactions to them in the news media as shared on social media. This thesis used a theoretical foundation of social presence theory, which in recent years has come to be used in a social media setting and can predict likeability based on effective participation in social media norms. Analysis was conducted through the lens of the femininity/competency bind to center an understanding of Hillary Clinton's image.

*Keywords:* Meta-meme, meme, political communication, femininity/competency bind, political humor, social presence, social media, Hillary Clinton

META-MEMING, LIKEABILITY, AND SOCIAL PRESENCE

“TEXTS FROM HILLARY:”

POLITICAL META-MEMING, LIKEABILITY, AND SOCIAL PRESENCE

by

Hanna K. Birkhead

B.A., Bates College, 2011

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Media Studies

Syracuse University

May 2016

META-MEMING, LIKEABILITY, AND SOCIAL PRESENCE

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In the spring of 2012, the Tumblr blog *Texts from Hillary Clinton* became a wildly popular, “hilarious, inescapable...phenomenon” (Weiss, 2012). Each of *Texts From Hillary*’s entries included a photograph showing a stone-faced Hillary Clinton sporting dark sunglasses and reading her cell phone on a military-style plane, while a hubbub of office workers takes place behind her. Each post’s accompanying text showed Clinton humorously belittling world political leaders, celebrities, and fictional characters alike, while appearing to be good friends with universally beloved figures like Meryl Streep (Lambe & Smith, 2012a). In one memorable iteration of this new meme, United States President Barack Obama texts Clinton, “Hey Hil, Whatchu doing?” Clinton’s reply? “Running the world.” (Lambe & Smith, 2012c).

In a matter of one week “that included 32 posts, 83,000 shares on Facebook, 8,400 Twitter followers, over 45K Tumblr followers, news stories around the world, [and] Renee Montagne from Morning Edition saying “ROFL,”” (Lambe & Smith, 2012b), *Texts From Hillary* was cemented as an unforgettable piece of pop culture. What happened next moved the blog to a more lasting space in the pantheon of popular culture, ahead of so many of the other memes and hashtags that go viral every day: its massive popularity prompted the subject of the blog, Hillary Clinton herself, to publically respond by creating and releasing her own version of the meme that *Texts From Hillary* made famous. Per Maura Judkis (2012) in *The Washington Post*, after Clinton’s contribution: “Twitter erupted: Hillary Clinton uses Internet slang! Hillary Clinton makes fun of her own scrunchies! Hillary Clinton might be the first cabinet member to participate in her own meme!” (Judkis, 2012).

Clinton’s masterful use of Internet humor twisted a popular portrayal of her, thereby allowing her to reclaim a measure of ownership of it. By taking agency in the cultural

phenomenon surrounding her, Clinton was able to gain some command of the conversation about her image, finally becoming “the cool kid” (Drexler, 2012).

This thesis investigates the uses of and responses to politicians’ engagement in meta-meming, or modifying an existing meme for their own benefit. Thus, the purpose of this exploratory case study was to develop an understanding of the uses of and responses to meta-meming by politicians, using Hillary Clinton’s example as described above. Throughout the research, meta-meming is formally defined using Anderson and Sheeler’s (2014) proposed definition of the political meta-meming trend: a meta-meme is “a message that invokes an existing meme while revising it and deploys the revision in order to generate a new meme” (p. 229).

### **The Importance of Likeability**

There are clear indications that in US politics, politicians’ personalities are often just as influential as their political rhetoric when it comes to getting them elected. A compilation of Gallup research in 2012 indicated that in every US presidential election since 1992, the presidential candidate with the higher likeability score has won the office of the presidency (Jones, 2012); other data collected by Wattenberg (2004) show that the winning presidential candidate had the higher likeability score as far back as 1952, with the exceptions of 1960 and 2000. Still more anecdotal evidence demonstrates that it is important for voters to feel that they can “have a beer” with their political representative (NPR, 2012). In each of these examples, it is clear that likeability is a tremendously significant factor in American voters’ assessments of politicians.

Given this knowledge, the type of cultural engagement exhibited by politicians who employ meta-memes should not be underestimated, as it could have implications in the

democratic process during the 2016 presidential campaign and beyond. Not only does meta-meming show that politicians are able to make fun themselves, but it also shows that they are able to understand and participate in cultural sharing – both of which have the potential to have an impact on a politician’s likeability and social acceptance.

Furthermore, reports indicate that capturing the youth vote will be crucial in the 2016 election (Shayne, 2015; Williams, 2015), as it appears to have been in the 2012 election (*Pew Research Center*, 2012). Given that the social media sites where memes and meta-memes are shared are largely populated with young, educated potential voters (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015), it is increasingly important to develop an understanding of how modern politicians work to situate themselves in popular culture through participation on social media and the sharing of Internet memes, and how their involvement is received by social media users.

### **Why Hillary Clinton?**

The use of Hillary Clinton’s meta-meme as the exemplar for this thesis is relevant for several reasons, despite its “old age” in the rapidly evolving world of viral social media sharing. First, Clinton remains a major player on the national political stage, as she seeks to become the democratic party’s nominee for president in 2016, and to then win the presidency itself. Many polls in the spring of 2016 show Clinton as the frontrunner both in the democratic race, as well as against her potential republican opponents (Agiesta, 2016). Furthermore, Clinton still frequently uses and makes reference to her meta-memes today, using the famous meme photograph as her Twitter avatar for almost two years (long enough so that when she eventually changed it, the shift made headlines in the *Washington Post* (Schwarz, 2015) and *TIME* (Worland, 2015), among others), and having the photo printed on the back cover of her 2014



book, *Hard Choices*. Her campaign also regularly uses the photograph in its social media posts (*HillaryClinton.com*, 2016). Finally, the meme is still frequently referenced in the media as a touchstone to describe Clinton's evolving image (Horowitz, 2015), and generates new search hits on an almost daily basis as of 2016. Signs indicate that the meme will still be used and discussed throughout the entirety of Clinton's potentially historic 2016 presidential campaign. For these reasons, analyzing this particular instance of meta-meming remains extremely relevant to developing an understanding of the uses and reactions to meta-memes.

### **Sharing News Online**

News articles shared on social media serve as an effective way of examining the reaction to meta-meming online. Data collected by the *Pew Research Center* indicate that as many as 30% of the general American population gets their news from Facebook, and nearly 10% of the general population gets their news from Twitter (Anderson & Caumont, 2014). Additionally, 50% of social media users have shared a news article on a social media site, and have discussed an issue in conjunction with that sharing (Anderson & Caumont, 2014). Thus, using content shared on social media to examine the reaction to meta-meming will likely capture a wide range of responses from a diverse group of users.

But beyond just the numbers, research shows that other conclusions can be drawn from what is shared on social media. Despite some researchers' contentions that information gathering on social media is typically limited to a person's homogenous circle of friends and acquaintances, Choi and Lee have shown that in actuality the typical social media user is exposed to a heterogeneous array of different types of news and opinions (Choi & Lee, 2014). Social media users typically see a diverse range of opinions in shared news articles, which can help them to form their own opinions. Further, Ma, Lee, and Goh (2014) have concluded that

when it comes time to share a news story themselves, “users are more likely to share news stories that they like,” (p. 612), meaning that sampling news articles shared on Twitter gives a good indication of what Twitter users were thinking about the event in question. Much of the current research regarding sharing news articles on social media strengthens the notion that an analysis of those articles will give a good indication of what users were thinking about a current event.

### **Key Concepts**

An analysis of meta-meming in US politics requires a multidisciplinary focus, as ideas pertaining to social media use, political communication, and humor must all intersect to provide a foundation on which to study politicians’ uses of meta-memes, and the public’s reactions to those uses. Additionally, this research examined Clinton’s meta-memes through the lens of social presence theory as it pertains to social media, as well as through the lens of the femininity/competency bind. These central concepts are briefly defined below, and will be expanded upon in Chapter 2.

#### **Social Media Use: Memes and Meta-memes**

“Normal” or popular use of social media currently encompasses the sharing of memes, which are pieces of culture that are passed from one person to another, or “cultural [trends] or [truths]...for communicating and collectively sharing cultural ideas through words, symbols and pictures” (Hubspot, 2012). Memes have been lauded as cultural phenomena and have been singled out for their usefulness in marketing, advertising, and communication campaigns (Daniele, 2013; Hubspot, 2012).

Closely related to memes, meta-memes are memes that have been appropriated by politicians and used to their benefit. Anderson & Sheeler (2014) propose a definition of meta-memes as a “message that invokes an existing meme while revising it and deploys the revision in

order to generate a new meme” (p. 229). The present study employed this definition of meta-meming in its exploration of how meta-meming was used strategically by Hillary Clinton.

### **Self-referential Humor**

Given that memes are generally comical (Davison, 2012), an analysis of meta-memes certainly requires an understanding of what it means to make fun of oneself. Therefore, it is important to have a working definition of this type of humor. Self-effacing humor has traditionally been seen as a negative form of humor, but some researchers have argued that it is better understood as a deliberate attempt to control a narrative, instead of as an action of self-hate (Juni & Katz, 2001; Lyttle, 2001). Other studies have furthered this line of inquiry and have shown that politicians can effectively use self-effacing humor to ingratiate themselves to their audience (Lyttle, 2001; Baumgartner, 2007; Stewart, 2011).

For the purposes of this research, I used the term self-referential humor as opposed to self-effacing humor, though the ideas of its construction will remain much the same as outlined above in terms of its usefulness at controlling a narrative. This change in language is because the humor employed in Clinton’s meta-meme references her in a multitude of ways, only some of which are effacing or deprecatory, which aligns with Stewart’s (2011) conceptualization of two types of political humor as used by candidates: self-deprecatory and other-deprecatory. Therefore, I chose to use self-referential humor in the analysis and defined it as political humor created by a politician, which refers back to that politician in some way and works to situate that politician’s image, both alone and in relation to others.

### **Social Presence**

Social presence theory refers to “the degree to which a person is perceived as a ‘real person’ in mediated communication” (Gunawardena, 1995, p. 151). When someone receives a

message via a medium, the degree to which that communicator feels positively about the other communicator and about the message being communicated is influenced by the degree of social presence in the communication. Social presence is an integral concept to this thesis, as it provides the foundation for my conceptualization of uses of and reactions to communication via the mediating presence of social media. In examining social presence in the social media world, Tu (2000) outlines several components of social presence, including on-line communication (normalized use of language, including the use of hashtags and other slang) and interactivity (normalized behavior and communication style, including quick response time and sharing of viral content) that are important to successful use of social media.

### **The Double Bind**

Jamieson (1995) first named the femininity/competency bind, which ensnares women politicians in a particular set of behavioral and physical cues. According to the femininity/competency bind, women politicians must not differ “from the female norm of femininity while [also not] exceeding or falling short of the masculine norm of competence” (Jamieson, 1995, p. 121). In other words, “the very characteristics that are expected of women hold them back” (Curnalia & Mermer, 2014, p. 27). Those women who can navigate this bind more successfully are better received by voters than those who do not. Hillary Clinton is particularly tied to these roles as a woman politician on the national stage, with Jamieson even devoting a chapter to Hillary Clinton as the “Rorschach Test” of the ideas of the double bind theory. Clinton is a woman who “[does] not live in a world of either-or...but of both-and” (Jamieson, 1995, p. 22). Throughout this thesis, I used the femininity/competency bind as a theoretical lens during coding and analysis to help structure the content of the messages contained within the memes and meta-memes.

### Research Questions

Given the changing political communication landscape and the emergence of memes as culturally meaningful units of shared communication, as well as the importance of politicians being able to connect with their supporters personally through social media, it is necessary to study the politicians who actively participate online in the political humor regarding themselves and their own actions through the use of meta-memes. In particular, Hillary Clinton's continued national recognition, and proximity to becoming the first woman president of the United States, creates a distinctive opportunity to understand the ways that she structures her image using these types of communication. Thus, this thesis examined the uses of meta-memes as a method of increasing Hillary Clinton's social presence and of creating her image within the femininity/competency bind. The present research also generally sought to better understand what the influence of meta-meming can be, and addressed three research questions in doing so:

RQ1: In what ways did Hillary Clinton's use of meta-meming work within the framework of social presence theory through normalized uses of language and behavior?

RQ2: In what ways did Hillary Clinton craft her image in her meta-meme within the confines of the femininity/competency bind?

RQ3: In what ways did news articles shared on Twitter respond to Hillary Clinton's meta-meming, including her uses of language and behavior in her meta-memes?

The following chapters provide the foundation for an exploratory study of meta-meming by politicians, using Hillary Clinton's appropriation of *Texts From Hillary* as the key exemplar. Chapter 2 gives a thorough overview of the key concepts defined above, and delves into the existing literature surrounding these topics and others to provide a theoretical framework on which I based this exploration. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in this thesis, while

Chapters 4 and 5 outline the findings of the qualitative coding I performed on the memes, meta-memes, and the media's response. Finally, Chapter 6 draws together the various themes found in Chapters 4 and 5 to outline the general uses of Clinton's meta-meme.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The study of Hillary Clinton's meta-meming is inherently interdisciplinary, involving ideas of meme culture, social media use in political communication, and political humor. The following literature review examines memes; social media use in politics; and political humor, especially self-referential humor, in order to develop a robust understanding of the many intersecting dimensions inherent in meta-memes. It also explores social presence theory's modern applications to provide a theoretical basis that draws these separate components together and creates a foundation on which to study Hillary Clinton's uses of meta-memes. Finally, it culminates in an exploration of the femininity/competency bind, as I used that bind as a lens through which to conduct the analysis of the content of the meta-memes.

### **Memes and Meta-memes**

The word "meme" was first conceived by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in 1976, who intentionally designed the word to be similar to the word "gene" in an effort to link how cultural information can be replicated and transmitted similarly to biological information. While genes are the part of every human being that carry codes of information through generations, Dawkins envisioned "memes" as being units of culture that similarly transfer ideas, practices, and knowledge from one person to another (Davison, 2012). In this way, memes become a sort of social way of coding cultural information, as a gene is with biological information. In recent years, memes shared on the Internet have become "the closest thing to a native cultural form the Internet has" (Marwick, 2013, p. 13), and have come to encompass the viral, shared aspects of social media.

As Internet memes have become more and more prevalent, with most large-scale public events resulting in user-made memes that quickly go viral online, the study of their meaning has

increased as well. Patrick Davison (2012) proposes an academic definition of an Internet meme as follows: “an Internet meme is a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission” (p. 122). The key term in this definition is the idea of influence: memes are not simply shared jokes, but carry with them some sort of power. By and large, the memes that go viral are humorous in nature, but also invoke emotion and invite citizen participation, among other attributes (Shifman, 2014). It is the emotional and participatory aspects that give the memes the social influence identified by Davison, whether by teaching something, providing social commentary, or simply by initiating feelings of shared togetherness in what can seem an increasingly individual world.

### **Memes as Political Criticism**

That memes stimulate participation is what makes them ever more a source of political communication in the form of discourse, criticism, and humor. In the past several years, research has explored the importance of memes in today’s political dialogue, pointing to them as the everyperson’s form of civic engagement and political satire (Plevriti, 2014; Shifman, 2014). It is easy to dismiss memes because of their humorous and seemingly fleeting nature; however, humor is intrinsically analytical of societal norms (Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009), and thus memes function as “[valuable]...public commentary,” (Plevriti, 2014, p. 42). Political memes thus gain their influence as an easily accessible way for people to be involved in political discourse (Shifman, 2014) and to think critically about political and social normalcy.

### **Meta-memes**

It is from the cultural sharing and political influence of memes that a new kind of meme has emerged: the political meta-meme. Anderson and Sheeler (2014) have recently proposed the



inaugural definition of the meta-meme, or the process that takes place when a politician modifies an existing meme to use for that politician's own benefit. They explain:

When political figures transmit or remix a meme in ways that are favorable to their personal brand, they create what we call a meta-meme. If memes are units of shared culture, meta-memes are the creative repurposing of said shared culture for strategic effect. A meta-meme is a message that invokes an existing meme while revising it and deploys the revision in order to generate a new meme. (p. 229)

Meta-memes are becoming increasingly popular today, with examples being created by politicians ranging from Barack Obama (Anderson & Sheeler, 2014), to the leaders of the Republican Party (Plevriti, 2014), to, of course, Hillary Clinton.

Meta-memes can capitalize on the use of memes in popular culture in several ways. If a meme makes fun of a politician, a meta-meme can show that the politician doesn't mind being teased, and indeed even understands and participates in the joke (Anderson & Sheeler, 2014). If a meme is an important method of social sharing (Shifman, 2014), a meta-meme indicates that the politician is an average person, and partakes in popular culture. If a meme criticizes a political position or provides a political opinion (Plevriti, 2014), a meta-meme can align a politician with that criticism or opinion. It is these multiple meanings and uses that make memes so potentially important for politicians to employ, and that thus make the study of meta-memes significant.

### **Twitter in Political Communication and Branding**

It is important to examine the venue for sharing of meta-memes, particularly Twitter, and its role in political communication. Today, Twitter is not only where a large number of people get their political news, but it is also where most political news is first broken, making it an essential component of the modern political communication process (Hamby, 2013). Old

methods of reporting politics and political campaigns are becoming obsolete “at a time when Twitter...[has] broken down walls between the political press and the public” (Hamby, 2013, p. 4), allowing for politicians to have a personal link to their supporters.

This has caused a recent multiplication of politicians conveying information on Twitter, instead of through the legacy media. Politicians now have a direct line of contact to supporters online, which allows them to regularly interact with their followers on a personal level, or at least to create the appearance of doing so (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012; Anderson & Sheeler, 2014). The personal engagement that Twitter can provide is valued highly among its users, with the politicians who interact personally with other users on Twitter rated more highly than those who merely use the platform to trumpet out headlines and soundbites (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012).

Still, research surrounding the use of social media in the 2012 presidential campaign shows that social media is still most often used in political campaigns to broadcast messages out to the public (Bor, 2013). This indicates that not much of a shift has taken place in the central components of the political communication process, but rather in the tools used to facilitate the old “one-to-many” methods of communication. Nonetheless, interview data from campaign experts shows that campaigns are aware of social media’s ability to “[maintain] a positive presence and [convey] humanizing qualities” (Bor, 2013, p. 1209), and that experts seek to expand those benefits in future campaigns. A growing body of research further points to the importance of politicians using informal and individual communication styles when using social media, citing the importance of using social media in a manner similar to their followers’ uses (Slotnik, 2009; Bor, 2013).

Consequently, Twitter has become a nearly essential component of politicians’ personal brand crafting. Hwang (2013) proposes a model of how to understand politicians’ uses of Twitter

and the potential enhancement of a personal brand that can stem from Twitter use. The proposed model states that if a follower evaluates a politician's Twitter activity positively, the follower will see the politician as being more credible and will evaluate that politician more highly. This once again highlights the importance of politicians participating in social sharing the same way that their followers do.

Linked to the idea that social media use can craft a political image is the idea that humor is also a central part in the creation of political brands (Săftoiu & Popescu, 2014). Therefore, the combination of social media use and humor is a potentially powerful one, and will be expanded upon in the next section.

### **Humor in Politics**

Political humor is a time-honored, well-studied tradition in American popular and political culture (Boskin, 1990; Lageson, Erensu, & Green, 2012). In addition to being a central factor in the creation of a politician's brand (Săftoiu & Popescu, 2014), humor is an essential component of broader cultural political discussion and debate (Tsakona & Popa, 2011).

However, humor that is produced by politicians themselves is a medium that calls for further study, particularly in the age of social media. As discussed above, politicians who interact with other users on Twitter are rated more highly by Twitter users than those politicians who do not interact (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012). It follows that politicians can thus greatly benefit from engaging in the same types interaction that their followers do, including the sharing of humor. This behavior can allow politicians to cultivate a reputation of interactivity and normalcy, and to engage in meaningful relationships.

In conducting an examination of Hillary Clinton's meta-memes, it is salient to examine self-referential humor, which is an intrinsic part of meta-memes. Stewart (2011) contends that

there are two types of humor employed by politicians on the campaign trail: self-deprecating humor, and other-deprecating humor, and that both are very important in terms of centering a candidate's image in a way that is positive to that candidate. Each type of humor can help a politician to state a position, to attack an opponent, or to gracefully sidestep criticism. Through their use of humor, "candidates are not simply the unwilling foils of the mass media's humor, but also may define themselves...through the use of humor on the campaign trail" (Stewart, 2011, p. 202). This conceptualization of political humor, particularly self-deprecating or self-effacing humor, is key to an understanding of how meta-memes can be strategic and helpful to the politicians that create them.

Though self-effacing humor has traditionally been seen as a negative form of humor, Juni and Katz's (2001) investigation of the subject postulates, "[self-effacing] humor is best understood as an attempt to control victimization" (p. 120). A person's adoption of self-effacing humor, which some social psychologists have argued is an inherently violent or masochistic response, indicating hatred toward the self, can be recast instead as being "adaptive and beneficial to the group's integrity and emotional well-being," (p. 120). This kind of humor can therefore be seen as a strategic, self-bolstering action instead of a problematic, self-hating episode.

Through their analysis of Jewish humor throughout literature and popular culture, Juni and Katz demonstrate that self-effacing humor is a powerful method of redirecting a narrative in a way that is favorable to the subject, and which serves various purposes. Self-effacing humor has additionally been linked to greater credibility, with the use of self-effacing humor in business settings significantly related to workers viewing the source of the humor more positively (Lyttle,

2001). Thus, self-effacing humor is consistently shown to allow the subject to regain control of a narrative and to reframe it in a self-favorable fashion.

Self-effacing humor has been found to have the positive effects enumerated above in the realm of politics and the Internet as well. Baumgartner's (2007) experimental analysis examined the impact of Internet political humor on the opinions of college students. A finding of this study indicated that respondents who viewed a humorous clip featuring an animated President Bush in the "first person," (that is, talking to the audience directly) were more likely to view the president in a favorable manner than those who did not watch the clip, though the clip was making fun of President Bush (Baumgartner, 2007). Baumgartner links this outcome to the fact that since the animated Bush was "talking" and "joking" to the audience, the video "[functioned] as a form of self-effacing humor" (p. 331). Here again, there is support showing that self-effacing humor can lead to outcomes such as greater credibility and positive attitudes, even when the humor is disseminated through a computer-mediated environment, as it was in Baumgartner's analysis.

As mentioned in the introduction to this research, I have chosen to substitute the term "self-referential" humor in the place of self-effacing humor throughout, as self-referential humor is more encompassing of the many uses and meanings that Clinton's meta-memetic humor has. While the term "effacing" humor suggests that the humorist is attempting to be less noticeable, in the case of political communication the use of this humor typically has the opposite intent of drawing attention in a positive way. Therefore, for the purposes of this research, self-referential humor gets at the true nature of this activity by recognizing that while this kind of humor can minimize and tease, in actuality it very much strengthens the subject.

### **Social Presence Theory Online**

Drawing together the above ideas of social media, humor, and political communication, social presence theory provides a foundational lens through which to study politicians' uses of meta-memes, and the public's responses to those uses. Short, Williams, and Christie (1976) initially defined social presence as the degree of salience (or presence) between people communicating via a certain medium. Communicators see media with a higher degree of salience as being social, personable, and positive, while media with a lower degree of salience are seen as being less personal, and are therefore viewed negatively (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). Even in its early conception, social presence theory provides a key foundation for the present research, as the idea of communicator salience and likeability is central to an understanding of why Hillary Clinton chose to engage in via meta-memes.

In a world that now contains the Internet and social media profiles for political campaigns, Lowenthal (2009) and Cui, Lockee, and Meng (2013) have provided overviews of the evolution and modern applications of social presence theory. Social presence has been applied in large part to examinations of its educational use in online learning, as researchers examine how students can best learn and communicate in a computer mediated environment. Lowenthal (2009) traces three distinct phases of social presence research in his inspection of its growth, and contends that we are in a fourth wave of this theory currently, which is inclusive of multi-method tools of learning and, importantly, communication via social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. A definition of this present wave of social presence is pointed to as: "the degree to which a person is perceived as a 'real person' in mediated communication" (Gunawardena, 1995, p. 151). This updated definition allows the theory to sit more firmly within

the scope of the present research, and provides a clear linkage to a study of social presence with regard to social media.

Online social presence has three distinct components: social context, on-line communication, and interactivity (Tu, 2000). On-line communication and interactivity, in particular, are central to an analysis of meta-memes. On-line communication “is the attributes of the language used on-line and the application of on-line language” (Tu, 2000, p. 29). The key to this concept is the idea that social presence is enhanced by normalized uses of language, and that it is important to communicate with others online in the same (socially acceptable) way that they communicate. Next, the interactivity component enhances the idea that participating on social media in a normalized way is key to social presence and therefore likeability: the actions and techniques used in communication on social media contribute to social presence; social presence is higher when similar techniques are used (Tu, 2000). These components together create a framework on which to analyze Hillary Clinton’s meta-memes and the responses to them through a social presence lens, by demonstrating that normalized use of language and interactive behavior are key to enhancing social presence.

In examining social presence theory’s application in social media, Cheung, Chiu, and Lee (2011) show that social presence is one of the biggest influences in social media use. Their study of why students use Facebook, examining social presence theory in addition to social influence and uses and gratifications, ultimately found that social presence had the largest influence on students’ decision to use Facebook. This again can be used to demonstrate that “proper” use of social media by politicians can lead others to find them more likeable, if social presence is a large contributing factor in their use of social media to begin with.

### **Social Presence in Politics**

Beyond the general study of social media, several studies applying social presence theory have examined social media environments specifically with regard to politicians' uses of social media. Eun-Ju Lee has been a pioneer in this area, publishing three pieces of research that show how politicians' uses of social media can be key to enhancing their likeability and credibility.

Lee and Shin's (2012) work examines social presence theory in relation to politicians' uses of social media. They found that a politician's interactivity on Twitter has a significant influence on users' impressions of and voting intentions towards that politician. Further, Lee and Jang's (2013) research focuses on examining direct interaction on social media as opposed to the reporting of that interaction on the news media; the main finding indicates that people have more positive attitudes towards politicians when they directly interact with them on social media. These findings support this thesis' contention that it is important for politicians to interact directly with their followers.

Expanding upon their initial study, Lee and Jang's (2014) research continues to examine how receiving a message from a politician on social media influences a person's attitude towards that politician, when compared to hearing the same messaging via an interview. The key finding of this study shows that among populations prone to using social media, exposure to a politician's Twitter page enhances a person's attitude toward, and intention to vote for, that politician.

These three studies are key to the conceptualization of social presence theory that allows it to be used as the foundational theoretical linkage for this research. An examination of Hillary Clinton's meta-meming draws into question her strategy and uses of memes and meta-memes, the nature of communication on social media, and the importance of personal engagement and its



connection to likeability. As examined above, social presence theory addresses these issues by asserting that the greater the interactivity and “correct” use of social media by people, including politicians, the greater their potential likeability.

### **The Double Bind**

Social presence theory provides the theoretical foundation on which to support the present study of meta-meming in political communication, as it helps to highlight the importance of using appropriate behavior for heightened likeability. However, this theory does not provide a way of structuring the various content-based themes within the memes themselves. In order to address those, I used a lens of the femininity/competency bind when analyzing the substance of the written texts present in Hillary Clinton’s meta-memes. As described in Chapter 1, the femininity/competency bind refers to the idea that women politicians must simultaneously fill two roles in their public life: that of a woman and that of a politician. However, those two roles are inherently contrasting each other: politicians must be powerful leaders, women must be emotional followers (Curnalia & Mermer, 2014).

### **Hillary Clinton**

There is a wealth of information from which to draw a literature review of the femininity/competency bind. Below, I have examined the available research specifically regarding Hillary Clinton to help provide a boundary to this review, both because Clinton is the subject of this thesis and because she is a uniquely well-known and influential woman, as evidenced by her record 20 times being named the world’s Most Admired Woman (Jones, 2015). Indeed, Jamieson (1995) noted in her work just how important Hillary Clinton is to an understanding of the femininity/competency bind. Even in 1995, before Clinton had been elected to the United States Senate, or had run for president twice, or had been secretary of state,

Jamieson had pointed her out as a particularly important component of the cultural understanding the proper role of a woman:

Hillary Clinton became a surrogate on whom we projected our attitudes about attributes once thought incompatible, that women either exercised their minds or had children but not both, that women who were smart were unwomanly and sexually unfulfilled, that articulate women were dangerous. (Jamieson, 1995, p. 23)

As such, Clinton can truly shed a light on the way the femininity/competency bind functions for women at a certain level of political life.

Interestingly, Clinton seems to sometimes inspire more rigid notions of the femininity/competency bind than other woman politicians do. Gervais and Hilliard (2011) conducted an experiment to rate peoples' willingness to vote for both Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin under different circumstances. Interestingly, they found that voters who found Palin to be "warm" were more likely to vote for her, but that voters who found her to be "competent" were also likely to vote for her, an unexpected result that seems to thwart the double bind. For Clinton, however, the double bind worked in a more expected way: those who rated her as warm were more likely to vote for her, while those who rated her as competent were not (Gervais & Hilliard, 2011). Perhaps Clinton's especially high-profile position leads to the public to expect her to hold to this bind even more than other women politicians.

Other research confirms this interesting twist in the bind for the two women. Research by Carlin and Winfrey in 2009 highlighted that Palin's traditionally sexier clothing was well-received in the media (that coverage itself being a form of sexism, of course), while Clinton's own forays away from pantsuits were met with disdain: "rather than being seen as attractive the way Palin's short skirts and tight jackets were, Clinton's feminine dress was seen as out of place

in the halls of Congress. For Clinton, a clear double bind existed” (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009, p. 332). While both women were objectified in different ways, the particular response that Clinton received shows just how carefully she must walk the lines of the femininity/competency bind, even when demonstrating femininity, and what the responses are like when she fails.

Curnalia and Mermer’s (2014) work examined Clinton’s famous “emotional moment” – an instant during the 2008 campaign when Clinton appeared to tear up during a campaign stop after being asked if it was difficult to run for president. Their analysis showed that in the media’s response just a few days after her expression of traditionally feminine emotion, Clinton was portrayed along both sides of the bind: “as a winner and loser, a broken-down ice queen and victorious strategist, someone who was unfeminine and yet could only appeal to women. She had set back feminism and inspired women” (Curnalia & Mermer, 2014, p. 31). These varying responses to Clinton’s becoming emotional illustrate clearly the ways that she (and all women) are constrained by the femininity/competency bind, and how she must adhere to that image. Clinton must fulfill many roles, and is scrutinized in the media for her failure to adhere to them, and for her appearance of behaving in a certain way based on strategy. This knowledge provides context for an analysis of the memes, the meta-memes, and of the media’s response, which are forthcoming in Chapters 4 and 5.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In order to best address the proposed research questions, a qualitative case study of Hillary Clinton's meta-meming is appropriate. According to Cresswell (2014), case studies allow the researcher to "develop an in-depth analysis of a case" (p. 52) by looking at multiple types of texts in relation to the central phenomenon being studied. Yin further expands on this notion by maintaining that case study analysis is appropriate when the researcher is attempting to explicate why or how a modern social phenomenon works (p. 11). In this case, the phenomenon of interest is Hillary Clinton's meta-meming, which encompasses both Clinton's creation and use of meta-memes, as well as the responses to them. Given the newness of this method of political sharing, an in-depth analysis was conducted to determine the possible breadth of results and reactions. Because this research sought to develop a thorough examination of this central phenomenon, I used a case study approach, as it allowed for an in-depth, well-rounded review of social media political interactions. Other methodological approaches might allow for focusing on one type of data but not several, and thus their analytic approach would not be as comprehensive to this particular scope of research as a case study's was.

#### **Data Collection**

In order to structure a robust case study of Clinton's meta-memes, two forms of data were collected: audiovisual materials (social media texts) and documents (news stories).

#### **Audiovisual Materials**

To develop an understanding of Clinton's creation and use of meta-memes, I first analyzed social media texts. These texts included the entirety of the *Texts From Hillary* blog's posts, including 32 versions of the Texts From Hillary meme; Clinton's meta-meme contribution to the blog; and Clinton's initial Twitter profile, including her avatar, Twitter biography, and first

tweet. Both Clinton's meta-meme and her inaugural days on Twitter were selected for analysis as they have been pointed to in the literature as examples of meta-memes (Anderson & Sheeler, 2014). Furthermore, it was germane to analyze the *Texts From Hillary* blog's output in its entirety, since Clinton's meta-meme referred to the blog with praise (Lambe & Smith, 2012a). As such, Clinton's meta-meme was considered to be an endorsement of the blog's message, causing the blog's content to become relevant to an understanding of her creation of the meta-meme.

### **Documents**

Documents sampled for this research were news media articles about Clinton's meta-memes that were shared on Twitter during the time of Clinton's meta-memes and the *Texts From Hillary* blog. Sampling these documents is significant to the study of Hillary Clinton's meta-meme for two reasons. First, research shows that social media users report being exposed to and exploring a wide range of news articles on social media, spanning multiple conflicting opinions (*The American Press Institute*, 2015). Therefore, sampling articles on Twitter presented a wide range of opinions and focuses on Clinton's meta-meme. Second, due to social media users' penchant for reading and sharing opinion pieces from newspapers (Bastos, 2014), Twitter's shared articles can be seen as reflecting public opinion of that topic, and therefore helped to develop a full picture of the responses to Clinton's meta-memes.

Articles were sampled through Twitter's own analytical tools. I had originally intended to use Topsy, a free online social media analytics tool that archived all public tweets from 2008 to the present and allowed a user to search tweets by hashtag, key words, and timeframe. However, between the writing of my research proposal and the actual data collection, Topsy was shut down by its parent company, Apple (Miller, 2015), (a change which is indicative of the evolution and

volatility of the social media analytics market). In that time, however, Twitter's own search function had become much more robust, and was able to adequately complete all of the searches that I needed to do in my sampling. Therefore, the loss of Topsy as a research tool was not detrimental to my research.

I searched for hashtags and terms including “#textsfromHillary,” “#tweetsfromHillary,” “texts from Hillary,” “tweets from Hillary,” “Hillary Clinton,” and “meme,” in the selected timeframes, which are expanded upon below. I also searched for variations of these terms, including common misspellings of Hillary and other words, to ensure a robust sample.

After executing the Twitter searches, I adopted a purposive method of sampling, using the maximum variation technique and attempting to find many differing types of articles regarding Clinton's meta-meme. Sampling here was as exhaustive as possible, though I acknowledge that it is impossible to have captured every article shared on social media during the timeframe, given the limits of the Twitter search function (which “filters search results for quality Tweets and accounts” (Twitter, 2016)), and the volume of tweets that appeared when searching the proposed search terms.

### **Sampling Timeframe and Sample Site**

Analysis of digital sharing trends shows that the average lifespan for sharing viral memes on social media is just one day (Maiaroto, 2013). Interview evidence from professional content experts states that viral content typically “lasts at most a few days and begins to trail off pretty quickly thereafter” (Henderson, 2012). Therefore, the chosen timeframe for both data samples included the dates that Hillary Clinton's meta-memes first appeared (April 4 – April 10, 2012 for the visual meta-meme and the *Texts From Hillary* blog, and June 10, 2013 for her use of the meta-memetic content on Twitter), plus two days afterward for each. Since news articles would

be shared during the time of the meme's viral popularity, I sampled both the memes and the news articles during those time periods. Sampling on the day of the meme plus two extra days after each meme ensured that the lifespan of the meme's initial virality was encapsulated, and that there was ample data from which to sample.

The nature of the central phenomenon being studied, and of the social presence theoretical lens that was employed in this research, are both tied to social media use, and so the sampling site for this research was entirely Internet-based. Specifically, sampling took place on the site of the *Texts From Hillary* blog, and on Twitter. Clinton's meta-memes were created, seen, and shared on social media, and thus sampling took place in the memes' native areas. Sampling of the news media documents also took place solely on the Internet, by only selecting articles that were shared by users on Twitter.

I chose to only sample documents that were shared on Twitter for two reasons. First, the modern social presence theory lens through which I analyzed the meta-meme requires online interaction and deals mainly with uses of and responses to communication on social media, with many applications of the theory focusing on Twitter. Secondly, sampling only articles that were shared on Twitter provided a helpful limitation to the scope of the study: meta-memes are largely shared and discussed on social media, and so it was relevant to sample only the sharing of information and ideas surrounding the memes that takes place on social media as well.

### **Access to Data**

For the most part, access to data was not a difficulty in this research. The *Texts From Hillary* blog in its entirety remains online, and its authors mention in their final entry that "the site will stay up," though they will no longer be contributing to it (Lambe & Smith, 2012b). Furthermore, Clinton's own meme and screen shots of her original Twitter page and biography

have been shared online thousands of times, so they were accessible throughout the research as well. Still, I downloaded and saved each of the blog's entries and the meta-memes to ensure that the data remained accessible during coding and analysis.

As mentioned above, I only selected documents to be sampled if they had been linked to in users' tweets, in an attempt to capture what information or point of view on Clinton's meta-meme users found to be interesting enough to share. Therefore, it was salient to only access the documents that were freely available online as well.

### **Data Analysis**

Each set of data was analyzed and coded through textual analysis. As the study of meta-memes is a relatively new topic, I borrowed from a grounded theory open coding approach to code both types of data, in which the researcher attempts to structure a general process of the topic at hand (Cresswell, 2014). Given the nature of the data and limitations in this particular project, which will be expanded upon below, it was not feasible to create a robust theory of meta-meming. However, I still employed the principals of thorough data analysis from grounded theory open coding.

Of course, textual analysis means that alternative readings of the data are possible. The results chapters that follow represent my evaluation of the texts, but my analysis certainly does not preclude other equally valid interpretations. Hall (1980) writes that just as content creators "encode" their creations with certain intentions, so to do the readers of that content "decode" it based on their understanding of it. Brennan (2013) similarly maintains that textual analysis is an inherently "subjective endeavor" (Brennan, 2013, p. 207). Therefore, while I have ventured to code the data with an incorporation of diverse viewpoints, my own personal lens certainly colors the forthcoming analysis. In particular, it is important to remember that I have used the



femininity/competency lens while coding the content of the memes, meta-memes, and media response, and am responding to the content differently than if I had chosen to use a different lens.

I identified themes as they arose during the coding. The social presence theory lens that is used in this research elucidated the themes with regard to meta-meming and likeability that I expected to find in the data. I gave particular attention to focusing on the aspects of social presence described above, including social norms of language and interactivity on the Internet like hashtags, meme sharing, and humor. Within this coding framework, each item in the datasets was analyzed using a line-by-line method, helping me to probe deeply for latent meanings in the content. I gave additional emphasis to structuring absences, particularly with regard to the meta-memes, with the idea that what Clinton's messages are not saying might be just as important as what they are.

### **Role of the Researcher**

It is important to acknowledge the researcher's role in the present study. I am a young, white, educated, liberal woman, as well as an avid user of Twitter. The coupling of those characteristics make me not only one of the most likely people to vote for Hillary Clinton (and indeed I just recently voted for her in the 2016 New York State Democratic Primary), but also one of the most likely people to share and engage with Internet memes. That a social media user and a fan of Clinton's conducted this research affects the findings, as I was perhaps inherently more inclined to view Clinton's meta-meming in a positive light than a detractor of Clinton's, or meme culture, might be. Still, qualitative research demands that researchers incorporate their own points of view into the research being conducted, and thus the conclusions drawn from this research are still relevant to any future examinations of meta-meming in politics.

### **Chapter 4: The Meme and Meta-meme**

As Clinton's creation and release of the meta-meme can be seen as an endorsement of the original memetic content (surely she would not respond kindly to the *Texts From Hillary* meme if she did not support or approve of the messages that it worked to convey), it is first essential to conduct an examination of the memes themselves that went viral and prompted her meta-meming. In conducting a thorough examination of the *Texts From Hillary* content, several themes emerged which paint a picture of a fictional Clinton that the real one carefully sought to further publicize and legitimize.

#### **The Meme**

Throughout this analysis, the femininity/competency bind is used as a lens and as a theoretical grounding point, as the memes in some instances enhance the complicated roles to which women politicians must adhere, while eviscerating those roles in others. Dissecting the ways in which this takes place provides a fruitful basis on which to discern the cultural and political significance of these memes.

The memes portraying Clinton have a heightened sense of both an ultra-femininity and ultra-competency that the real-life Clinton could never achieve in her non-fictional constraints. They work to both undermine and expand upon the femininity/competency bind in certain ways, explored below. This enhanced femininity/competency bind "2.0" shows her as being the most competent (and indeed often aggressive) person in the room, and not traditionally feminine, but sexual and sexually desired. Thus, the ultimate message of the memes' themes is one of a sharp sense of both Clinton's power and her womanhood, a sort of superheroic female politician.

Similarly to reforming the femininity/competency bind, each of the major themes found in the thirty memes also thwarted the media's traditional narrative of Hillary Clinton at every

turn. The media often implies that Clinton is inexperienced or not qualified for a top political job because she is a woman (Carroll, 2009, p. 6); in the world of the meme, she is the most powerful figure there is. It is popularly thought that Clinton is not cool, and is out of touch with the public; in the memes, she not only easily understands and makes cultural references, but even has a hand in their creation. News media often paint her as a “man-killer” or shrew (Lawrence & Rose, 2010 p. 199), but in the world of *Texts From Hillary Clinton*, she is sought after and is implied to lead an active sexual life. These themes are also woven into the analysis below and provide additional insight into what prompted the real Clinton to create the meta-meme.

### **Shifting the Femininity/Competency Bind**

In dissecting Clinton’s portrayal in the memes, it is first important to note that the Clinton of the memes was created by two men; this knowledge colors this analysis of both the content of the memes and the audience’s perceptions of them. In textual analysis, the content creator’s intent behind the content can certainly be taken into account when trying to discern the meaning of the data. Brennan writes that “the intended or dominant meaning is what the text’s creator hopes we will all understand and take away from the text,” (Brennan, 2013, p. 200), and should be sought out. While alternative readings of the data are possible in a textual analysis based on a researcher’s own lens as they decode the content, keeping the creator’s intent in mind is important to developing a full picture of the content.

*Texts From Hillary Clinton* was created by Stacy Lambe and Adam Smith, “two gay guys, who had the idea on the rooftop of Nellie’s, a popular D.C. gay sports bar,” (Buzinski, 2012). Smith and Lambe are white, gay men, and Washington, D.C. area communications professionals, who noticed the photograph of Clinton and began to wonder who she could be communicating with. Smith and Lambe have stated that they created the meme out of love for

Clinton and intended it to be wholly flattering of her. Lambe in particular has noted in interviews that “the photo of Hillary is just brilliant. She looks so badass. How could you not be inspired by it?” (Iezzi, 2012). The creators have outright articulated in interviews that they love Clinton, and intended the meme to be a positive portrayal of her, saying: “we built the site to show that she's this rock star” (Simonetti, 2012).

The identity of these creators works within a reading of the memes in several ways. First, it may shed some light on why Clinton chose to create her meta-meme. As Witt, Paget, and Matthews (1994) point out, women candidates often seek to:

...obtain endorsements from people whose own power and prestige can enhance her own standing and impress the voters. Until very recently, of course, most of these figures have been men. Used strategically, they could reassure voters on key elements of a woman's competence or credentials. (p. 121)

While Clinton neither sought to have these two men “endorse” her through their creation of the *Texts From Hillary* memes, nor are Stacy Lambe and Adam Smith powerful or prestigious politicians to whom the public looks for political guidance, Witt, Paget, and Matthews' above assertion is still relevant to our understanding of the memes. The effect of their white, masculine structuring of her image perhaps offered some “power and prestige” to this portrayal of her in the public eye (one can easily imagine this meme being far less popular if created by a controversial feminist writer).

Further, the memes creators additionally influence how Clinton is portrayed in the memes and the ways in which the memes thwart the femininity/competency bind. The effect of these male creators in and of itself enriches our understanding of the memes' shifting of the femininity/competency bind in that Smith and Lambe, being unbound by those roles, can speak

for Clinton in ways that she herself cannot speak for herself. Rebecca Traister (2010) points out the various ways in which people other than Clinton have historically been able to speak for her, as Clinton is held to the various obligations of female candidacy in the way that non-politicians, or lesser-known people, are not. For example, about *Saturday Night Live*'s influential portrayal of Clinton and Sarah Palin throughout the 2008 campaign, Traister writes: “[Amy Poehler had the] ability to say what Clinton never could have: “I invite the media to grow a pair. And if you can’t I will lend you mine”” (p. 261).

The same could be said here. The Clinton represented in the memes is far more outspoken than woman politicians are typically allowed by cultural norms. Whereas “women candidates are warm, compassionate, kind, and passive; men are perceived as strong, knowledgeable, tough, direct, and assertive” (Dolan, 2008 p. 116); the memes time and again show Clinton as possessing the latter characteristics, thus casting off the femininity/competency bind in large part. Perhaps meme-Clinton’s ability to rise above and beyond the standards typically set by the public for female competency can be attributed to the fact that this fictional portrayal of her was created by two people who themselves are not bound by these restrictions because they are men, and thus do not know to adhere to them, whether innately or explicitly.

Finally, the creators both being openly gay is significant, particularly given that Hillary Clinton has long been viewed as a “gay icon,” helping her to largely garner support from those voters in the 2008 election (Kennedy, 2008). *Texts From Hillary Clinton* itself has been examined in work examining the creation of “diva” narratives in popular gay culture, with Smith and Lambe’s creation of Clinton noted for the way she navigates power in her texts to other prominent figures, becoming “a model for contemporary gay iconography,” (Gilson, 2015). This knowledge both gives extra context to finding a positive portrayal of Clinton in the memes, and

also colors the kinds of jokes that were included in the memes and which were not. This will be expanded upon later in this chapter.

**Visual Elements.** In analyzing the memes, I found that their visual elements first paint a striking picture on their own. Two photographs of Clinton are used interchangeably in the original memetic content; both were taken on the same day, in the same place, and at nearly the same moment, but one is in black and white and has a wide angle, while the other is in color and focuses more closely in on Clinton from the side. In each photograph, Clinton is wearing dark sunglasses that obscure her eyes, and her face is devoid of expression. She sits in a large, leather seat on a military airplane, with stacks of papers organized neatly in front of her. Behind her is a knot of people standing, as well as a few sitting; all are several feet behind Clinton, or further. The background is chaotic while she is tranquil – indicating that Clinton is the center of calm, giving her an almost zen-like state while disorder reigns behind her (and appears via fictional message on her phone). Looking down, holding her phone to one side in one hand, she seems to be taking a quick break in the middle of the other work that piles carefully on the desk in front of her.

Clinton's physical presence in the photograph adheres to the femininity/competency bind very neatly and expectedly, as this is a real picture of her at work, where she must most embody those roles. Though Clinton is indeed the central figure in the photograph and is shown as being in charge, embodying the notion of competence as described above, she also exhibits traditionally feminine traits: she has long, coiffed blonde hair, which is flipped outward at the ends, evoking a 1950s hair-flip, a deeply nostalgic and feminine style. Further, she wears prominent jewelry in the form of a colorful necklace and a brooch, signaling her femininity

again. The intersection of femininity and competency here walks the line that women politicians are expected to walk.

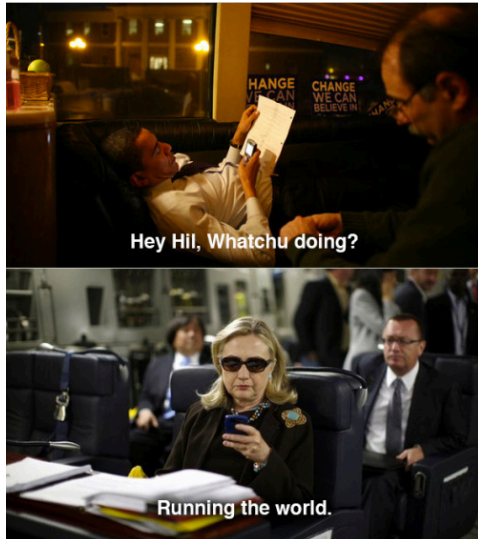
It is when this photograph is coupled with another photograph that the meme creators' work comes into play. In each meme, one of these two similar images of Clinton is then coupled with a photograph of someone else, sending her a text message. When juxtaposed with the accompanying photographs used in the memes, the composed image of her becomes all the more striking.

**Case Study: The Obama Meme.** The initial meme of Clinton and President Barack Obama presents a case study of precisely how the memes' visual juxtapositions behave in the ways described above, and also of the importance of their written content. This meme was the first to appear in the blog, and was the meme that went the most viral, with the highest number of shares on the Tumblr site (Lambe & Smith, 2012), which makes it particularly significant to this analysis as shares connote higher levels of user engagement than do likes (Redsicker, 2014). It also shows how the femininity/competency bind was thwarted and enhanced in the memes, and will set the stage for further analysis to come in later sections of this chapter.

In the meme, Obama texts her, "Hey Hil, Whatchu doing?" and Clinton replies, "Running the world" (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Note: for space reasons, only certain memes are included in the text. Images of all the memes can be found in Appendix A.



*Figure 1.* Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.

The visual content of the juxtaposed photographs is striking here: President Obama is in repose on a couch, with a wrinkled shirt and in dim yellow lighting. He is paying more attention to his phone than the paper he is holding, in essence appearing as a teenager lounging and playing games while avoiding homework. When this image is apposed with the one of Clinton surrounded by work on a busy plane, the effect is to highlight her as the competent one in their relationship. The language of this meme is important to shaping and pushing the bind as well. Obama texts her, “Hey Hil, Whatchu doing?” and Clinton shoots back, “Running the world.” If she is running the world, he is not doing so – again, the Clinton in these memes is more powerful and in control than the President of the United States.

It is in content like this where the femininity/competency bind is most explicitly thwarted. Where the femininity/competency bind theorizes that women must not “[exceed] or [fall] short of the masculine norm of competence” (Jamieson, 1995, p. 121) but rather must meet it exactly, Clinton clearly far exceeds the president’s competence in this case, both visually and verbally; in this way, the fictional Clinton is able to cast off her real-world constraints through the mouthpiece of Smith and Lambe. The content’s rejection of the competence bind is allowable



to the audience because, after all, the Clinton of the memes is a fictional portrayal, not an autobiographical one. Furthermore, the gendered approval of Clinton by Smith and Lambe comes into play: her role in the memes is acceptable because it was created and promoted by men.

With this meme, it is easy to see how *Texts From Hillary Clinton* is already working to push the boundaries of the femininity/competency bind; the Clinton of the memes is more competent, certainly, than the man who holds the highest office in the land. It thus serves as a microcosmic representation of the power of *Texts From Hillary*: Clinton is physically feminine, but ultra-powerful. That this meme was shared the most times out of all of the memes provides an indication that the public enjoyed and appreciated the view of Clinton that was being portrayed here (13,952 times on the Tumblr, 10,000 more than the average number of shares on that site (Lambe & Smith, 2012)).

The lens of the femininity/competency bind through which I coded the memes means that there are other interpretations of the content above, particularly with regard to President Obama. If coding with a lens of critical race theory, Obama's physical positioning in the memes, as well as the written content of his texts, could point to this meme being more negative or critical of Obama than it is praising of Clinton. Here, the knowledge of Lambe's and Smith's intentions as creators of the meme can come into play in my reading of them: knowing that the creators set out to make the Tumblr overall flattering to Clinton does suggest that they had positive intentions toward Hillary in making this particular iteration of the meme, and were not concentrated primarily on portraying Obama negatively. Nevertheless, the creators' statuses as white men perhaps had an impact on their (intentional or unintentional) tying of Obama to long-held stereotypes of black men as lazy.

**Continuing Bind Shifts: Ultra-Competence.** Though the other memes shown in *Texts From Hillary Clinton* take on different subjects, and therefore have their own complicated interpretations and lenses, they follow the same patterns as those described above. As such, they reinforce their messages and reframing of Clinton's persona. Several of these memes are analyzed below, with a concentration on how they craft Clinton's heightened competence both visually and verbally.

**Visual Competence.** The meme featuring former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and former President George W. Bush is another good illustration of the memes' visual power and the ways in which they thwart a traditional narrative. It shows the two on a small airplane, drinking coffee and chatting with each other across the aisle (Figure 2).



Figure 2. George W. Bush, Condoleezza Rice, and Hillary Clinton.

They wear and are surrounded by pastel colors and light, instead of the cavernous darkness of the black-and-white version of the Clinton photograph that accompanies it. Clinton wears sunglasses, while Rice and Bush do not, furthering her image of power. The two photographs

next to each other makes Bush and Rice look disorganized, small-time, and frivolous, while Clinton shoots back cool answers from her dark, solitary desk, unruffled and all-knowing.

Like the Obama meme above, an alternative interpretation of this meme might center on mocking the fact that George W. Bush is often thought of as being unintelligent. Condoleezza Rice's portrayal here is also complicated; though she once held the same job as Clinton, she is not treated to the same powerful portrayal that Smith and Lambe give Clinton. Again, however, Lambe and Smith's positive intentions toward Clinton support a reading of this meme as being ultimately aimed to enhance Clinton's image, even as it also worked to detract from Bush and Rice's.

The accumulation of similar imagery in the other memes paints Clinton as a central figure in United States political and cultural life. People from both sides of the aisle and many different fields text her eagerly; she replies, from the same seat, on the same plane, wearing the same outfit and an unchanging, stony expression. When viewed in succession, Clinton becomes a calm, serious, studious figure, while the world constantly seeks her help. Furthermore, because two nearly-identical photographs of Clinton are the only ones used of her in each and every meme, the collected effect of the blog as a whole seems to indicate that she is getting all of these texts in the space of a few moments. The memes' audience is left to extrapolate that this must be what all of Clinton's days are like – briefly doling out advice and sarcasm when called upon, and remaining focused on her work. Her competency as a politician is continually enhanced through these repeated visual cues.

***Political, Cultural, and Personal Competence.*** The imagery described above becomes all the more important when viewed over and over again in conjunction with Clinton's words in the memes. The text messages she sends and receives in the thirty versions of the meme further

highlight Clinton as a politically and culturally powerful figure, one who seems to be at the center of everyone's lives, and who answers the pleas of a diverse group of people (and presidents). These themes further work to nullify the fictional Clinton's adherence to the competency aspect of the femininity/competency bind, and are highlighted and expanded upon below.

Clinton appears not just politically strong and authoritative, but perhaps even the most powerful figure in US politics. In eight out of the thirty entries from the original *Texts From Hillary Clinton* Tumblr page, Clinton is communicating with her fellow politicians, almost entirely men. The inclusion of these figures in her fictional texting conversations works in two ways: they are first a simple reminder to the audience that Clinton is important enough in stature to be on texting terms with American political leaders including Barack Obama, Joe Biden, George W. Bush, John Boehner, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Mitt Romney, Sarah Palin, Timothy Geithner, and Anthony Weiner. The interactions that Clinton engages in here can only be imagined by the members of the public who are reading the blog; that she has President Obama's and former President Bush's cell phone numbers cannot be underestimated, as it reminds meme readers of Clinton's importance on the national political stage.

But the significance of Clinton's political power in these memes is derived not just from the fact that she is texting these political figures, but in how these communications occur. In all but one of these political images, Clinton is the texted and not the texter; she is sought out for political advice, counsel, friendship, or even sex (which will be expanded upon in its own thematic breakdown later in this chapter), while she responds briefly, bluntly, snarkily, eschewing the traditionally feminine traits that are ascribed to women politicians.

The Obama meme analyzed above sets the stage for these memes in which Clinton continues to be hassled by others, and indeed proves her competency to be above and beyond that of the largely male politicians who seek her correspondence: Joe Biden sends her YouTube videos and texts her a bar story, while she asks him to get back to work, a cross between boss and a maternal figure. Mitt Romney asks for advice on the campaign trail as he runs for the presidency in 2012, and Clinton advises him to drink, indicating that she herself has coped with election losses in that way (and providing a sly commentary on his Mormonism, as Mormons cannot drink alcohol). The secretary of the treasury texts her about the economy, and Clinton has no sympathy for the difficulty of his job. Sarah Palin texts her, “I’m not a regular mom. I’m a cool mom. Right Hillary?” to Clinton’s reply of “Please stop talking.” (Both texts in this particular example are quotes from the movie *Mean Girls*, a significant cultural reference for young people of a certain age, which will be expanded upon in its own theme below.) Clinton is brief, she is brutally honest, she does not have time to play games, and she is sought after by some of the most powerful people in the United States. Her competency is absolute, and her demeanor casts off those traditionally feminine notions described above.

The summed effect is to make Clinton seem like the first point of contact for political inquiries from leaders on both sides of the aisle. Building on the memes’ casting off of the femininity/competency bind, this “ultimate authority” storyline is a significant way for Clinton to be portrayed in popular culture. It is particularly noteworthy given that one of the prevailing narratives about women running for the presidency in the United States remains that they lack even the most basic qualifications for the role, since the “unspoken requirements for the job are defined in masculine terms” (Lawrence & Rose, 2010, p. 33). Given that predominant cultural characterization, the memes’ casting of Clinton as not only a being politically powerful person,

but being the *most* politically powerful person among others, signals an important cultural shift in thinking about her and perhaps even about women politicians more broadly.

***Competence With “Real People.”*** Significantly, the only non-celebrity person featured in the entirety of the *Texts From Hillary Clinton* is a woman, in black and white, who texts Clinton seriously: “It’s 3 am and I think something’s happening.” This is a reference to Clinton’s famous 2008 campaign ad that asks viewers who they want to be solving problems in the White House when the rest of the world is asleep (TIME, retrieved 2016). In the meme, the black and white photograph of Clinton responds simply: “On it.” (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Unknown woman and Hillary Clinton.

In the midst of a series of memes showing Clinton to be biting and belittling to most anyone else who texts her, this meme serves as the sole sobering and abrupt reminder of actual politics found on the *Texts From Hillary Clinton* page. It fits in somewhat with the content around it by drawing on a cultural touchpoint – in this case, providing an answer to the public commentary on that ad from the 2008 election. It also emphasizes and adds to Clinton’s brand of hyper-competency that the other memes work to build. However, there is no humor in the exchange

between Clinton and the concerned citizen. As such, it references her competency and political abilities more concretely than any of what has been described above.

Both Clinton and the texter are rendered in black and white, linking them visually and heightening the seriousness of the situation. Whereas in other memes, the photograph of Clinton is often the opposite of the photograph of her texter (if the texter is shown in color, she is in black and white, and vice versa, particularly when Clinton is being antagonistic towards the person texting her), the photo choice here highlights her sameness with the woman texting her. Further, the woman is rendered with a plain white background, making Clinton's bustling background of a military plane suddenly become all the more potent: rather than highlighting how lazy or insignificant her colleagues are being portrayed, now this background seems to indicate that she has already called the troops into action; they flurry behind her, perhaps working to get to the bottom of the citizen's request. Clinton's affirmative reply of "on it" only heightens this sense.

Finally, there is the pure fact that this citizen has Clinton's phone number, and that they are texting each other. As with those memes that showed Clinton to be on texting terms with the most powerful political and celebrity names of the day, this meme also illustrates her texting contacts. This time, though, her contact is impressive in a different way; the message here is that she is willing to directly answer the call of any average citizen. This meme, and its placement as the most serious content in an otherwise humorous collection of memes, has a powerful effect.

**Continuing Bind Shifts: Enhanced Femininity and Sexuality.** As the memes worked to enhance Clinton's competency and power with other politicians and real people, they also addressed the other side of the bind: femininity. Through powerful female friendships and sexual desirability (inasmuch as normalized sexual activity denotes a type of femininity), Clinton is

shown in the memes to embody a kind of feminine power that can contribute to the memes' upholding the femininity/competence bind by continually reminding audiences of her womanhood.

Tellingly, the memes feminizing of Clinton left out any mention of Clinton's motherhood, and barely any of her status as Bill Clinton's wife. Clinton's position in both of these roles has long been questioned in the media, beginning in 1992 with her "cookies" gaffe: while on the campaign trail for her husband, "[Clinton] made [a] famous remark about how she supposed she could have stayed home and baked cookies while her husband was governor of Arkansas, but instead she'd chosen to continue her career as a lawyer" (Wickersham, 2013). Leaving this image-defining moment out of the *Texts From Hillary Clinton* purview indicates an interesting trend in how Smith and Lambe constructed meme-Clinton's heightened femininity. Rather than showing texts from Chelsea Clinton, or even many from Bill Clinton, the memes instead construct Clinton's womanhood through friendships with other women, and through sexual power. Ignoring the traditional maternal and wifely aspects of femininity points to just how much the memes were focused on heightening Clinton's power.

***Female Friendships.*** Clinton's femininity and womanhood in the memes is portrayed in one way through her friendships with the women celebrities who contact her. Anna Wintour, the Editor-in-Chief of *Vogue Magazine* texts Clinton "H-B..." prompting Clinton to text back "I-C" – four letters which mean "head bitch in charge" when strung together, a popular way of denoting strong womanhood on the Internet. Rachel Maddow texts her "Who run the world?" and Clinton responds "Girls," in reference to the Beyoncé song that made that refrain famous, and serving as a second instance of two women lauding each other and their gender in these text message exchanges. In the blog's second-most-viral meme, Meryl Streep texts an invitation to



brunch (an extremely popular fad with millennials) (Ferdman & Ingraham, 2015). Clinton replies: “Obviously” (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Meryl Streep and Hillary Clinton.

Clinton is affable and close with these women who are at the top of their respective fields, and engages with them on a level of female empowerment and support. Significantly, her responses to these messages also call upon her knowledge of pop culture, which will be expanded upon in my later discussion of her larger cultural status in the memes.

Given the relationships described above, it is curious that meme-Clinton’s particular brand of powerful female friendships does not extend to all of the women with whom Clinton is in contact in the meme. She sometimes gives sarcastic or belittling responses to women including Sarah Palin, Oprah, Lady Gaga, and one of two memes featuring Anna Wintour. It is easy to think of explanations for some of these: Sarah Palin is a political opponent (and an easy target for many on social media), Oprah offers her a free car when Clinton is riding on her own plane, and Anna Wintour provided Lambe and Smith with an excellent opportunity for a *Devil Wears Prada* pop cultural reference. Perhaps these discrepancies from the friendly female relationships described above indicate more about Lambe and Smith’s ideas for cultural jokes

than they do about the nature of meme-Clinton's feelings about powerful women. They may also indicate the creators' own feelings toward these particular women celebrities, or ideas about the value of their work. Still, Clinton's negative response to Lady Gaga, for example, (Figure 5) highlights the fact that not all female friendships are valued in this fictional world – perhaps only those who have reached a higher level of celebrity than Lady Gaga are part of Clinton's exclusive club.



*Figure 5.* Lady Gaga and Hillary Clinton.

This is one of the only examples found where the overall effect of Clinton in the memes is not supportive of feminism or female empowerment. Even so, however, Clinton's responses to women largely do not fall into the pattern of heightened aggression seen in her communication with men, helping these particular communications to strengthen the theme of female strength found throughout.

Absent in this theme of strong female relationships is any notion that Clinton is gay. This is a pervasive rumor that has followed Clinton and been covered in some news media for years,

with *Hillary Clinton Quarterly* reporting: “the day that Hillary Clinton became First Lady, speculation about her sexual orientation started in earnest” (Marafiote, 2013). A search of headlines on this topic from the early months of 2016 shows some commentators speculating that “Hillary Clinton ‘Could Be Our First Lesbian President,’” (*Huffington Post*, 2016) and that “Hillary Clinton ‘Will Be Having Sex With A Woman’ In The White House” (Wong, 2016). It is in the absence of gay jokes that knowledge of the meme creators’ intent again comes into play in a reading of the content. The fact that the memes did not venture into this territory for jokes speaks to the fact that the creators of *Texts From Hillary Clinton* are gay, and likely would not want to lend credence to a line of jokes that has largely been a way for conservative pundits to demonize Clinton to their base (those two headlines above come from Glenn Beck and Bryan Fischer, two conservative figures who commonly make “anti-gay declarations,” (*Huffington Post*, 2016)). This shines another light on how Smith and Lambe intended for Clinton to be viewed in the memes, and lends credence to a positive interpretation of them.

When male celebrities text Clinton in the memes, she reverts back to responding icily, as she did with the powerful politicians as explored above. She responds to Jay Z, one of the richest and most powerful male artists in the music business today (Stanger, 2015), with a message asking who is texting her, a variation on the “new phone who dis” meme used when people wish to appear above or to insult the person who has texted them (Galbreath, 2016). She deletes Mark Zuckerberg’s Facebook friend request and, in a second meme involving him, asks him to put on a shirt with a “big boy collar,” a belittling comment on Zuckerberg’s personal style. She rejects Jon Stewart’s request for her to appear on the Daily Show with the news that she has already accepted a spot to appear on the competing Colbert Report. While belittling men does not necessarily connote strong womanhood, Clinton’s aggression in these messages harkens back to

the theme of the changing femininity/competency bind that the memes portrayed above where she was equally aggressive with her male colleagues. In this way, the memes again show Clinton as proving her power and competency above that of men's, while remaining traditional notions of femininity and womanhood through female friendships, sharing brunch, and sexual desirability.

*Sexuality.* There has been an attempt on the part of scholars and media personalities to “recast femininity as a transgressive opportunity to claim sexual power” over the past decade (Keenan, 2008, p. 379). In keeping with this cultural shift in thinking about femininity, this theme upholds the women politicians' required femininity in a particular way with regard to sexual power and desirability. With this theme, the memes take a decades-old perspective on Hillary Clinton (this time, the idea that she is not a sexual or desirable being) and provide a completely different portrayal of her persona.

Popularly, Clinton's sexual identity has been portrayed through the notion that she must not have a sexual past (or present). This idea was brought into the public consciousness through the Monica Lewinsky scandal during Bill Clinton's presidency (which is referenced in the memes, as Bill Clinton accidentally sends a text meant for Monica to Hillary, who handles it coolly) and solidified seemingly through that public fear of seeing strong, powerful women in charge (Traister, 2010, p. 66). It was particularly played for jokes in the wake of the scandal, with popular opinion largely saying: “had Hillary Clinton been a satisfying sexual partner, the president would not have strayed” (Lawrence & Rose, 2010 p. 202).

In contrast to this, Clinton in the memes is sought after sexually and yet consistently denies the sexual advances of others; a theme which further twists and brings new meaning to the femininity/competency bind. Mitt Romney, Anthony Weiner, Ryan Gosling, and Jeff Winger, a

fictional character on the television show *Community*, each send Clinton a “booty call” message. Mitt Romney sends her a selfie and it is implied that Anthony Weiner sends her a picture of his genitalia (referencing his famous sex scandal). Clinton summarily rejects both of their advances (“Not a chance, Mittens”), as well as those of Ryan Gosling (that particular meme referencing his own Tumblr blog), and Jeff Winger. Clinton being shown as desirable in this way is significant given the largely negative social conversation surrounding her body and physical features (Traister, 2010, p. 66, 261) that paints her popularly as a “harpy, shrew, [and] boner-shrinker” (*Saturday Night Live*, 2008).

It would be easy to assume that these particular memes merely add more jokes to that aforementioned prevalent idea that Clinton is either inherently nonsexual or else made so by the fact that she is not attractive enough to warrant any sexual attention. However, the message of the memes is somewhat more complex than that. Her response to Jeff Winger is “Not tonight, Winger” (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Joel McHale as Jeff Winger and Hillary Clinton.

Her response of “not tonight” implies that this text message exchange has taken place before, and perhaps there have been other nights where her response to his text was something different.

Likewise, she responds to Anthony Weiner’s implied “dick pic” by saying “is that it?” indicating that she has seen more impressive bodies than his. Her lack of shock or outrage at receiving the picture can even be interpreted as her having been engaged in a conversation with him before this – perhaps that she had even requested the picture. The phrasing and content of both memes seems to indicate that Clinton has been involved with some of these men before, or at least has been engaging them in conversation beyond just the text messages that we see; thus, this theme brings a new layer of understanding into the construction of Clinton’s sexuality and womanhood. Here, she is sought-after, sexually active, and in control of her sexual encounters. A core tenet of Clinton’s public persona is struck down, and a new one is shaped.

### **Pop Cultural Context & Virality**

Beyond meme-Clinton’s heightened political competency and femininity as explored above, other messages in the original memes serve to highlight Clinton’s cultural popularity as well as her own celebrity. This theme in particular draws on not only themes similar to those discussed above, but also draws on the recent history of Clinton, and indeed feminism more broadly, being a mainstay of popular culture and social sharing. Traister (2010) devotes an entire chapter of her book to this idea, outlining the ways in which Clinton’s 2008 White House run was covered (and in some cases assisted) by “pop culture warriors” like Katie Couric, Ellen DeGeneres, Oprah Winfrey, Barbara Walters, Rachel Maddow, Amy Poehler, and Tina Fey, among others. Traister credits these pop cultural women with “the fusion of feminism and funny” (p. 262) that persists to this day. Vincent (2014) similarly postulates that modern feminism is an “academic movement [that has been] embraced by the mainstream,” pointing out

the many ways in which feminism has swept popular culture in recent years. This groundwork of feminism's pop cultural power likely contributed to the creation of the meme and set the stage for its extreme virality, and also helps to contextualize the themes of Clinton-as-pop-cultural-maven which are explored below.

**Pop Cultural Cachet.** In the memes, Clinton is an important figure in pop culture. She appears as a sort of omnipotent figure who not only has a deep knowledge of American popular culture, but also is instrumental in orchestrating scandals in real life and plot developments in fictional worlds. For a woman who has struggled at times with appearing to be hip or connected, or with understanding the life of average Americans, Clinton's role in the memes is one that works to cast her as a part of American culture, and one of which she must have been aware as she chose to give legitimacy to the Tumblr's messages through her creation of the meta-meme.

Clinton appears as a supreme figure in pop culture. The memes reference various scandals, plot developments in popular shows, and other moments that are cemented in the cultural zeitgeist as shared reference points for the citizenry, and the Clinton of the memes has both the knowledge and the cultural quotes to show her being as interested in these cultural developments as we are. From the Clinton family's own Monica Lewinsky scandal, to Kanye West interrupting Taylor Swift at the MTV Video Music awards in 2009 (Kreps, 2009), from quoting popular movies including *Mean Girls* and *the Devil Wears Prada*, to quoting popular hip hop music, the Clinton of the memes knows all, and is ready with a comment on these moments in pop culture. Throughout the memes, she engages in behavior that is socially normal and accepted on the Internet, and that would not be expected of the real Clinton. That perceived socially normal behavior contributes to her social presence, and, ultimately, greater likeability.

Furthermore, meme-Clinton has a hand in orchestrating scandals of her own. She is shown in one meme telling Tareq and Michael Salahi, the infamous “White House Party Crashers,” (Argetsinger & Roberts, 2009) that she is sure they can attend a state dinner with no invitation (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Tareq Salahi, Michael Salahi, and Hillary Clinton.

Of course, the couple did do just this in 2009, resulting in embarrassment and accusations that the then-newly formed Obama Administration had weak security procedures that allowed these people to enter the White House unnoticed and unchecked (Cooper & Swarns, 2009). In the world of this meme, Clinton was behind all of this – playing pranks and wreaking havoc on her former political rival from behind the scenes: the meme was accompanied by the text “every now and then, Hillary likes to cause a national security breach for fun” (Lambe & Smith, 2012). Not only, then, does this meme reinforce Clinton’s presence in American culture, but it again increases her competency – she can cause trouble for the president “for fun.”

Similarly, Clinton is also able to insert herself into fictional worlds and interact with characters. In one meme, she texts the characters of *Pretty Little Liars*, an ABC Family television



show in which a group of girls receives mysterious texts from “A,” the show’s primary villain, an unknown person who appears to know everything about them and may in fact be their deceased best friend (Figure 8).



*Figure 8.* Hillary Clinton and the cast of *Pretty Little Liars*.

As with the party crashers, Clinton here seems to be a sort of omnipotent figure playing the world as a giant chess game, moving people, sending texts, and giving information with no one’s knowledge. She is not only working hard and keeping us safe, but is indeed orchestrating many of the scandals that keep the public occupied.

This cultural status and involvement paints her as an even more powerful figure, and yet at the same time a person who is “normal” – in that she enjoys pranks, makes jokes, and is interested in popular culture. This is significant because it is in sharp contrast to some of the typical touchstones of her public persona and the way she is portrayed in the media: as out-of-touch, not relatable, or too elite (Leibovich, 2015). Like the portrayal of Clinton as the most powerful and qualified politician in the game, the meme again tackles another core tenet of her public persona and works to shift ideas of her in another direction.

That the meta-meme tapped so precisely into the cultural moment that supported funny feminism is likely one major reason for its popularity. Contextually, however, it must also be said that Clinton's political power and likeability were at a high point leading up to the time when the memes were released, which certainly contributed to the memes' particular vision of Clinton and their subsequent popularity. As Traister (2010) elaborates:

Zipping around the world, keeping her head down and her nose to the State Department grindstone, [Clinton] worked so quietly in her first year on the job that some pundits assumed that she had had her wings clipped. (p. 293)

Later that year, Clinton achieved higher favorability ratings than those of Obama, a fact which Traister attributes to:

...a depressing truth: that it was easier to embrace this woman in a state of diminished power, once she had lost the big prize, when she was no longer threatening to the chances of a cool guy. (p. 298)

This political context sheds additional light on the virality of the memes and their acceptance into popular culture (as well as why the creators would think to make a meme of her): Clinton's general popularity at that time, coupled with absence of presidential or legislative power, certainly could have set the stage for her to be eminently likeable in a nonthreatening sense – in a fictional meme.

Still, the memes' popularity documents peoples' willingness to accept women politicians shown in a different light. Per Limor Shifman's (2014) work on the cultural importance of memes, political memes act in three intertwining ways: "(1) Memes as forms of persuasion or political advocacy...(2) memes as grassroots action...(3) memes as modes of expression and public discussion" (p. 122). Of particular importance to this analysis is the third prong, which

paints memes as “accessible, cheap, and enjoyable [routes] for voicing one’s political opinions” (p. 123). Given this knowledge, the virality of these memes becomes even more significant, as they point to a cultural psyche of citizens willing to voice their positive opinion of the flattering representation of Hillary Clinton that Smith and Lambe intentionally created.

### **The Meta-meme**

The accumulation of the Texts From Hillary memes paints a strong, detailed picture of Hillary Clinton: one where she is central to American life both politically and culturally, she is sought after for many different reasons, and she is a woman who is considered to be powerful, desirable, and sexual. As described above, the themes that emerged in analyzing the memes are each in sharp contrast to typical media portrayals of Clinton. The messages of these images were certainly taken into consideration when the real Clinton created her meta-meme on the back of this meme in order to participate in and capitalize on its virality.<sup>2</sup> The notions that she is more competent than her fellow politicians, that she is on a friendly basis with some of the most popular women celebrities in the world, that she is desirable and sexually active, that she is central to culture and to the thoughts and concerns of so many – these are what Clinton undertook to emphasize by bringing even more light to the meme.

### **Strategic Mimicking**

Clinton’s first meta-meme (Figure 9) drew upon the established meme rules in all of the usual ways.

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<sup>2</sup> As mentioned in the methodology chapter of this thesis, it is unlikely that Clinton herself physically created the meta-meme. Although the meme was likely created by her communications team, Clinton certainly would have needed to see the Tumblr and sign off on the meta-meme, and the effect of the meta-meme is of Clinton’s participation. Thus, I will continue to refer to the meta-meme as being “her creation,” for ease of language.



*Figure 9.* Adam Smith, Stacy Lambe, and Hillary Clinton.

The meta-meme rightly follows the same structure as the memes in the Tumblr that came before it; a mimicking that is specified in the definition of meta-memes (Anderson & Sheeler, p. 229). It makes use of the black and white picture of Clinton that the Tumblr blog had used, continues by including pictures of the blog creators on their phones, and finally adds a second photograph of Clinton, in a slight deviation from the norm. It is telling that Clinton chose to use the black and white picture in her meta-meme, in which she cuts an imposing figure, cast in black and white, with the grand scale of a plane of people behind her; the picture in color, taken at closer range and clearly showing the floral accessories she is wearing, was not chosen. Figure 10 shows Clinton's initial Twitter page, which is her second instance of meta-meming – here again, the black and white picture was chosen.



Figure 10. Hillary Clinton's Twitter page.

Perhaps this photograph choice indicates an inclination to enhance the ultra-competent theme of the memes as much as possible, at least visually.

### Deviations

However, despite Clinton's adherence to the "rules" of the meme in her creation of the meta-meme, several things about this meta-memetic content set it apart and shed some light on the differences between Clinton's intentions and strategies for the meta-meme and the original memes (beyond the obvious). Most meaningfully, Clinton's response to the meta-meme sees her place herself squarely back within the normalized femininity/competency bind that the meme had so often sought to go above and beyond those stereotypical roles. As Lawrence and Rose (2010) point out, Clinton's very existence in the top echelons of public life "[challenges] the definition of femininity, and her own grasp on womanhood" (p. 38), thereby making it difficult for her to be viewed as normal by members of the public. Thus, while the memes (that Clinton sought to legitimize) brought her persona to a new level of both competence and a particular kind of modern femininity, she herself still felt that she had to diminish that in her own response to the meme, perhaps as a continuation of the work she had been building on her image upon the past.

As such, her meta-memes draw into account something that had not been included in the Tumblr meme at all: her personal style. Her initial meta-meme's most overt self-referential joke makes a mention of "scrunchie time," calling back to the scrutiny that Clinton's hair has received in the media over the years. This is something that Clinton has leaned upon heavily in her public persona in recent years, with her 2014 book *Hard Choices* including the quote:

When I began this book, shortly after leaving the State Department, I considered a number of titles. Helpfully, the Washington Post asked its readers to send in suggestions. One proposed 'It Takes a World,' a fitting sequel to 'It Takes a Village.' My favorite was 'The Scrunchie Chronicles: 112 Countries and It's Still All about My Hair.'" (Clinton, 2014, p. xiv)

Her inclusion of this kind of comment in her autobiography sheds light on its importance to her own crafting of her image, and contextualizes its use in her meta-meme. Including this content in her meta-meme shows her sticking to a typical path of making fun of herself while at the same time emphasizing her prowess. This fits in with the notion of self-referential humor as a way of situating one's image in a powerful way, even while the joke might seem to deprecate.

Likewise, Clinton's Twitter biography contains other self-referential humor in the inclusion of the phrases "hair icon" and "pantsuit aficionado" among the list of her many impressive descriptors. Indeed, those two self-referential entries received a lot of coverage in the media, directly leading to Clinton being characterized as "a witty, self-effacing and almost hip netizen" (Rucker, 2013), which was perhaps the intent behind the inclusion of that content. However, Clinton's hair and clothing had not been referenced once in the original meme's content. Instead of drawing upon these image-based attributes that had previously made up so much of the cultural jokes about Clinton, the meme instead made her funny in another, more

positive way. By creating the meta-meme and giving her endorsement to the meme's content, Clinton sought to endorse to this new view of her. It is interesting, then, that in her response she reverted back to the old ways of denigrating herself.

In essence, Clinton's meta-meme tries to walk the fine line of both endorsing the content which came before it, and drawing more attention to that content – but also maintaining her image as a female politician: one who cannot just come out and belittle male politicians, cannot be seen as too sexual, cannot be seen as not sexual enough, cannot truly give her opinion or be in charge. The Clinton of real life is constrained in all of the ways that the meme Clinton is not, and her meta-meme's choice of self-referential humor shows that, even as her choice of visual content, and her endorsement of the meme, sought to reinforce it.

Another explanation for Clinton's use of hair and clothing humor is that it might have been a way of bringing a kind of femininity back to her image in response to the meme. While the meme did paint her as a desirable person with a certain kind of femininity, as discussed above, it also showed her in a light that is not feminine in a traditional sense. The extreme power the fictional Clinton exhibited over all of the men who texted her in the meme, and her embrace of feminist pop culture touchpoints like "HBIC" both showed her as being strong and powerful in a way that she may have sought to personally soften, even as she embraced or endorsed others' saying it. Her references back to her hair and clothing, then, provide a reminder of a more traditional womanhood; her need to concentrate on her fashion choices and hairstyle becomes apparent when bringing the content of the meme into the real world, and not just in a fictional Tumblr blog. This can be seen as an adherence to role congruity theory, proposed by Eagly and Karau in 2002, which states that "prejudice toward female leaders follows from the incongruity that many people perceive between the characteristics of women and the requirements of leader

roles” (p. 574). Clinton’s own embrace of more traditionally feminine traits in her meta-meme, then, show her forming herself back into those roles.

Beyond the picture, the initial meta-memes betray some of Clinton’s real persona in a different way as well, in the form of the language used throughout. In the original meme, some of Clinton’s texts were written in misspelled and abbreviated “Internet language,” and some were not. In most cases in the meme, Clinton responded using the opposite language of whoever had texted her: if they used abbreviations, she wouldn’t, and vice versa. In her initial meta-meme, however, she exclusively uses Internet-speak. Since the Tumblr often portrayed her saying things such as “lolz” and “bitch please,” Clinton was able to respond to them using language such as “ROFL” and “G2G” – and spread that use into her Twitter account, which premiered later that year with the hashtag #tweetsfromhillary, referencing the Tumblr and her persona on it. While the idea of Clinton using this language was funny in the original meme, the effect of her actually using it in the meta-meme shows that she is trying to capitalize on and fit in with the new image of her as being “cool.”

Clinton’s response through the meta-meme is especially important given research by Tucker-McLaughlin and Campbell (2012) that finds her to typically be stripped of a voice in news media coverage of her. Although, of course, much news coverage is devoted to Clinton every day, particularly while she is running for office, research has shown that she is not often called on to provide her own active voice in news coverage of her. Journalists rely on interviews about her and in videos of her speaking elsewhere, rather than seeking her input in stories (Tucker-McLaughlin & Campbell, 2012). With this knowledge, Clinton’s meta-meme increases in importance. By responding to the Tumblr and creating her own post for it, Clinton adds an active voice to the conversation. With that voice, she validates the ideas presented in the Tumblr,



though she says she is laughing at it, and uses self-referential humor in her discussion of it, strengthening her own agency in her image. Her response to *Texts From Hillary Clinton* catapulted Clinton's public image into one where she was able to add to and control the political humor surrounding her in the public eye.

## Chapter 5: The Response

Examining the news reaction to the meme and meta-meme is salient to this research as it allows me to identify a wide range of opinions regarding Clinton's image in *Texts From Hillary Clinton* and in her resulting uses of that image. As previously explained in Chapter 3 of this thesis, Twitter's shared articles on a particular topic can be used in research as a reflection of the public opinion of that topic, due to social media users' penchant for reading and sharing opinion pieces from newspapers and other news sources (Bastos, 2014). As such, the media's response to *Texts From Hillary Clinton* and Clinton's meta-memes provides further material for this case study by helping to develop the full picture: the meme, the meta-meme, and finally, the public's response.

### The Sources

I expected to find a wide range of opinions and focuses on *Texts From Hillary Clinton* and Clinton's meta-meme, given data from *The American Press Institute* that illustrates the many varied types of media that are typically shared on Twitter (*The American Press Institute*, 2015). Indeed, the nearly 70 articles selected for coding spanned the spectrum from *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Politico*, *TIME Magazine*, and *The Atlantic Wire*, to *Buzzfeed*, *The Huffington Post*, and *The Hollywood Reporter*. There were openly republican sources (*Red Alert Politics*), and democratic sources (*DelawareLiberal.net*). National, local, and international (*The Vancouver Sun*) media sources were all represented, as were feminist and women-based publications (*Ms. Magazine*, *The-Broad-Side.com*), pop-culture focused magazines (*Glamour*, *US Magazine*), and small personal blogs. In this way, the sample of articles coded does fulfill the research design's intention of capturing a wide range of media sources.

It is important to note here that due to the limitations of the timing and methodology of this thesis, it is difficult to know how many times each of these articles was tweeted. As

indicated in Chapter 3, I searched for these articles using Twitter's own search functionality, which allowed me to search for selected phrases and hashtags, and their spelling variants, within the specified timeframes. Once the searches had been completed, I used purposive sampling, using the maximum variation technique, attempting to capture as many individual and varied articles as the search functionality would let me see. This technique allowed me to derive common patterns from a diverse sample. Given the particular time and search constraints of this research, I am unable to locate exact numbers with regard to exactly how many times each article was tweeted. Still, many of the articles selected for coding appeared several times during the search, which signals the virality of some of this content on Twitter.

### **Partisan Bias?**

Despite the fact that the wide range of sources found in the coding formed a relatively robust sample, as described above, there are two unique characteristics about the sample itself that certainly color the forthcoming analysis. First, it is true that many of the well-known publications incorporated in the sample (including *The Washington Post*, *Politico*, *The New York Times*, and *The Huffington Post*) are often popularly thought to show a bias in favor of a liberal point of view. These four publications in particular have audiences that are rated in research as being more consistently liberal (Blake, 2014). They also regularly appear on non-academic lists of "most liberal media outlets" (Shor, van de Rijt, Ward, Askar, & Skiena, 2014), which indicates the popular sentiment surrounding these sources.

Furthermore, sources in the sample including *NPR*, *Time*, and the *Wall Street Journal* (in addition to some of those mentioned above), have all been rated with scores of above 60 on a political bias scale where more conservative publications rank closer to zero, and more liberal ones closer to 100 (Dubner, 2012). Perhaps these ratings inflate the liberal bias of each

publication, particularly given that this rating system originally comes from a conservative-leaning book entitled *Left Turn: How Liberal Bias Distorts the American Mind* (Grosseclose, 2011). However, data collected by the *Pew Research Center* corroborates the finding that these particular sources are both used and trusted more by liberal people than they are by conservatives (Michell, Gottfried, Kiley, & Matsa, 2014). Thus, while some outlets included in the coding had a conservative bent, and many others are not well-known enough to have a commonly agreed upon political bias, the fact remains that a large part of the sample used in this research is thought to be predisposed toward the left.

The reasons for and importance of this liberal-leaning bias in the coverage of the meme and meta-meme are debatable. I first assumed that I found more liberal-leaning articles to code because liberal publications are more likely to cover a woman, particularly Hillary Clinton, so these articles appeared in the searching simply due to their greater volume. However, this supposition is actually not supported in the literature: Shor et al's (2014) news media analysis of more than 3,000 publications found a moderate positive relationship between "conservative" media outlets and the amount of coverage of female subjects. Their findings indicate that conservative-leaning news sources are more likely to cover women (though their analysis used data regarding celebrities and athletes in addition to politicians).

Thus, it seems that the particular ratio of liberal media outlets to conservative media outlets in the sample may not have to do with which sources were more likely to cover news about Clinton, but instead might provide a good indicator of what kinds of people were largely reading the coverage of *Texts From Hillary Clinton* and finding it compelling enough to share on their social platforms. Demographic information regarding Twitter users shows that they tend to be younger and more highly educated than the general population (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe,

Lenhart, & Madden, 2015). Furthermore, young, educated people have been found to be “the most liberal age group” (Kiley & Dimock, 2014). It follows then, that the high proportion of left-leaning media sources selected for coding simply represents who is on Twitter – young, educated, liberal people – and is not necessarily indicative of a broader lack of conservative coverage of *Texts From Hillary Clinton*, or of a problem with the sampling methods.

The importance of the sample’s possible liberal bias is perhaps extremely significant to the resulting analysis. For example, Groeling’s (2008) study of how major news networks cover presidential candidates found support for the idea that “liberal” news networks will cover their candidates more positively, and the opposing candidate more negatively, and that “conservative” news networks will do the opposite. For Hillary Clinton, this friendly effect may be mitigated by her gender (for example, some research shows that Clinton is referred to more informally than her male counterparts by both liberal and conservative journalists (Uscinski & Goren, 2011)). Still, the idea that this study’s liberal sample may have been predisposed to cover her candidacy positively is interesting and provides context for the thematically positive findings to come below; in particular, that the media found the meme to be a flattering portrayal of Clinton, and that journalists largely understood *Texts From Hillary Clinton* to be a reflection of the real-life personality of Hillary Clinton.

### **Gender Bias?**

The second unique characteristic of the sample that gives context to the forthcoming analysis is the fact that a majority of the response articles coded herein were written by women. Thirty-four of the articles coded for this research were written by women (48%), twenty-three articles by men (33%), and the remainder written by either unnamed authors, a combination of

men and women authors, or authors whose gender could not be determined by their byline (19%).

With a number of the sampled articles written by unknown authors, mining this particular bias is only so helpful. Still, the particular gender breakdown of the coded articles' authors is telling, given past research that indicates that men by far outnumber women in news bylines, televised news coverage, and newsrooms. Indeed, research conducted by the organization Political Parity shows that 60% of all news articles are written by men (Sabonmatsu, 2015), while an *International Women's Media Foundation* study similarly confirmed that only 27% of the journalistic workforce worldwide is comprised of women (Byerly, 2011). Adding greater relevance to the present research, *The Woman's Media Center* reported that 65% of all political news stories were written by men, a disproportionately large percentage given the total gender breakdown of reporters as described above (*Women's Media Center*, 2015). With these global trends providing a male-dominated news context, particularly with regard to political news, the fact that a greater number of this study's coded articles were written by women than by men becomes an interesting trend to investigate in this analysis. Like the exploration of the liberal-leaning bias of the news articles found for coding above, this woman-centric trend found in the coding is an area that demands further elucidation.

The above-average proportion of women journalists covering *Texts From Hillary Clinton* and its aftermath is of particular importance if these women were somehow intrinsically more likely to look upon Clinton favorably. The woman-friendly bias of women journalists as compared to male journalists is an area of study that does not yield entirely conclusive results. Rodgers and Thorson (2003) write that the gender of a journalist brings: "different values, interests, and priorities to the newsroom that will affect the manner in which news stories are

researched, framed, and written” (p. 659). Building upon this idea of an inherent difference between men and women journalists, another study found that women journalists in particular are more likely to cover the needs of other women in their writing (Kangas, Haider, Fraser, & Browne, 2015). Even further, Kim and Yoon (2009) found support for this fact with specific regard to women journalists covering women politicians (which is of particular importance to the present research that has a high instance of this very relationship). The woman journalists studied in Kim and Yoon’s research used “a more positive tone, emphasized conflict news value less, used less stereotypical references to women, and employed more gender-sensitive perspectives than did male reporters,” (p. 298). These studies and others indicate that the majority of the media coverage analyzed in this study might be predisposed to positive coverage, given the wealth of women journalists found in the coding.

However, other scholars have pushed back against the idea that women journalists are differentiated to a greater extent by their womanhood than other facet of their selves (van Zoonen, 1998). Indeed, a 2012 comparative study did not find any substantial differences in thought or attitude between men and women journalists (Hanitzch & Hanusch, 2012). Thus, it is unclear whether to expect that women journalists would cover *Texts From Hillary Clinton* differently than male journalists would. In fact, in coding I found that there was little content-based difference of note in women and men journalists’ coverage of the meme and meta-meme, and indeed references to gendered differences in coverage are not included often in the analysis below. Still, the fact that substantial research highlights the importance of a gendered difference in reporting should perhaps shape a reading of the forthcoming analysis.

The fact that more women journalists are found in the articles selected for the analysis is perhaps indicative of news organizations’ habits in handing out assignments to their workers, and

can help to center an understanding of Clinton's meta-memes in culture. Studies have shown that women journalists are more likely to be assigned "soft" news topics (health and feature stories, and non-time-sensitive stories) as opposed to hard news topics (political, international, and time-sensitive stories), which are largely left to the realm of men (Kangas, Haider, Fraser, & Browne, 2015; Irvin, 2013). The tendency of women covering soft news topics is certainly one explanation for the above-average proportion of women journalists found in the articles coded here, and provides context for how *Texts From Hillary Clinton* was framed: as a fluffy piece rather than any sort of influential trend or commentary on the public image of the secretary of state. The meme's location outside of political news is confirmed by the fact that the articles used in this research largely represent commentary, lifestyle, entertainment, and interest pieces, as opposed to straight news stories.

### **Describing Power**

The response articles' analyses of the *Texts From Hillary Clinton* Tumblr memes are certainly not as thorough as the scholarly analysis I completed in Chapter 4. However, the responses to the meme and meta-meme largely picked up on several of those visual and content-driven thematic elements that I found the memes to reveal, and thus the themes explored below do mirror Chapter 4's analysis in many ways. The coverage of the memes chiefly focused on the competency aspect of the femininity/competency bind found in the memes, and did not devote equal time to discussion of the themes of femininity and sexuality. Further, analysis of the media's response indicates that the anticipated social presence effect (as written about in Chapter 2 of this thesis), was indeed present here, with many of the articles mentioning first and foremost how exciting it was that Clinton was engaging with the public through social media at all, before going on to praise her and write about her in a close, friendly manner.



## Visual Competency

The theme of Clinton's competency prominently emerged in the articles' discussions of the visual elements of the memes, particularly the meme showing Clinton and President Obama. The photograph of Obama used in this individual iteration of the meme (Figure 11) was the only non-Clinton photograph that was discussed in multiple different response articles.

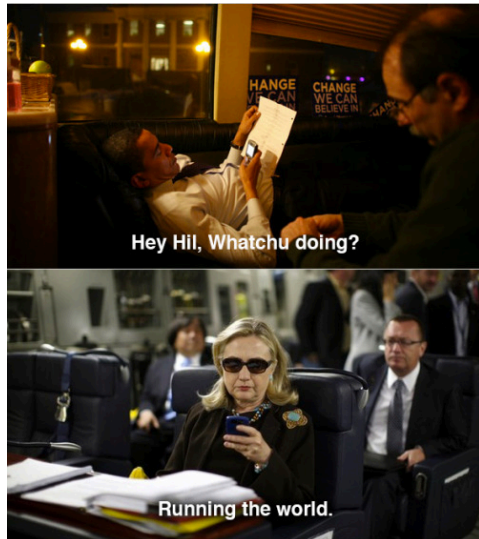


Figure 11. Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.

Journalists and bloggers took particular notice of Obama's physical appearance in that photograph and contrasted it with their description of Clinton's physical appearance in the meme. One example of this coverage, written by an unknown author in *Agence France-Presse*, reads as follows:

“Hey Hil, Watchu doing?” President Barack Obama says to his top diplomat on the blog as he is shown reclining on a sofa.

“Running the world,” Clinton replies, smartphone in hand and aides in the background as she sits in the C-17. (Agence France-Presse, 2012)

This specific example includes overt references to some of the important visual themes found in the coding of the original memes. First, the author makes a point of describing Clinton's

environment heavily: she is shown surrounded by people, on a military plane, and hard at work as a “top diplomat.” Compare this to the only descriptive words used for Obama: that he is reclining on a sofa. The focus here is on Clinton’s visual power, showing that this journalist understood this theme that was found time and again in the memes.

A similar article, written by Daniel Terdiman on *CNet.com*, also covered this contrast: “In the very first post, we see a reclining Barack Obama text, “Hey Hil, Whatchu doing?” To which the secretary of state responds, “Running the world.”” (Terdiman, 2012). Here, Clinton’s job title is used, while Obama’s isn’t – but his relaxed physical position is pointed out. Multiple other articles similarly used the word “reclining” or its variations and thus highlighted the importance of the visual makeup of this meme. The media’s collective concentration on this photo alone of all of the other photos included with the memes suggests that the fact that Clinton was portrayed more powerfully than the president of the United States did not go unnoticed in their analyses.

Indeed, some of the coverage sought to enrich the audiences’ understanding of this theme by contrasting Clinton’s and Obama’s portrayal here with how these two were talked about in 2008. Amanda Terkel for *The Huffington Post* remembered: “Hillary Clinton was parodied [in 2008] as drab and calculated, especially compared with young and vigorous Barack Obama,” (Terkel, 2012). In that light, this particular parody of the two becomes even more telling, and is illustrative of the changes that Clinton, Obama, and the public had gone through in the intervening four years. The focus on Obama’s “reclining” is far from his younger, vigorous image, and Clinton is instead the one in charge, still up and working while he leans back on his couch. Coverage that juxtaposes Clinton with Obama serves to illuminate for readers the particulars of just why Clinton appears so powerful in these memes, and shows that the memes’

fictionally enhanced boundary of her competence as explored in Chapter 4 was clear enough to be touched upon in the mainstream media's analysis.

### **A Respectful Portrayal**

Furthermore, the media's response to the meme for the most part understood and highlighted a second prominent theme discussed in Chapter 4: the fact that this meme was largely about lauding Clinton instead of belittling her. In particular, the word "respect" appeared time and again in the media's coverage of the memes, with men and women journalists alike finding the meme to be a reverent portrayal of Clinton, and primarily teasing only those she texts. Dylan Byers, writing for *Politico*, summed up this sentiment in his discussion of what made the meme so popular, saying "Here's why it works: Most memes make fun of their subjects. This one is all about respect," (Byers, 2012). Megan Garber in *The Atlantic* similarly wrote that the meme was a "pitch-perfect fusion of irony [and] respect," that made fun of everyone "except Hillary Clinton" (Garber, 2012). In these analyses, the meme is popular precisely because it is respectful of Clinton, which makes it unique from other popular political memes that often solely seek to disparage their subjects.

Thus, while words ranging from badass and iconic (both used in many of the articles) to icy, goofy, stoic, swaggering, serene, superhero, and sassy are all used to describe Clinton, the consensus in the journalistic analysis of the memes recognized that *Texts From Hillary* was a "flattering" portrayal (Judkis, 2012). As political memes are seen as a form of opinion expression (Shifman, 2014), this positive reaction to the memes is significant. The journalists' embrace of the memes indicates that they largely agreed with the thematic material found in a close reading of the memes, enumerated above. Again, given that "drab and calculated" (Terkel, 2012) public view of Clinton that dominated the cultural view of her several years before, it is likely that this

meme could easily have been taken as a joke on Clinton's personality. Perhaps journalistic coverage of the meme in 2008 would have focused on how funny the portrayal was, given that the real Clinton would never act like she does in the memes. Instead, writers reacted oppositely, not finding the contrast of the real Clinton and meme-Clinton to be funny, but instead to be respectful, and true. The idea that the memes showed a version of what Clinton is truly like will be expanded upon in coming sections.

Furthermore, the media's consensus that the memes showed a flattering image of Clinton indicates that they appreciated the enhancement of Clinton's femininity and competency in the memes, as highlighted in Chapter 4. Nowhere in commentators' discussion of the memes was there any notion that the fictional Clinton was out of place or overstepping her boundaries. Even the conservative *Red Alert Politics*' coverage of the memes said only that the meme "[made fun of] Hillary Clinton's supposed obsession with her phone" (Chambers, 2012), in between author Francesca Chambers listing her "favorite entry" as the one that featured George W. Bush and Condoleezza Rice (analyzed in Chapter 4). Her analysis did not comment on Clinton's portrayal as being outside the norm for a woman politician – perhaps, in this case, because the author herself was a woman.

Truly, the only other coverage found in the coding that leaned toward negative was in those pieces that insinuated what a smart public relationships move it was for Clinton to embrace the memes (which will be expanded upon below), or in coverage of how Clinton used to be in years before the memes. Jena McGregor in *The Washington Post* captured this in the headline of her piece: "Hillary Clinton joins Twitter, sounds human" (McGregor, 2013). Not only did the headline provide a comment on Clinton's past public personality, but McGregor also went on to contrast Clinton's Twitter biography admiringly with those of other prominent politicians. In any

sort of “negative” coverage that the memes received, Clinton’s roles in terms of the femininity/competency bind were not mentioned. The memes were instead received largely positively, if not gleefully, a reaction that is perhaps a comment in and of itself on how ready the public was to see a portrayal of Clinton in this light.

The theme of positivity is one where it is certainly important to remain aware of the possible liberal leanings of the articles found for coding. While the man-penned *Red Alert Politics* piece does provide an indication that conservative voices did not always comment negatively on Clinton’s portrayal in the memes, that is only one known conservative outlet included in this analysis. Were other conservative news outlets found online for coding, it is likely that this theme may have been portrayed differently here. Of course, it is difficult to make statements about the political bent of many of the lesser-known media outlets used in coding, so perhaps there are more conservative voices represented here than I can confidently report. Still, as described in the introduction to this chapter, the viewpoints described above are largely liberal. As it is, this theme of positive coverage certainly indicates that for the sect of people on Twitter sharing articles about this phenomenon, Clinton’s portrayal in these memes was viewed as flattering.

### **Clinton’s True Self**

Building upon the above idea of the memes’ respectful coverage of Clinton, another theme that emerged in coding is that the meme showed Hillary Clinton’s true nature. It is here that the memes most significantly link with the idea of social presence, or: “the degree to which a person is perceived as a ‘real person’ in mediated communication” (Gunawardena, 1995, p. 151). As noted in Chapter 1, social presence provides an important way to ground this analysis because it can help to explain what factors are at play when people are found to be likeable or not in

online communication. Accordingly, social presence contributes to an understanding of why and how memes and meta-memes are potentially so important in crafting a politician's image. With this theme, the importance of social presence becomes clear: whereas in Chapter 4's analysis I have taken pains to keep meme-Clinton and real-life-Clinton distinctly separate, the commentary from the media largely combined the fictional Clinton with the real one and did not seek to obey those boundaries. Clinton's online portrayal was turned into a real-life personality.

Although some commentators did write that this meme constituted a whole new way of seeing Clinton (in a fictional world where she is free to say and do what she chooses free of constraints), the majority of them promoted the idea that these memes "[reinforce] much of our public opinion of Clinton," (Judkis, 2012), and that they "captured Clinton so perfectly in her zone" (Lee, 2012). Significantly, both of those quotes above were written by women, for *The Washington Post* and *Politico*, respectively, and many of the quotes that come below were also written by women. In this theme more than the others described herein, the majority of the support seems to come from women writers, which gives insight into how those journalists view or want to be viewing prominent women figures in public. Ultimately, among journalists of both genders and even in the early life of the meme (before the meta-meme and other recognition), *Texts From Hillary Clinton* was being taken as a portrayal of who Clinton is as a person, and not as a joke on her lack of importance or humor.

Furthermore, the meme was not viewed as a commentary on Clinton's inability to ever behave like she does in the meme, as perhaps it well could have been. Journalists were not put off by meme-Clinton's thwarting of the traditional boundaries of the femininity/competency bind, and instead took kindly to her meme portrayal as an indication of what the real Clinton must be like. Joanna Peña-Bickley wrote on her blog that the meme "reinforces that [Clinton] is

a bad ass [sic]" (Bickley, 2012), and not that it created a new sense of her as a badass. This notion of the memes showing Clinton's real self again illustrates that the memes and meta-memes were perceived to have a high degree of social presence, lending to the public's and media's largely positive reaction to them and to their analysis of meme-Clinton as a "real person."

Highlighting this sense that the meme shows the true Clinton, the majority of the articles responding to the popularity of the meme and meta-memes largely wrote about the Clinton of the memes in present-tense, as though they were writing about a real person (as specified in the theory of social presence). These articles often did not make any distinction between describing the portrayals of Clinton in the meme and what we know of the real woman. Two women writing for *Today.com* noted that "Clinton is back and super bad with her very own dedicated Tumblr," (Choney & Popkin, 2012), using the present tense to insinuate that the real-life Clinton and the meme-Clinton are one and the same. Benjy Sarlin similarly wrote for *Talking Points Memo*: "[Clinton is] fueling Internet jokes based on her own brand of badass cool" (Sarlin, 2012). That "badass cool" was arguably a creation of the memes and the Tumblr blog at that point, but the author attributes it to being Clinton's "own brand." The coverage of the memes thus conflated the Clinton found in the memes with the real one and largely focused on a sense of authenticity coming from the memes.

In further examples of this conflation of the fictional Clinton and real Clinton, the Clinton of the memes is written about as though she has the same schedule and habits as real Clinton, and the authors reinforce her importance. There is no distinction drawn between the creation of Lambe and Smith and the real-life secretary of state, which allows Clinton to be described as both funny and tech-savvy, as well as an important, high-level official: Amanda Terkel for *The*

*Huffington Post* begins “On Tuesday, Hillary Clinton took a few minutes away from her texting (and all her other duties as secretary of state)...” to meet with the meme creators (Terkel, 2012). Margaret Johnson wrote that Clinton had inspired the meme, “in addition to the zillions of other things she did this week,” (Johnson, 2012). Another example from Annie Colbert on *HolyKaw.com* states:

Hillary Clinton doesn't have time to talk on the phone. Like any modern woman on the go, the Secretary of State relies on texting to communicate, stay on top of work, and save the world from exploding into a nuclear war. All in a day's work.  
(Colbert, 2012)

These responses both manage to highlight Clinton's importance, celebrity, and difference from the “modern woman on the go” (who doesn't have to stop nuclear war), while at the same time treating her like she is a normal, average woman, texting to stay in touch. It implies that Clinton was in fact the one making the meme's text-based jokes, even as journalists acknowledged the meme creators, and lauded them on a successful parody. This way of writing about the meme and the woman found within it shows that the meme was at least somewhat able to penetrate the public consciousness of a certain subset of people and shape their opinion of Clinton, at least for a time.

The three themes explored above all tie together to show how the journalists responded to the content of the meme. In pointing out the strong visual cues in the meme, treating it as a respectful and flattering portrayal, and combining the memes' image of Clinton with their real coverage of her, journalists set the stage for the positive reaction to the meme that many members of the public had. The next themes will shift focus on this kind of coverage of Clinton's



meme from the content of the meme to the surrounding political context and strategic media world.

### **Discerning the Strategy**

Enriching an understanding of the memes' and meta-meme's coverage, the media analysis of the memes additionally expanded to include shift in tone as commentators sought to discern what kind of strategy Clinton and her team may have had when creating and releasing the meta-meme. The responses came in one or two days after the meta-memes were released, and largely praised Clinton for having the good nature to embrace a teasing portrayal of herself (though as I have sought to highlight in Chapter 4 and above, the portrayal was not all that teasing).

### **Physical Aspects**

In coverage of Clinton's meta-memes, commentary first largely focused on her own use of hair and clothing jokes to craft her image, as well as her signing off her meta-meme as "Hillz." As discussed in Chapter 4's direct analysis of Clinton's meta-memes, it is significant that Clinton chose to make fun of her hair and clothing in her meta-memes when it had not been discussed whatsoever in the original meme. That focus on the classic "Hillary Clinton jokes" about her hair and style in her meta-meme may have been a way for Clinton to re-center herself in a more traditional political narrative, away from the enhanced femininity and competency that the memes structured for her, as ideas of strategic self-referential humor dictate. Clinton, while publicizing and endorsing those other messages, had to bring herself back down to the reality of her situation, and respond in the way a real person would be expected to.

From the positive coverage that these jokes received, it appears that Clinton made a smart decision in using these forms of self-referential humor. Even as journalists had held Clinton up for perfectly embodying the strong portrayal of herself in the meme, as explored above, they

simultaneously lauded her self-deprecation as indicative of her true self-image, as two authors wrote for *New York Magazine*:

Kurt: She also turned her pantsuits and hair into a joke, but I thought we weren't supposed to talk about those things. Can we now?

Kat: By embracing her memes, she's saying yes. What a 21st-century form of self-actualization. (*The Cut*, 2013)

Like Clinton's own response, the analysis here seems to be caught in between embracing the powerful Clinton found in the memes, and continuing to hold on to the old, safe cultural references that belittle her hair and her clothing and keep her in a safely feminized space. Another article written by an unknown author for *DZone*, highlights this juxtaposition even more prominently:

The potential 2016 presidential candidate's profile page shows the infamous photo of the stern-looking Clinton wearing dark sunglasses and reading her Blackberry aboard a military plane. Her biography section includes light-hearted descriptions like "hair icon," "pantsuit aficionado," and "glass ceiling cracker." (*DZone News Blog*, 2013)

This coverage refers to her as "stern-looking," on a military plane wearing dark sunglasses. The photograph is referred to as "infamous." These descriptors match those used in coverage of the Obama meme explored in the first theme, above. However, the very next description of Clinton points out her "light-hearted" jokes on the Twitter profile (dubiously including "glass ceiling cracker" in the list of light-hearted entries, which was likely not supposed to be a funny inclusion).

In the *New York Daily News*, Leslie Larson writes, "Though known as a political powerhouse, Clinton struck a playful tone in her biography," (Larson, 2013). The coverage time

and again concentrated on that powerhouse/playful dichotomy so succinctly described in Larson's quote. Thus, despite the positive coverage of Clinton as a powerful and aggressive political force during the initial run of the *Texts From Hillary Clinton* meme, which these articles reference, as soon as the real Clinton came into the picture the journalists mitigated their reactions and praised her for her "playful" self-deprecating and ultra-feminizing response. The femininity/competency bind rears its head here again, and finds the media struggling to reconcile the memes' pushed boundaries, just as Clinton's meta-memes themselves did.

### **Pop Cultural Savvy**

Commentary additionally focused on the significance of Clinton being tuned-in enough to popular culture to understand the meme and how to respond to it, drawing on the conflation of feminism and funny that Traister (2010) had written about that provided context in the above analysis for the memes' virality. This Internet savvy theme again taps into the notion of social presence, as Clinton's normalized use of the Internet led to praise and excitement among those covering the meme and meta-meme. For entertainment news blog *Zap2It*, Carina MacKenzie asked, "where can we vote for Hillary Clinton as President of the Internet?" (MacKenzie, 2012), saying that Clinton had "[won] everything," (common Internet parlance for being smart and funny (*Know Your Meme*, 2016b)). *The Atlantic* contributor Megan Garber likewise referred to Clinton as her "new Internet hero," after her submission of the meta-meme to the *Texts From Hillary Clinton* account (Garber, 2012).

The significance of appearing to understand and participate in Internet culture is paramount here, as again those with normalized Internet participation will have higher social presence and thus higher likeability. As Maura Judkis precisely illustrates in her *Washington*

*Post* response, Clinton's meta-meme captured the Internet conversation because of the excitement of seeing a politician participate in this cultural form of conversation:

Twitter erupted: Hillary Clinton uses Internet slang! Hillary Clinton makes fun of her own scrunchies! Hillary Clinton might be the first cabinet member to participate in her own meme! (Judkis, 2012)

Indeed, even as commentators understood that Clinton herself likely did not physically create the meta-memes, they were still impressed with her savvy in the creation of them. Nick Carbone for *TIME* summed this sense up perfectly:

While we can't imagine Clinton herself sat down to Photoshop everything together, it warms our Internet-centric hearts that she and her staff decided to respond to the meme.

A sense of humor is a truly underrated trait in government. (Carbone, 2012)

From these responses, it is clear that many journalists found Clinton's social presence was raised through her meta-meme, which thus provides support for my contention that the meta-meme led to Clinton's growing likeability for those people at that time.

### **Transformation Over Time**

Similar to the above, another theme found in the coding highlighted Clinton's involvement in the meme as an indication of her evolution, both politically and as a person. This kind of media coverage sought to contrast her behavior with the meme and meta-meme with her former behavior as a politician and a candidate, and concluded that Clinton had undergone a dramatic shift in her years as secretary of state. Maureen Dowd concentrated on Clinton's evolution in this way in her commentary for *The New York Times*, drawing upon her colleagues' arguments as well as making her own:

As Jonathan Darman, who covered Hillary's campaign for Newsweek, noted: "The speed with which she's embraced it suggests something has really changed in her. If this were 2008, the conversation around her would have been: 1) What is Tumblr? 2) What is Facebook? and 3) How do we get them to take down the Tumblr and/or how do we destroy Facebook?"<sup>3</sup> (Dowd, 2012)

This change was also a topic of interest for Suzi Parker at *The Broad Side*, after Clinton introduced the meta-meme again by referencing it with her newly created Twitter account:

The fact that Hillary and her social media team are willing to be less-than-serious in describing the former first lady shows how far she's come since her presidential run in 2008. Then, it seemed highly possible for Hillary to crack the glass ceiling but not a joke. She was portrayed as an ice queen who didn't like media or rope lines. And she lost to Barack Obama who embraced both. (Parker, 2013)

This particular example is notable not only for its concentration on Clinton's evolution, but also for its use of the moniker "former first lady." Like the above theme that explored the reporters' "powerhouse/playful" strategic diminishing of Clinton's strong image found in the memes, Parker has included Clinton's most feminizing title even during her otherwise positive appraisal. Here again, the strength of Clinton in the memes struggles to be reconciled with traditional notions of what makes a woman an acceptable politician or a good person. Parker continued on to include a reference to the transformational theme that other journalists did, saying that Clinton's meta-meme was "brilliant [and] transformed Hillary from a cool Secretary of State to a kick-ass pantsuit-wearing superhero" (Parker, 2013).

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<sup>3</sup> Note: Darman's coverage was not found in the Twitter search for news reports regarding the meme and meta-meme, so it was not coded as part of this sample.

It is telling that the press analyzed Clinton's meta-meme as evidence of her change over time, or as a "reinvention," (Byers, 2012) rather than as evidence of a sense of humor that had always been present. While one analysis by an unknown author mentioned "I am glad Hillary's well known private humor is getting a public airing," (Delaware Dem, 2012) (significantly an openly pro-democratic response), the rest focused largely on this narrative of change: Clinton is different now than she was during her 2008 campaign; she understands modern communication and how to use it.

Interestingly, this narrative could be a result of what was shown in the meme itself, rather than an indicator of a real-life evolution in Clinton's understanding of media. The memes explored in Chapter 4 all showed Clinton as a media-savvy texter and a mainstay of popular culture, two indicators of her social competence. When the real Clinton then responded to the memes, the original memes' priming of the idea that Clinton was a media-savvy personality perhaps contributed to the media's highlighting of Clinton's change. As such, this theme taps into the aforementioned idea that journalists wrote about the meme-Clinton and the real Clinton largely as though they were one. Here again, the meme and meta-meme together were both instrumental in shaping the public opinion about Clinton, and seemed to have an impact on how she was portrayed in the media just days after the release of the meta-memes.

This kind of coverage bears a striking resemblance to Clinton's own second meta-meme: the creation of her Twitter account. As discussed in Chapter 4, Clinton made sure to both reference the meme while juxtaposing it with her own terrific accomplishments. This is very similar to the kind of coverage described above, where journalists recognized and focused on her accomplishments while largely covering the content of the memes themselves.

### Summary

In the above analysis, the femininity/competency bind and social presence theory have provided a helpful lens through which to examine the responses to *Texts From Hillary Clinton* meme, Clinton's meta-meme, and the responses to them both. I largely found that journalists focused on Clinton's competency in the memes, finding the memes to be both a flattering portrayal and also as being indicative of her true nature. When Clinton then created her meta-memes, journalists recognized her strategy in the creation of the memes and took her response as an indication of her transformation as a person. They also sought to re-center her in a comfortable narrative, much as her own meta-memes had, by juxtaposing those ultra-competent themes from the original memes with her own self-deprecation, and use of softer feminized language.

While Clinton's public persona has largely shifted in the years since, especially given her current bid for the White House in 2016, there are traces of the meta-meme's power still evident in her team's social media usage, and in the public reaction to those. In the final chapter, I will develop the lessons learned from the media's response in this chapter and the memes in the previous chapter, as well as seek to situate those lessons in the current political climate to further understand how Clinton, and indeed women politicians more generally, may be able to use social media to their benefit in the future.

## Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

In conducting this research, I wanted to illuminate the potential uses of meta-memes in political communication. With specific regard to the *Texts From Hillary Clinton* memes and meta-meme, the research questions proposed in Chapter 1 sought to discern how Hillary Clinton's meta-meming worked within the framework of social presence theory through normalized uses of language and behavior, and how the news articles shared on Twitter responded to that language and behavior. A third research question also asked in what ways Hillary Clinton crafted her image through the confines of the double bind. Therefore, as a means of addressing those questions, my analysis in Chapters 4 and 5 used the lens of the femininity/competency bind to explore the *Texts From Hillary Clinton* memes' messaging, the meta-memes' further crafting of that message, and how both of those constructions of Hillary Clinton's image were picked up on and written about in the media's response.

### Uses of Meta-memes

In synthesizing the results of that analysis into a coherent whole, two primary themes arise: Hillary Clinton's meta-memes were largely useful to her as a way to push and shape her image, both (1) explicitly through the act of her cultural participation, and (2) as an unspoken way of highlighting the constraints that are placed upon her as a woman politician in a man-dominated political world. First, the simple action of Clinton's involvement in the viral trend of *Texts From Hillary Clinton* brought her image to a new realm of cultural connectedness and enhanced her "real person" credentials and hipness, which she still seeks to make use of today. This theme draws on the ideas of social presence theory, mainly through the idea that Clinton's activity connoted "normalized" behavior of the average Internet-participating American, thereby enhancing her social presence and thus her likeability. Second, the actual content of those meta-



memes cast a light on how the real Clinton's behavior needs to be different from her fictional counterpart's. The femininity/competency bind largely contributes to this theme by heightening the awareness of the constraints that are placed on Clinton, and indeed on all women politicians, and allowing me to focus on how she both undermined and reinforced them. These two central facets of Clinton's meta-meme can help begin to shape a theory of meta-meming more generally: explicit and implicit image building.

In exploring these two themes of meta-meme use, it's first important to review what I found during the analysis of the *Texts From Hillary Clinton* memes, as they construct an image of Clinton that she recognized and legitimized through her creation of meta-memes. The memes were generally extremely flattering to Clinton, first showing her as being both politically and socially commanding. In the memes, politicians, celebrities, and normal citizens alike sought Clinton out. She was almost always the texted party in conversation and not the initial texter, showing her centrality in both political decision-making and cultural conversation. She exhibited a positive attitude towards other strong women who texted her, and largely belittled everyone else, especially the political men who reached out. She quoted pop cultural touchpoints with ease. Importantly, she held power over President Obama, to whom she had lost the democratic presidential primary race in 2008. As I discussed in Chapter 4, this kind of behavior in the memes showed Clinton as an ultra-powerful figure, pushing the normal limits of competency to which woman politicians find themselves bound in the public eye.

Further, the memes feminized and sexualized Clinton in an enhanced way as well. Whereas Clinton's own narrative in this regard is often tied in with the Monica Lewinsky scandal (with Bill Clinton's infidelity signaling Hillary Clinton's failures as a woman) and is marked by long-held ideas of Clinton as unfeminine and unsexual, the memes painted her as

desirable, desired, and sexually active. In the memes, Clinton was approached several times for one-night-stands, sexting, and other sexual and romantic encounters. She had strong female friendships and engaged in feminine behaviors with Meryl Streep and other important woman celebrities. She used popular terms like “head bitch in charge” and wholly seemed to be a part of the kind of woman-centric conversation seen in certain social discussions today. She also was not portrayed as a maternal figure, despite the fact that such a portrayal would have further contributed to a feminine image. This absence illustrates how the Clinton of the memes presented both a certain kind of ultra-feminized and still ultra-powerful representation of the real woman, pushing a construction of her image far beyond the constraints that tie her as she operates within reality.

### **Cultural Participation**

I have found that the primary usefulness of meta-memes to Hillary Clinton is that they enhance her likeability. This theme ties directly to the theoretical basis of social presence that has driven this research. Social presence has been defined as: “the degree to which a person is perceived as a ‘real person’ in mediated communication” (Gunawardena, 1995, p. 151). As examined in Chapter 2, communicators, including politicians, who have a high degree of social presence in online communication are more likeable to those receiving the message. In creating her meta-meme, Hillary Clinton was primarily able to use it as a means of being viewed as a socially and culturally connected figure – in other words, by increasing her social presence.

Clinton benefitted from the publication of the powerful image presented in the memes, as described above, but more importantly, her meta-memes showed her ability to participate in the new American pastime of meme sharing and Internet culture. Chapter 4’s close reading of Clinton’s meta-memes showed the various ways that her contributions to the *Texts From Hillary*

*Clinton* blog were normalized. She used the same photograph of herself, relied on the same popular Internet language (“ROFL @ ur Tumblr”), and even showed evidence of her understanding of other popular jokes about her (“scrunchie time”). The use of this kind of slang was outlined by Tu’s (2000) social presence theory research as being a way of heightening social presence in online communication. Clinton may well have intended to use the meme specifically to enhance her likeability, given findings from Bor (2013) that show how politicians and campaigns are aware of social media’s ability to “humanize” politicians and lead to positive feelings toward them from their followers (Bor, 2013, p. 1209).

The media’s response to Clinton’s meta-memes provides support for the idea that this kind of normalized behavior online lead to greater likeability for Clinton. As my media analysis in Chapter 5 showed, Clinton’s simple action of adding an image to the Tumblr blog was lauded by journalists and taken as proof of her status as a “real person.” This again ties into the idea that common actions and techniques used on social media contribute to social presence; social presence is higher when similar techniques are used (Tu, 2000). Highlighting Clinton’s heightened social presence as a direct result of her meta-meme, a headline covering the meta-memes read simply, and tellingly: “Hillary Clinton joins Twitter, sounds human” (McGregor, 2013).

The media concentrating on Clinton’s humanness in this way becomes even more powerful given her history. Beginning in 1979 when Bill Clinton first became governor of Arkansas, Hillary Clinton’s image has been constantly and unrelentingly public. Even in 2000, at the beginning of her life after being first lady, her image struggles were described as complicated and contradictory: “[Hillary Rodham Clinton] is depicted as a career woman turned feared feminist, a sometimes all-powerful First Lady who becomes a more traditional “good mother,”

and a "stand by your man" wife who is victimized by a cheating husband" (Parry-Giles, 2000, p. 206). Clinton has been a political wife, a first lady, a wronged woman, a Lady Macbeth, a senator, a candidate, a secretary of state – and currently, she could be the president of the United States. In each iteration of Clinton's image, however, her humanity has been largely out of focus through the media narrative. As an ever-present part of American public life for the past forty years, she has been viewed as a figurehead for any number of causes, and not as a flesh-and-blood person. Her authenticity is constantly in question (Smith, 2012).

The meta-meme's power, then, is derived first from the simple evidence that Clinton exists in the same world that we do. She is aware of viral trends online, and participates in them. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the media understood Clinton's participation in the memes to be strategic, but did not react negatively to it. Typically, any indication of Clinton's behind-the-scenes political machinations or attempts to win over the public is met with skepticism at best, and ridicule at worst. In the 2016 election, her comment about carrying hot sauce in her purse was seen by some as pandering to the black voter base, and generated serious news coverage about whether or not Clinton had ever been seen consuming hot sauce or spicy foods (Newkirk, 2016). In the case of the meta-memes, however, the strategy behind her cultural participation was covered positively on the whole. The largely favorable reaction gives an indication of the affirmative power that Clinton's memetic participation had on the public's view of her, at least at the time that the meta-memes were released. Based on the coverage that the media gave to her meta-meme, as discussed in Chapter 5, the image created within the meme was able to trump other constructions of Clinton's image for Twitter users at that time.

This political usefulness of the meta-meme to Clinton is evidenced in her current presidential campaign. She has sought to continue that praising, authentic media coverage of her

as much as possible in the years since. A search of her campaign's website for the phrase "texts from Hillary" as of April 2016 reveals that Clinton and her campaign strategists still seek to remind voters of her *Texts From Hillary* image wherever possible. The campaign invites voters to sign up for campaign text messages from her using that now-famous phrase (Figure 12):

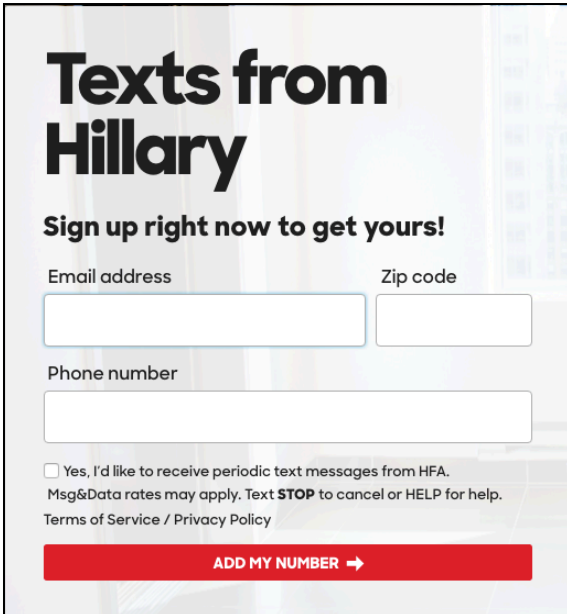
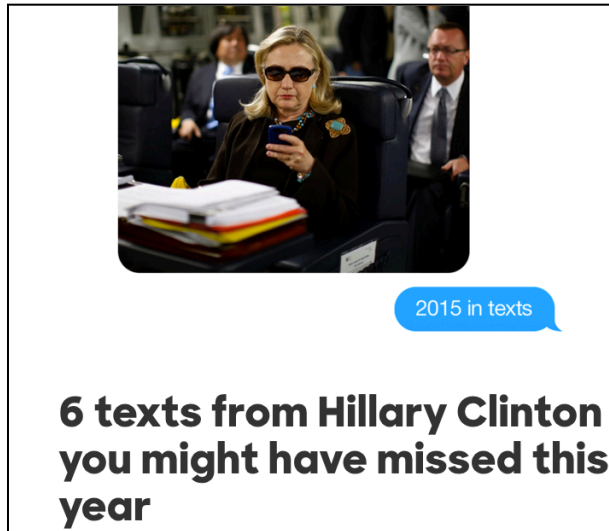
A screenshot of a web form titled "Texts from Hillary". The form has a white background with a light blue border. At the top, the title "Texts from Hillary" is written in a large, bold, black sans-serif font. Below the title is the sub-header "Sign up right now to get yours!" in a smaller, bold, black font. The form contains three input fields: "Email address" and "Zip code" are side-by-side at the top, and "Phone number" is centered below them. Below the input fields is a checkbox with the text "Yes, I'd like to receive periodic text messages from HFA." followed by a line of smaller text: "Msg&Data rates may apply. Text STOP to cancel or HELP for help." and a link "Terms of Service / Privacy Policy". At the bottom of the form is a prominent red button with the white text "ADD MY NUMBER" and a right-pointing arrow.

Figure 12. A screenshot from Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign website inviting users to sign up to receive text message alerts.

Subscribed supporters receive texts with messages from Clinton during moments such as the republican debates and other crucial campaign events. This strategy represents a personalized way for voters to stay in touch with Clinton, and strives to continue her image as a real person – one who might “live-text” the republican debate with friends.

For those people who have not subscribed to the texts, the campaign gathers Clinton's best texts and puts them on her website in a listicle, again endeavoring to bring “texts from Hillary” to the widest possible audience. At the top of a page where the campaign has gathered some of her best text messages, that famous photograph of Clinton in her sunglasses is used above the headline (Figure 13).



*Figure 13.* A screenshot from Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign website showing "texts from Hillary" that have been sent by the campaign this year.

Even four years after the *Texts From Hillary Clinton* memes became popular, Clinton is using this photograph and the messages it conveys to remind the public of that all-powerful image that was presented and made famous in the memes and meta-memes. The use of this picture and the "texts from Hillary Clinton" wording can each be seen as a continuation of her meta-memes, showing that the meme has possibly been useful to her as a way to remind voters of her authenticity.

Beyond those two examples examined above, it's additionally clear that Clinton's campaign continues to bring memes into the conversation in other ways as well. They use not only media-ready speech soundbites or perfectly polished quotes to text and tweet to supporters, but continue to use normalized social behavior as a key aspect of her candidacy, as Figures 14 and 15 illustrate:

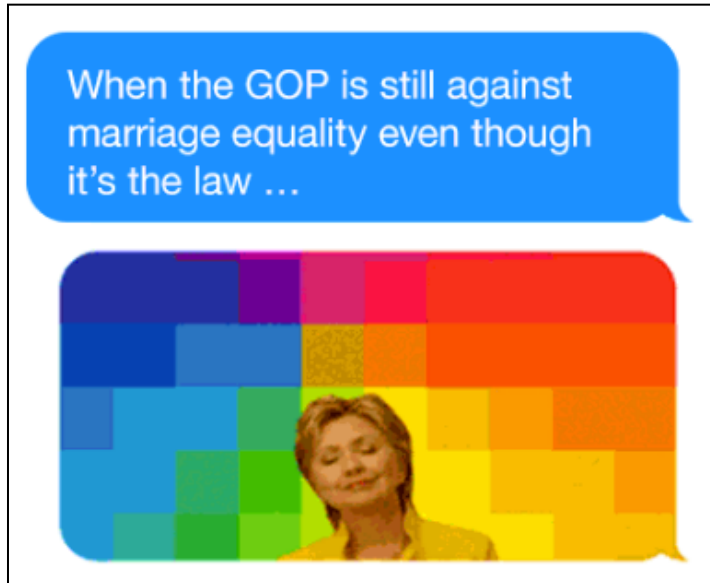


Figure 14. A screenshot from a text from Hillary Clinton to supporters. In the actual text, the rainbow image is a GIF and is changing shape and color throughout as Clinton waves her head from side to side.



Figure 15. A screenshot from a Hillary Clinton tweet to followers. In the tweet, the image is a GIF and shows Clinton drinking wine and rolling her eyes while speaking to a fictional Donald Trump (played by Jimmy Fallon).

With each social media update that uses a GIF, or a funny picture of Clinton, or a meme, her campaign calls back to *Texts From Hillary Clinton* and seeks to ensconce itself firmly in the Internet culture that jokes and interacts in a particular way. Both Figures 14 and 15 above have

roots in the original meme and meta-meme: Clinton is sassy, sarcastic, and communicating her thoughts both visually and through text. Given Clinton's closeness to the White House (she is the democratic frontrunner at the time of this writing), her campaign's continued use of the meme shows how they still wring meaning from that image of her, as a method of trying to stay relevant with younger voters. Her social presence in these interactions can be traced back to her first foray into memes. With her continuation of meta-meming, the first use of meta-memes is clear: that they can be an important way of tying a politician to a certain subset of the public, and that they can show authentic, "average person" tendencies and a participation in culture.

### **Expanding the Image**

Beyond a meta-meme's ability to tie her to regular behavior in American life through normalized use of humor and social media, Hillary Clinton's meta-memes are also potentially useful to her because they link an idealized image of her directly to a mediated one. It is this juxtaposition of the two disparate images that can enrich a deeper understanding of the constraints that Clinton faces in society. The use of a meta-meme made Hillary Clinton more likeable through enhanced social presence, yes. Even further, though, perhaps the meta-memes were somehow able to develop, however minutely, the public's understanding of the differences between a fictional rendering of Clinton and the version that she must present. In short, the meta-meme was used to shed greater light on just why the initial meme was funny in the first place: because it shows a way that Clinton could never act.

To be sure, this understanding is not always (or indeed, even ever) made explicit to the extent that I am endeavoring to do in this piece of research. However, some of the media's reaction to the juxtaposition of these two images provides clues that indicate that the two images of Clinton did not go unnoticed. Chapter 4 outlined all the ways in which Clinton's image in the



memes presented an unattainable, superhuman version of her, one that threw off her typical femininity/competency constraints as a woman politician. The initial memes may have gone so viral because they pushed the boundaries of Clinton's behavior so aggressively, thus showing all of the ways that she cannot act in real life. The first round of responses to the memes seem to embrace the out-of-character actions of Clinton within the memes, with Alex Fitzpatrick for *Mashable* calling her, admirably "rough-and-rumble" within the memes (Fitzpatrick, 2012), or mentioning that she "seems more powerful and unflappable than ever" (Byers, 2012).

But while the memes portrayed Clinton as aggressive, powerful, and sexual, her meta-memes then included self-deprecating and belittling comments, and traditionally feminine ones, bringing Clinton back to the realm of reality and the loaded expectations that are placed upon her as a woman politician in a man-dominated political world. The media responded to those by contrasting the two images directly themselves: "though known as a political powerhouse, Clinton struck a playful tone in her biography, describing herself first and foremost as a wife and a mother," (Larson, 2013). Others described her as "fiercely witty" (Parker, 2013), or summed up her meta-memes as follows:

The potential 2016 presidential candidate's profile page shows the infamous photo of the stern-looking Clinton wearing dark sunglasses and reading her Blackberry aboard a military plane. Her biography section includes light-hearted descriptions like "hair icon," "pantsuit aficionado," and "glass ceiling cracker." (*DZone News Blog*, 2013).

Political powerhouse, or wife and mother? Fierce or witty? Stern-looking and militaristic, or light-hearted? The coverage here shows exactly the constraints that Clinton must operate under – limitations with regard to being a woman, a politician, the wife of a politician, and a high-level official in the United States government. More importantly, however the juxtapositions present

in the media's coverage of the meta-memes illustrate just how the meta-meme was used to shed some light on those boundary constrictions. Clinton placed the disparate roles expected of her directly next to each other in her biography ("SecState" and "hair icon." "US Senator" and "pantsuit aficionado."), throwing them into sharp relief and inviting them to be a part of the media's response.

Of course, it is unclear whether Clinton was conscious of her meta-memes creation of these juxtapositions, but she might have been. When Hillary Clinton is likely the subject of many tens, hundreds, or thousands of memes shared on the Internet each day, why did she choose to participate in this one? In part, her participation was perhaps due to *Texts From Hillary Clinton's* unusual virality and the fact that it was being covered in the media very early on. It is possible, however, that Clinton saw that the meme's construction of her was wholly new, and recognized that it gave her a friendly chance to point out, in some small way, the differences between that meme and her constrained role. She further publicized those layers of new image that were created for her, as described in Chapter 4, but also brought herself right back down to the level of hair-joking and self-policing. In this way, "she pokes fun at those who poke fun at her," (Rucker, 2013) through the differences in those two images.

Clinton's voicelessness in news coverage of her image, as identified by Tucker-McLaughlin and Campbell (2012), is important to note when thinking about whether Clinton actively sought to contrast her competent role with her feminine one. In the context of this thesis, the knowledge of Clinton's usual lack of an active role in how she is portrayed enriches an understanding of both why she chose to create the meta-meme, and of potentially how strategic she was in her choice of content. An opportunity to publicize her own voice was one that she chose not to pass up.

Whether she intended to create this narrative or not, the juxtaposition of those two identities indicated something deeper about her political and gendered identity. Above all else, Clinton's meta-memes highlighted just how constrained her image is every day, and perhaps brought a new layer of understanding to public conversation around her. In making the media and the public somehow more aware of those constraints, maybe the meta-meme was able to be used to create some kind of lasting change in how a small section of the public understands Hillary Clinton.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this thesis arise in large part due to its timing. Clinton's initial meta-meme appeared in the spring of 2012, and her Twitter account was created one year later. This research took place at the tail end of 2015 and in the first half of 2016, after a significant gap in time from the memes' viral popularity. This time lapse had an effect on several aspects of the present research in several different ways, including the technology used, the data gathered, and the social and political context in which the research was conducted. These limitations are discussed briefly below.

The foremost limitation stemming from the delayed timing has to do with the chosen methodology for this thesis; more specifically, with the ease and precision of sampling. Today, there are many platforms that allow for searching on Twitter while certain topics are trending. These platforms provide clear statistics on hashtag use and article virality, among many other capabilities. However, the fact that this research was conducted after a delay from the virality of the meme limited my ability to take advantage of this kind of technology. Many of the platforms I researched and attempted to use in designing this thesis were not able to search back far enough in time, or had severely limited capabilities when going back several years. One such example is

Sysomos MAP, a flexible and exciting tool available at my university, but which does not have the ability to search back to 2012 or 2013, and so was frustratingly not able to be used for the present research.

Using Twitter's own search functionality, I was ultimately able to get a robust sample of news articles to code, but I am sure that had the research been done closer to when *Texts From Hillary Clinton* and the meta-memes were first popular, I may have gained an entirely different sample of responses due to the enhanced capabilities of those new technologies – although some of those may not have been available a few years ago. Furthermore, relevant tweets and articles may have been deleted in the intervening few years, meaning that the sample I was eventually able to capture was again not an exact proxy for a timelier one.

Furthermore, the lapse in time between meta-meme and research meant that it was not feasible to gain insight into individuals' personal opinions regarding the meta-meme. In conducting research about meta-memes, I sought to gain a whole picture of why they are used and what their potential political effects might be; as such, it was pertinent to find a way to analyze the public's responses to Clinton's meta-memes. Analyzing news articles became a good method to assess this response, and was based in theory regarding audience consumption and sharing of news content. However, it is likely that a different understanding of the reaction to Clinton's meta-memes could be gained through first-hand reactions to it. The timing of this research and of Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign meant that focus groups or interviews regarding the meta-meme in 2016 would not have been fruitful at this particular time – or at least, would not have been able to pinpoint the immediate reaction to the meme. Thus, a subset of possible data was lost, which creates another limitation in the methodology of the research.

Beyond sampling and methodological concerns, the lapse in time between meta-meme and research made it more difficult for me to use contextual information about the state of politics and Clinton's image in 2012. Social and contextual clues about Clinton's image in public before and after the meta-meme are certainly crucial to my understanding of just how the memes and meta-memes were able to shape an evolving image of Clinton. Although the articles I coded were all from that time period and did provide helpful clues to use in my analysis, my own view of Clinton has likely evolved over the intervening few years (particularly as I have recently voted for her in the New York State primary elections), and possibly had an impact on my in-depth analysis of her image and the responses to the meme and meta-meme. My writing about her image and of people's thoughts about her image is certainly colored by the current changes in her image due to the campaign, as well as the sheer volume of Clinton rhetoric that it is possible to take in on a daily basis. It is probable that the lag in the timing of the research again led to some changes in the resulting analysis and themes. As qualitative research demands that the author's personal viewpoint be taken into account, this limitation may not have diminished the quality of my research, but rather possibly leads to a different set of outcomes than might have been found were this research taking place in 2012 or 2013.

The limitations listed above mean that the insights gained here may not be identical to the insights that would have been gained were the research completed closer to the time of the memes or with a different theoretical lens. Still, this thesis was still able to provide a first understanding of some of the uses of and responses to political meta-memes, and perhaps even gained some useful insights with the benefits of hindsight. Mindful of the limitations enumerated above, I next give some suggestions for future research that can avoid these limitations and

continue to build an understanding of the uses and usefulness of meta-memes in a political context.

### **Directions for Future Research**

There is ample opportunity for future research that takes up the mantle of meta-meming and can further the insights that were gained here. As this study sought to be an initial exploration into a meta-meming phenomenon, future studies should deconstruct the meta-meming process to look at the different uses of meta-memes, and then at the success of those uses. In short, this study sought to provide a case study of one particular instance of meta-meming from initial meme to the public's reaction, and future studies should break those down into their component parts and seek to look at each more closely.

More and more politicians are receiving public support for participating in Internet humor. In the 2016 election, Ted Cruz released an April Fools' Day YouTube video saying that Donald Trump had accepted his invitation to debate (which he hadn't), followed by a portion of the music video for Rick Astley's song "Never Gonna Give You Up" (Dicker, 2016) – a commentary on Trump's continued avoidance of a one-on-one debate with him. Bernie Sanders "dropped the mic" at the end of a recent speech (Topher, 2016), a popular Internet phrase connoting "a display of bold confidence following a successful performance" (*Know Your Meme*, 2016a). Both actions were well-received on social media. Given these trends, it becomes increasingly relevant to examine when and how meming and meta-meming can capture the attention of an important subset of voters; namely, young ones who are active on social media. Examining diverse instances of political meta-meming across politicians of different genders, races, political parties, and popularities will help to form a more robust understanding of when and how meta-meming can best be used to a politician's benefit. Was Clinton's meta-meme

more or less successful than a politician's of a different race or gender would be? Where is the line between participating successfully in Internet humor and being made fun of for trying? As I have demonstrated above, the successful uses of meta-memes are potentially very important in reaching out to young voters; thus, the keys to their success demand to be understood more fully through comparative analysis, if possible.

Future research can also address all of the limitations of this study. First, the study of the public's reaction to a meta-meme while the meta-meming phenomenon is taking place will be extremely helpful to constructing an understanding of this particular form of supporter engagement. This research showed that the media was able to analyze the meta-memes and to come up with largely the same themes that I myself found, though in less depth. I used those to draw a line to what the public might have thought about Clinton's meta-memes. However, nothing can replace a first-hand account; future research might conduct surveys, focus groups, interviews, or even experiments closer to a meta-meme's popularity to truly capture what kind of an effect this behavior can have on the opinion of a member of the public. Logical research questions might include: What kinds of political supporters are most affected by meta-meming? When do they think it is done well, and when do they not? What are the crucial pieces to successful deployment of this communication strategy?

Future study of this topic might also seek to examine what contributes to the longevity of a meta-meme. As I have explored above, Clinton's meta-meme still has life years later, and is still used by her campaign and in news coverage about her as a way to craft her image. The staying power of this meme in particular suggests that the positive effects created by meta-meming in general might be even more important to understand since they could still resonate with the public years later. In today's media environment where there is a new viral trend almost

daily, any lasting effects of an image shift can and should be understood as one facet of building a politician's legacy. Study of meta-memes' longevity can draw on image restoration literature to flesh out an understanding of why politicians might choose to create a meta-meme, and why they can possibly have a lasting impact on image. Benoit's (1995) theory of image restoration posits that people value their image or reputation highly, and therefore are spurred to action to restore their image when it has been damaged. Perhaps, then, the success and lasting impact of a meme takes place within a larger narrative of a politician commanding agency in the repair of a harmed image. Future studies could mine this relationship to help develop a robust understanding of meta-meming.

Finally, it is possible that the conclusions drawn in Chapters 4 and 5, and in this chapter, arise more from Hillary Clinton's unique space in American political and gender narratives than from an understanding of meta-memes. Perhaps my conclusion of meta-memes as useful in deepening a public understanding of political image constraints comes almost entirely from the fact that the meta-memes explored here were about Hillary Clinton, who is extraordinarily constrained, more so than most other politicians. Future studies that mirror this one in scope and methodology might compare other politicians to Clinton in order to see if the uses of meta-memes are the same for someone of a different gender, race, or level of importance in our governmental system and culture.

### **Conclusion**

We are in an age where "the presidential candidate must perform as a celebrity, sustain celebrity appeal," and be a part of today's media culture (Smith, 2012, p. 524). The 2016 presidential election in the United States, which has provided a backdrop for the writing of this thesis, continues to reinforce the importance of studying social media in a political context. In



my own life, barely an hour goes by where I am not inundated with quotes and opinions of each of the presidential candidates, through Facebook, Twitter, emails from my friends, and other forms of communication. Politicians must navigate these spaces while also providing the political and policy-driven content of traditional political campaigns. In the context of the never-ending media cycle, the possibilities of meta-meming found in this research become even more clear.

A few months after this thesis will be completed, Hillary Clinton could be sworn in as the President of the United States. A historic occasion for many reasons, not least because of the simple fact she will be the first woman elected to that office, Clinton's election would speak volumes about the evolution of the American woman, and could also illuminate how women remain constrained in many ways. The current and upcoming scrutiny of Clinton's own evolution again reinforces the importance of what was learned here: meta-meming is potentially very useful to politicians as a way of enhancing their likeability and perhaps also of enriching an understanding of the image constraints they face. Meta-memes should continue to be studied as one of many ways that today's politicians can construct their narrative in a media- and culture-focused world.

**Appendix A: The Memes**

April 4, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20501704983/original-image-by-kevin-lamarque-for-reuters>



April 4, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20509025861/original-image-by-kevin-lamarque-for-reuters>



April 4, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20503568688/original-image-by-diana-walker-for-time>



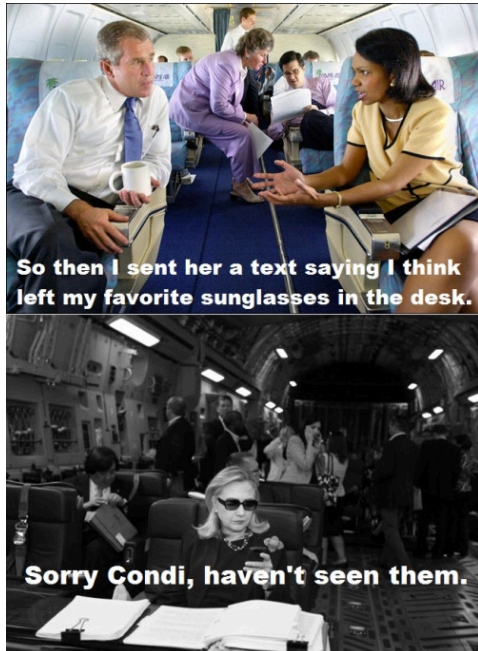
April 5, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20525893974/original-image-by-kevin-lamarque-for-reuters>



April 5, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20528018113/original-image-by-diana-walker-for-time>



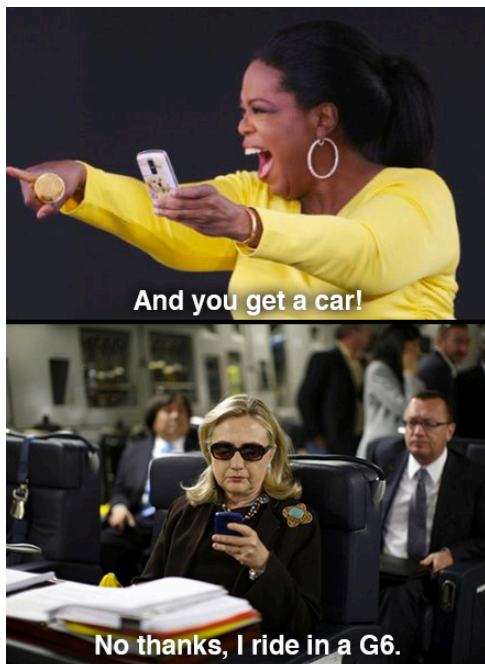
April 5, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20533946104/inspired-by-this-thanks-to-dlind-and>



April 5, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20531761276/original-image-by-kevin-lamarque-for-reuters>



April 5, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20535845208/original-image-by-diana-walker-for-time>





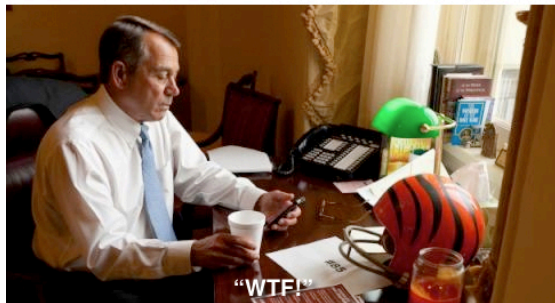
April 5, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20538302111/original-image-by-diana-walker-for-time>



April 5, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20542644038/original-image-by-diana-walker-for-time>



April 5, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20545109996/scotchandscones-happy-birthday-colin>



April 5, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20550554725/notnadia-because-once-a-joke-is-made-you-can>



April 5, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20564093339/leoandtelevision-im-sorry-that-i-just-beat>



April 5, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20565412098/original-image-by-diana-walker-for-time>



April 6, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20586065282/original-image-by-kevin-lamarque-for-reuters>



April 6, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20588228165/original-image-by-diana-walker-for-time>





April 6, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20589956130/sharapwna-every-now-and-then-hillary-likes-to>



April 6, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20599587066/original-image-by-kevin-lamarque-for-reuters>



April 6, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20594545873/original-image-by-diana-walker-for-time>



April 6, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20601140276/original-image-by-diana-walker-for-time>



April 6, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20603791605/original-image-by-diana-walker-for-time>



April 7, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20651224954/original-image-by-diana-walker-for-time>



April 6, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20606518140/source-chase-whiteside-original-image-by-kevin>



April 7, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20652158577/original-image-by-diana-walker-for-time>





April 8, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20709729611/original-image-by-diana-walker-for-time>



April 9, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20776605823/original-image-by-diana-walker-for-time>



April 9, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20783546487/deliberatepace-my-two-cents-more-here>



April 9, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20796979516/source-joe-devillaglobal-nerdy-original-image>





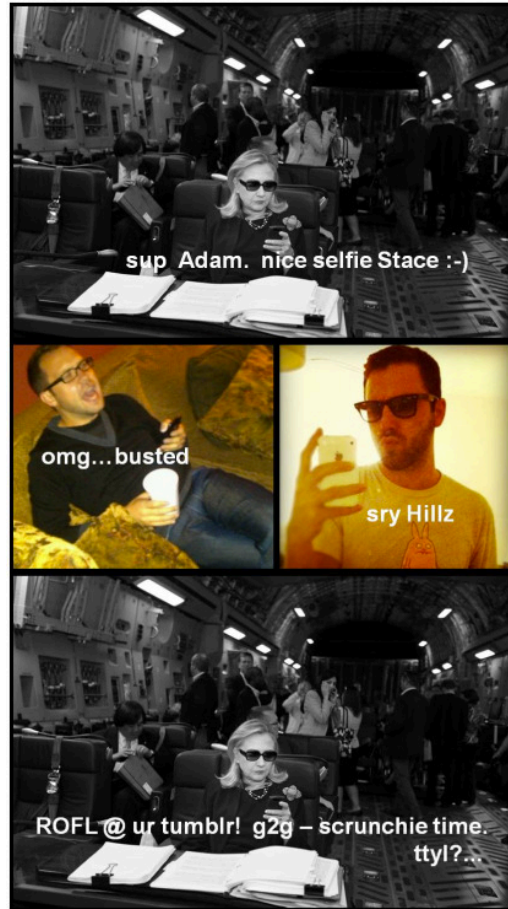
April 10, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20838007265/original-image-by-diana-walker-for-time>



April 10, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20848769934/a-submission-from-secretary-hillary-clinton>



April 10, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20840535068/thanks-to-capitolhillkid-and-adamconner-for>



April 10, 2012

<http://textsfromhillaryclinton.tumblr.com/post/20853280902/texting-with-secretary-hillary-clinton-proof-of>



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Yin, Robert K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods, 4th edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

## Hanna K. Birkhead

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### EDUCATION

**S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University**  
Master of Arts, Media Studies | expected May 2016

**Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University**  
Master of Public Administration, Nonprofit Management | expected July 2016

#### **Bates College**

Bachelor of Arts, Political Science | May 2011

#### **Temple University Rome Campus**

Immersive study abroad experience | August – December 2009

### AWARDS

**Syracuse University Graduate Scholar** | 2015-2016

Recipient of scholarship given in recognition of academic and professional achievements.

### RESEARCH & PRESENTATIONS

Liebler, C., **Birkhead, H.**, & Yan, Y. (2016). How WEIRD Are We? Sample Diversity in Premier Mass Communications Journals. Paper to be presented at the annual conference of the International Communication Association, Fukuoka, Japan.

Gallagher, A., & **Birkhead, H.** (2015). #Mustread: How Journalism Textbooks Address Social Media. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Francisco, CA.

Yan, Y., Long, P., Vickers, J., & **Birkhead, H.** (2015) Power Women: Exploring the Effects of Political Women on TV. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Francisco, CA.

### POLICY EXPERIENCE

**Massachusetts National Organization for Women**, Boston, MA | September 2011 – June 2012

#### *Policy & Programs Fellow*

- Principal staff member in Massachusetts' NOW office.
- Built and advanced a comprehensive legislative advocacy program, including lobbying and working with elected officials and dozens of organizations, unions, and coalitions to advance shared legislative, educational, and political priorities.
- Expanded website and social media presence through strategic use of Squarespace, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube. Wrote biweekly email newsletters to NOW's 5000+ members.
- Strengthened NOW's educational outreach efforts via strategic reworking of programs including Campus Action Networks and youth education program.
- Planned major yearly fundraiser and other events. Developed speaking programs, designed invitations and websites, and executed media outreach.
- Compiled prospective donor information and produced targeted prospect lists and mailings, and collaborated with treasurer to reach fiscal goals.

**League of Women Voters of New York State**, Albany, NY | June 2011 – December 2011

*Writing Consultant*

- Researched paths to achieving higher voter participation in New York State, focusing on voter registration modernization, trends in early voting, and issues with ballot design.
- Authored a briefing paper based upon research (“Increasing Voter Participation: Opportunities in New York State,” available upon request, or at <http://www.lwvny.org/>) to inform statewide organizational lobbying and advocacy decisions.

**Environment America Federal Advocacy Office**, Washington, DC | May 2010 – July 2010

*Field Intern*

- Authored press releases, internal newsletter, and website updates.
- Obtained and prepared weekly progress reports from Environment America’s 29 federation states.
- Filmed video messages from Environment America’s Executive Director for use on website and social media platforms.

## OTHER WORK EXPERIENCE

**Office Of Academic Affairs**, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY | August 2015 – May 2016

*Graduate Assistant*

- Assist the academic affairs office in preparation for school accreditation.
- Develop systems to track professors’ syllabi and office hours.
- Audit social media presence.

**Professor Carol Liebler**, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY | November 2014 – May 2016

*Research Assistant*

- Select articles to include in a research study examining sampling strategies and demographic trends in communication research sampling.
- Code articles based upon a coding guide in order to establish which trends are present in sampling in mass communications research.

**Professor Aileen Gallagher**, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY | January 2015 – April 2015

*Research Assistant*

- Devised coding guide and coded journalism texts to research social media trends in reporting.
- Wrote accompanying academic article. Advised professor on quantitative analysis best practice, and completed analyses.

**Jones & Bartlett Learning**, Burlington, MA | August 2012 – August 2014

*Editorial Assistant*

*Editorial Intern*

- Edited 1st and 2nd-pass pages of multiple textbook manuscripts. Managed manuscript review process.
- Created content for ancillary products including online courses, mobile apps, student workbooks, instructor toolkits, and companion websites.
- Edited audio books and interactive eBook modules. Copyedited articles for company website and newsletter.

**Bingham McCutchen, LLP**, Boston, MA | June 2012 – August 2012

*Diversity & Legal Recruiting Coordinator*

- Created content for department newsletters and firm's internal website. Managed application and hiring database for new attorney positions.
- Oversaw daily department scheduling for two departments and planned travel for three supervisors. Coordinated planning of public and private events.

**TECHNICAL  
SKILLS**

Efficient and well-trained in the Microsoft Office and Macintosh suites, Constant Contact, Squarespace, and other tools.

Proficient in database use, including the America Votes Voter Engagement Network & Activation Network, and FileMaker.

**LEADERSHIP &  
PROFESSIONAL  
AFFILIATIONS**

**Matilda Gage Center for Social Justice Dialogue**, Fayetteville, NY | July 2015 - July 2016

*Treasurer, Board of Directors*

**Massachusetts NOW Foundation**, Boston, MA | December 2012 – December 2014

*Member, Board of Directors*

- Co-chair, fundraising committee.
- Successfully raised nearly \$100,000 for NOW over three years planning the yearly gala fundraiser.