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The Effects of Gender and Apology on Evaluations of Political Misconduct

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors
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Honors Capstone Project in Political Science

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Abstract

In American politics, elected officials often engage in transgressions that result in scandals. This thesis presents the results of an experiment testing how a politician's gender and the issuance or lack of an apology affect voters' evaluations of elected officials engrossed in a financial scandal. An experiment with 530 participants shows that politicians who apologize for financial misconduct are evaluated more favorably than politicians who do not apologize. In addition, the elected official's gender does not affect evaluations, and male candidates who apologized are not favored over women candidates who apologized. However, women respondents believed female candidates who did not apologize were tougher and more assertive in politics. This finding may suggest a shift in women's expectations of female candidate behavior.

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I also have the deepest appreciation for my additional advisors: Professor Shana Gadarian and Professor Steven Pike. Professor Gadarian has volunteered her time and efforts not only to this thesis, but to advising a women's leadership organization that I lead. Her contributions to this campus are evident in everything she does. I approached Professor Pike having not taken a class of his, but understanding his background in communications and politics would be a strong addition to my committee. He eagerly agreed, and I deeply value our conversations about public relations and politics as they intersect. Professor Dimitar Gueorguiev has guided our Distinction group from the beginning, and I have benefitted from his advice and the sense of companionship he fostered among our class. Lastly, the friendships I have made with my Distinction peers have transformed my senior year. Despite the inevitable challenges of research, they made this a fun journey.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all of the women in my family who have advocated for themselves and succeeded in the face of hardship, both personally and professionally. In particular my mother, Kathleen Trainor- you have worked your entire life for me to be able to attend college. You have given me the greatest gift and I am forever indebted to you.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In August 2018, Representative Duncan Hunter (R-CA) was indicted by a federal grand jury for using over \$250,000 of campaign funds to expense family vacations, private school tuition for his children, and various other personal luxuries. Hunter falsely filed campaign finance records with the Federal Election Commission, leading to an investigation by the United States Department of Justice that recovered evidence of fraud as early as 2009. Duncan and his wife were both indicted and have pleaded not guilty to all 60 charges, with a spokesperson for the Congressman stating that the investigation is “purely politically motivated.” In November, Hunter won re-election to a sixth term in his District.

In February 2019, just days after Senator Amy Klobuchar announced her candidacy for President, multiple news outlets began running stories about her track record of subjecting her staffers to fits of anger and humiliation. Anonymous former employees even cited instances where the Minnesota Senator threw a binder or made them tell other Senators’ staffers “I’m supposed to tell you Senator Klobuchar is late today because I am bad at my job.” Klobuchar responded by stating that she can be tough and push people, and has high expectations for her staff and for the United States. Some of her staff members spoke out in support, citing sexism as a reason for the public outcry toward her behavior. Others called the categorization of this behavior an “attempt to sell cruelty and pathological behavior as a feminist victory (Flanagan,

2019).” Some noted that things may have been different had Klobuchar been a man, as men throwing things tends to signify genuine danger, while women throwing things is perceived as a minor tantrum.

These events may seem like brief flashes in the news, but they are not uncommon incidents. While the 1970s through the 1990s were categorized as times of singular scandals drawn out over a long period (Watergate, the Clinton affair), 2016 was the first time two general election candidates of different genders faced off for the Presidency, bringing more media attention to the role of gendered expectations and scandal than ever before. President Trump and his inner circle have propelled themselves to the center of numerous personal and financial scandals, so much so that discussion around corruption has become normalized. Not only do scandals lower voter evaluations of individual politicians; they also erode trust in democracy and political institutions (Bowler & Karp, 2004 p. 271). Have Americans become desensitized to political misconduct in the Trump era, or do scandals continue to trouble voters in ways that have real impacts on behavior?

As seen in the varied responses to Senator Klobuchar’s behavior, some political commentators believe sexism leads to different perceptions of a scandal if the politician is a man vs. if she is a woman. It is worthwhile to examine how these perceptions of differences between men and women manifest in evaluating candidates not only in a proactive way (how a voter feels about a woman taking a policy risk when it comes to foreign affairs or a man advocating for more compassion in the healthcare system, for example) but also when a politician must react to a self-inflicted misstep. In this paper, I aim to determine whether a relationship exists between gendered expectations of women elected officials (specifically expectations of apology) and feelings towards the politician following a scandal. If women are expected to apologize more yet

their apologies are less effective (Walfisch & Dijk, 2013), will voters evaluate women politicians differently than men politicians apologizing for the same misconduct? Essentially, had Duncan Hunter been a woman, or had Amy Klobuchar been a man, would reactions toward their transgressions be different?

Chapter 2

Theoretical Background

Importance of Character Traits

Character and trait evaluations are important aspects of how voters make decisions about candidates. This process exists at both the Presidential and Congressional level. For example, in their study of character issues in the 2000 presidential election, Bishin et. al found that voters who perceived George W. Bush as “unfair” or “willing to say anything to get elected” were 12-21 percentage points less likely to vote for him (Bishin et. al, 2006). Among trait assessments like competence, empathy, and others, honesty mattered significantly to voters. In addition, character assessments of incumbent Congressional candidates found that levels of integrity directly affected feeling thermometer scores and vote choice (McCurley & Mondak, 1995).

With character traits in mind, scholars attempt to understand why some politicians are forgiven when they fail to act with integrity or honesty, and why some succumb to negative voter

assessments. Rundquist et al. (1977) found that when voters are confronted with information about a candidate facing corruption charges, they use a “trade-off” model and weigh different factors in determining whether or not to vote for the candidate. Voters weigh partisanship and policy positions more heavily than corruption charges in the case that the candidate aligns with the voter on these preferences. As a result, incumbents in the study only suffered a loss of about 6-11% of vote share and were reelected after a scandal. Corruption does matter to voters, but not enough to entirely change voting patterns. Other research has demonstrated the effects of gender, timeframe, and type of scandal (financial vs. personal) on evaluations of officials following alleged misconduct, and found these factors to be strongly influential.

Apology

Apologies can serve as a means to acknowledge blame for a wrongdoing and seek forgiveness from those affected. Little research exists on the apology effectiveness of individual politicians on constituents. However, scholars have for years sought to understand apologies in the workplace and personal settings, which can help open a window into public figure apologies. In studies of apology effectiveness in professional settings, apologies are found to be more effective than non-apologies, especially when delivered shortly after the transgression (Tomlison et al., 2004). The effectiveness of apologies differs depending on the context, however. Due to the demonstrated effectiveness of apologies in repairing trust in personal relationships, I hypothesize that:

H1: Among elected officials who have engaged in misconduct, those who apologize will be evaluated more favorably than those who do not.

More elaborate apologies lead to more forgiveness, liking, and positive evaluations (Darby & Schlenker, 1982). Apologies are especially effective when they contain 1) an expression of empathy for the offended group, 2) an acknowledgement of violated rules/norms, and 3) an offer of compensation. Scher & Darley (1997) suggest that if one of these components is absent, apology of effectiveness may change. Assuming each of these apology components are present in both male and female conditions in this experiment, both men and women should be evaluated more positively when they apologize.

Male and Female Apology Differences

Despite the documented differences in the frequency, type, and expectedness of apologies between men and women, little research examining the effectiveness of male vs. female apologies exists. Schumann and Ross (2010) found that women report apologizing more, but believe that more of their behavior constitutes an apology. Men also rate their offenses as less severe than women. In an experimental situation where respondents believed they had accidentally spilled soda into someone's bag, women delivered more apologies, offered more help in attempting to fix the situation and repair the damage they caused, and made a stronger effort to explain themselves (Gonzales et al., 1990).

Women often attempt to influence the outcome of a situation and others' perceptions of them, even in an accidental offense. Brown & Levinson (1987) coined *politeness theory*, suggesting that people in a position of lower power in society make more of an effort to maintain positive perceptions from others. Women's power and influence in society lacks compared to men, therefore women internalize blame, then explain and apologize for their behavior (Levin, 2004). In addition, an offender's gender influences the effectiveness of their apology in the

workplace. A study examining the effectiveness of apologies from males, females, managers, and subordinates found that apologies are most effective when they come from men and managers (individuals with higher levels of power) because these apologies are less expected (Walfisch, Dijk & Kark, 2013). The increased expectation of apologies from women may stem from the perception of apology from a group with lower social status as an obligation, or the socialization process by which women are expected to maintain positive relations with others (Josephs, Markus & Tafarodi, 1992). Due to the greater effectiveness of male apologies in the workplace, I hypothesize that:

H2: Male elected officials who apologize will be evaluated more favorably than female elected officials who apologize.

Gender and Scandal

Broadly speaking, a political scandal typically involves some sort of misconduct on behalf of a public figure, ranging from “violations of the law to various perceived improprieties (Nyhan, 2017).” Markovits and Silverstein (1988) define scandals as the *disclosure* of moral transgressions, however Nyhan emphasizes that even events where a politician does not admit their behavior can escalate into a scandal if the media covers the issue.

In an experiment examining candidate image as a function of gender and type of scandal (sex scandal vs. financial scandal), Carlson et al. (2000) hypothesized that due to gender stereotypes of women being more honest and trustworthy than men, violation of these norms would cause men to receive more favorable evaluations in the presence of both sex scandals and financial scandals. Contrary to this expectation, the violations of these norms did not lower

evaluations of female candidates. In fact, women involved in a sex scandal received significantly higher scores than men with a sex scandal. No significant differences were found in evaluations of male and female candidates with a financial scandal.

In an additional study examining standards for women vs. men, Smith et al. (2005) looked at candidate evaluations as a function of gender, the type of scandal, and the type of reaction strategy employed (excuse, denial, or justification). Again, researchers hypothesized that due to gendered stereotypes, women would be held to a more serious standard in violation of these principles following a scandal. Consistent with previous studies, however, the mean overall evaluations of male and female politicians were the same. Researchers also hypothesized that the candidate's gender would interact with the type of reaction strategy and affect evaluation. On the contrary, excuses did not work more effectively for females, and justifications did not work more effectively for males. Gender did not influence evaluations.

In the experiment, Smith et al. created male-typical scenarios (sexual relations with a subordinate/tax fraud) and female-typical scenarios (sexual relations with a superior/hiring illegal immigrant as maid) in order to see if cross-gender transgressions elicited more negative evaluations. Surprisingly, this was not the case, as women committing stereotypically-female scandals were evaluated the same as women committing stereotypically-male scandals. Respondents were actually more accepting of cross-gender transgressions, favoring women involved in stereotypically-male scenarios over males in the same situation. These results are surprising, as they conflict with research that suggests women politicians are punished for violating gender expectations.

Gendered Expectations of Women Politicians

While some research suggests that gender now plays a smaller role in candidate evaluation, other work shows that women still face obstacles. Once women decide to enter the political arena, they are still not immune to the external perception that they are better suited for particular situations and environments. In addition, women politicians may be evaluated more negatively due to their inability to fit social roles traditionally associated with elected officials. Eagly and Karau (2002) explain this phenomenon through “Role Congruity Theory,” in which they analyze prejudice as a result of gender roles. When an individual holds a stereotype about a certain group that is considered to be required for success in a social role, and this stereotyped group member acts in a way that contradicts this social role, this “violation” lowers the evaluation of this individual. Female politicians may experience prejudice from voters when they perceive a difference in the characteristics of women and the characteristics of leaders.

National survey responses indicate that female elected officials are believed to be more suited to handle policies related to children and the poor, while male elected officials are better at handling the military, economy, and foreign affairs (Mueller, 1986; Sapiro, 1983). Eagly et al. expand on this research by identifying communal characteristics such as kindness, compassion, nurturing, and gentleness as being ascriptive to women, and the agentic characteristics of assertiveness, control, ambition, and independence as ascriptive to men. These characteristics explain why people may associate women with healthcare and education, and men with national defense and foreign policy. Women politicians may be punished by voters for violating traditional gender roles in their expression of agentic characteristics. For example, in Carli’s (1990) study of tentative vs. confident female speakers addressing a crowd, men found women to be more influential when they spoke tentatively rather than confidently.

The majority of Americans (61%) still believe that women in office must work harder to prove themselves (Horowitz et al., 2018). Women may have a heightened awareness of themselves once in office, due to their underrepresentation and known stereotypes about their strengths and weaknesses. They even introduce more bills and participate more in hearings, possibly stemming from the need to demonstrate their worth. "I have no hard evidence that women are less likely to engage in risky or somewhat stupid behavior," Professor Kathryn Pearson said in an interview with *The New York Times*, "but women in Congress are still really in a situation where they have to prove themselves to their male colleagues and constituents. There's sort of this extra level of seriousness." The article goes on-

"Celinda Lake, a Democratic strategist, says female politicians are punished more harshly than men for misbehavior. 'When voters find out men have ethics and honesty issues, they say, 'Well, I expected that,' " Ms. Lake said. "When they find out it's a woman, they say, 'I thought she was better than that.' (Stolberg, 2011)."

Perhaps a perception exists among the public and political agents that women don't have the room to mess up. They have to go a greater length to prove themselves than their male colleagues.

For decades, scholars have sought to understand if voters value stereotypically masculine or feminine traits in elected officials, and if acting in accordance with one's designated gender roles puts candidates' electoral potential in jeopardy. As more women run for office and explore different campaign strategies, a reflection of older and more recent work in this area is valuable. Kinder (1980) created four dimensions of presidential personality and asked voters to assess

traits of an ideal president. Dimensions containing the most typical feminine traits (like empathy) had lower impact on assessments of presidents, and dimensions encompassing the most typical male traits (like leadership) played a more prominent role on assessments. Women are also penalized when voters lack information about them, and therefore use candidate gender as a shortcut to determine beliefs. Lacking information prompts voters to think of a female candidate as a “typical woman (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, Adams, 1975).” Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) also found that voters prefer more masculine traits in leaders at higher elected office positions, such as executive vs. local office holders. The association between men and leadership still exists today (Offermann & Coats, 2018). Research spanning decades suggests that gender stereotypes disadvantage women candidates.

Considering that women are believed to be intrinsically more honest and trustworthy than men and that misconduct requires them to violate these expectations, and because voters may unconsciously punish women when they lack information about them (such as policy beliefs, their party, and agenda), I hypothesize that:

H3: Among elected officials who have engaged in misconduct, women be evaluated less favorably than men.

Chapter 3

Design

In order to test my hypotheses, I designed an experiment with four different scenarios that manipulated gender and apology. The scenarios were fictional stories in a fabricated newspaper about an elected official engrossed in a financial scandal. The respondents in the study were 604 individuals who opted-in to take the survey through Amazon's MTURK platform in return for \$.70. I completely eliminated the 74 respondents who failed the second manipulation check, leaving 530 respondents left to analyze. Thirty-nine percent of respondents were in the 26-33 age range, and 26% were in the 34-42 age range. Fifty-nine percent of participants were male. The majority (52%) of respondents were Democrats, and half of respondents said they followed political news in the U.S. "somewhat closely." All participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (Elected official gender: Male vs. Female) x 2 (Apology Issuance: Apologized vs. Did not Apologize) experiment.

Respondents were first asked to answer questions about their age, gender, political party identification, ideology, and following of political news. Then, each respondent was randomly assigned to read a different version of a newspaper article describing how an elected official misused campaign funds, a violation of federal election law. The scenarios are as follows:

- *Male elected official/Apology*
- *Male elected official/No apology*
- *Female elected official/Apology*
- *Female elected official/No apology*

I chose the misuse of campaign funds as the scandal for a few reasons, one being that voters see financial scandals as much more detrimental than a personal scandal (Doherty, Dowling, & Miller, 2014). In addition, Carlson et al. (2000) found that women involved in sex scandals received higher character scores than men. No significant differences were found in evaluations of male and female candidates with a financial scandal. Therefore, a financial scandal is more “equal” in terms of effects, and thus a harder test of H3.

In each news story published by the same fictional local newspaper, the politician is found to have used over \$125,000 from campaign donations to expense private travel, restaurant bills and mortgage payments. For participants in the “male” condition, the candidate was named “Peter Hopkins.” For those in the “female” condition, the candidate was named “Patricia Hopkins.” In the “no-apology” condition, the elected official refuses to acknowledge the issue when prompted:

"Hopkins was approached by journalists outside of his office on Wednesday afternoon, but refused to address the issue. 'I have nothing to say about that. During my time in Washington and even before, I have worked to bring change to the people of Ohio. I plan to continue working on behalf of the people of Barre County.'"

In the “apology condition,” the elected official delivers a lengthy apology to their constituents and donors:

"Hopkins held a press conference on Wednesday afternoon to discuss the issue, saying, "I sincerely apologize to the people of my district for my wrongdoings during my campaign for Congress. I knowingly used campaign funds for various personal expenses. I am very sorry to my constituents and to the donors who generously funded my campaign. During my time in Washington and even before, I have worked to bring change to the people of Ohio. I plan to continue working on behalf of the people of Barre County.'"

After reading the article, participants answered a series of questions about their views of the candidate. These measures were based on those used in Smith, Powers and Suarez (2005) and Gonzales et al.'s (1995). These questions asked participants about a politician's competence, likeability, credibility, intelligence, and trustworthiness on Likert scales.

For the first dependent measure, each respondent was asked to rate the elected official on his/her credibility (1 to 7 scale), intelligence, (1 to 4 scale), and trustworthiness (1 to 6 scale). These three items were combined into one, 0 to 1 scale as an index to measure competence ($M=.36$, $\alpha=.70$, $SD=.21$)

Next, each respondent rated the elected official on a feeling thermometer from 0 to 100, with 0 being “Unfavorable/Cool” and 100 being “Favorable/Warm.” Participants also rated the official's likeability and honesty on a 4-point scale. Feeling thermometer scores, likeability, and honesty were averaged together to create an index of likeability ($M=.38$, $\alpha=.88$, $SD=.26$)

Finally, respondents were asked to rate the official on their assertiveness and toughness (7-point scales). These two items were averaged together as an index of Agency ($M=.49$).

Respondents were asked about the likelihood that the official would win re-election in the next election cycle. Answers to this one question on a 4-point Likert scale created the measure of electability. At the end of the survey, two questions served as a manipulation check, asking whether the respondent recognized the offense and the apology- or lack of- in the condition. The questions were: "According to the article you read, did [Peter/Patricia] Hopkins misuse campaign funds?" and "According to the article you read, did [Peter/Patricia] Hopkins apologize?"

Chapter 4

Results

H1 predicted that candidates who apologize would be evaluated more favorably than those who did not. This hypothesis was supported. Table 1 shows the results of an OLS regression predicting likeability.

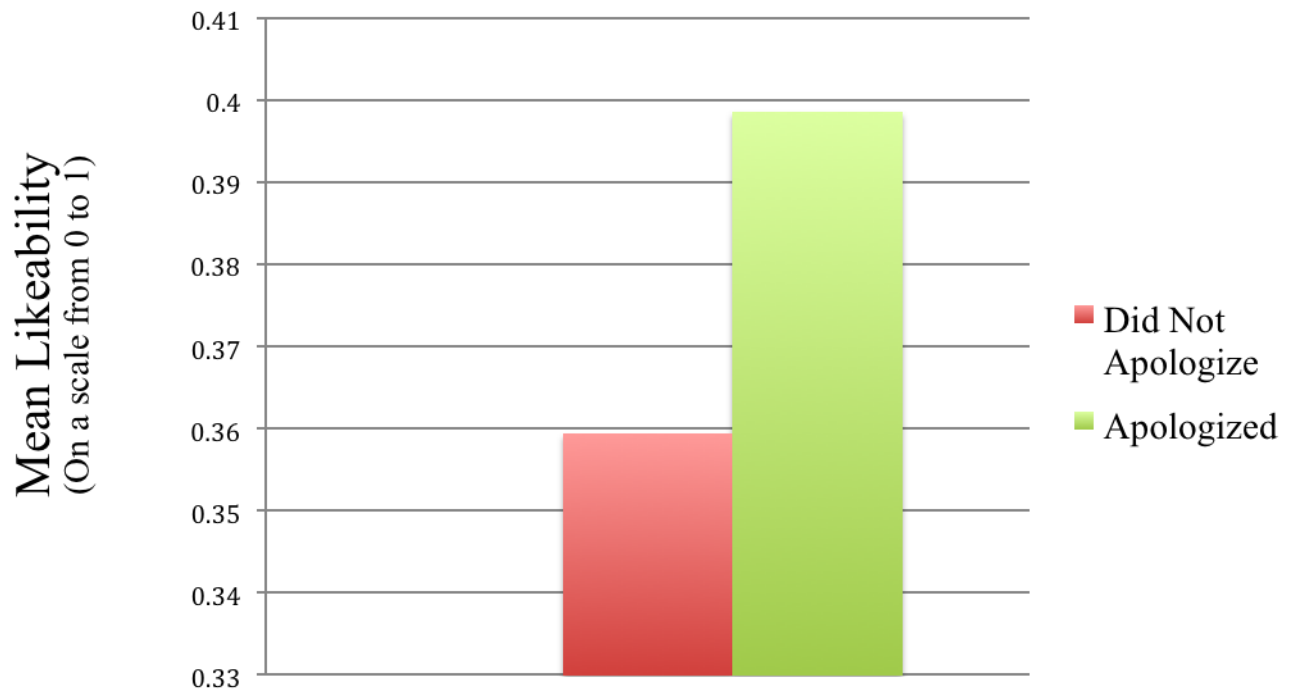
Table 1. EFFECTS OF APOLOGIZING ON LIKEABILITY

Likeability	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>t	95% Conf.	Interval
Female	0.048	0.03	1.45	0.146	-0.01	0.11
Apologized	0.064**	0.03	2.12	0.035	0	0.12
Female#Apologized	-0.055	0.04	-1.24	0.217	-0.14	0.03
_cons	0.337	0.02	14.88	0	0.29	0.38

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Elected officials ensnared in a scandal who apologized received significantly higher likeability ratings than those who did not apologize. Figure 1 shows this effect graphically. Respondents believed officials who apologized were more trustworthy, credible, intelligent, likeable and honest, regardless of the candidate's gender.

Figure 1. MEAN LIKEABILITY OF NON-APOLOGY VS. APOLOGY GROUP



Contrary to some literature that suggests male apologies in the workplace are more effective due to their unexpectedness, I found no support for Hypothesis 2. As shown in Table 1, there is not a significant interaction between candidate gender and apology. Male elected officials who apologized were not evaluated more favorably than female elected officials who apologized.

H3 predicted that women would be evaluated less favorably than men overall. Table 1 also shows that H3 is not supported. Women do not receive significantly lower or higher evaluations than men. This means that women officials who have engaged in misconduct are not punished by voters simply for being women. Voters do not see women overall as less or more

tough, assertive, competent or likeable than their male peers who committed the same transgression. In addition, women were not seen as more or less likely to be re-elected than males. These findings are consistent with the Smith et al. (2000) finding that women engaged in financial and personal scandals were not evaluated worse than men.

Exploratory Analyses

This section examines interesting patterns in the results that were not specifically predicted in the formal hypotheses. First, grouping together all four treatment groups, I examine how respondents' demographic characteristics affect their evaluations of the candidate as well as his/her electability. Table 2 shows the results of a regression analysis exploring this question.

Table 2. EFFECTS OF AGE, GENDER, NEWS CONSUMPTION, PARTY ON
EVALUATIONS

	Model 1 Competence		Model 2 Likeability		Model 3 Electability	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Age	-0.025**	0	-0.037***	0.01	0.031**	0.01
Female	0.017	0.02	0.009	0.03	0.021	0.03
News Consumption	0.04**	0.01	0.026	0.02	-0.055*	0.02
Republican	0.069**	0.04	0.094**	0.05	-0.071*	0.03

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

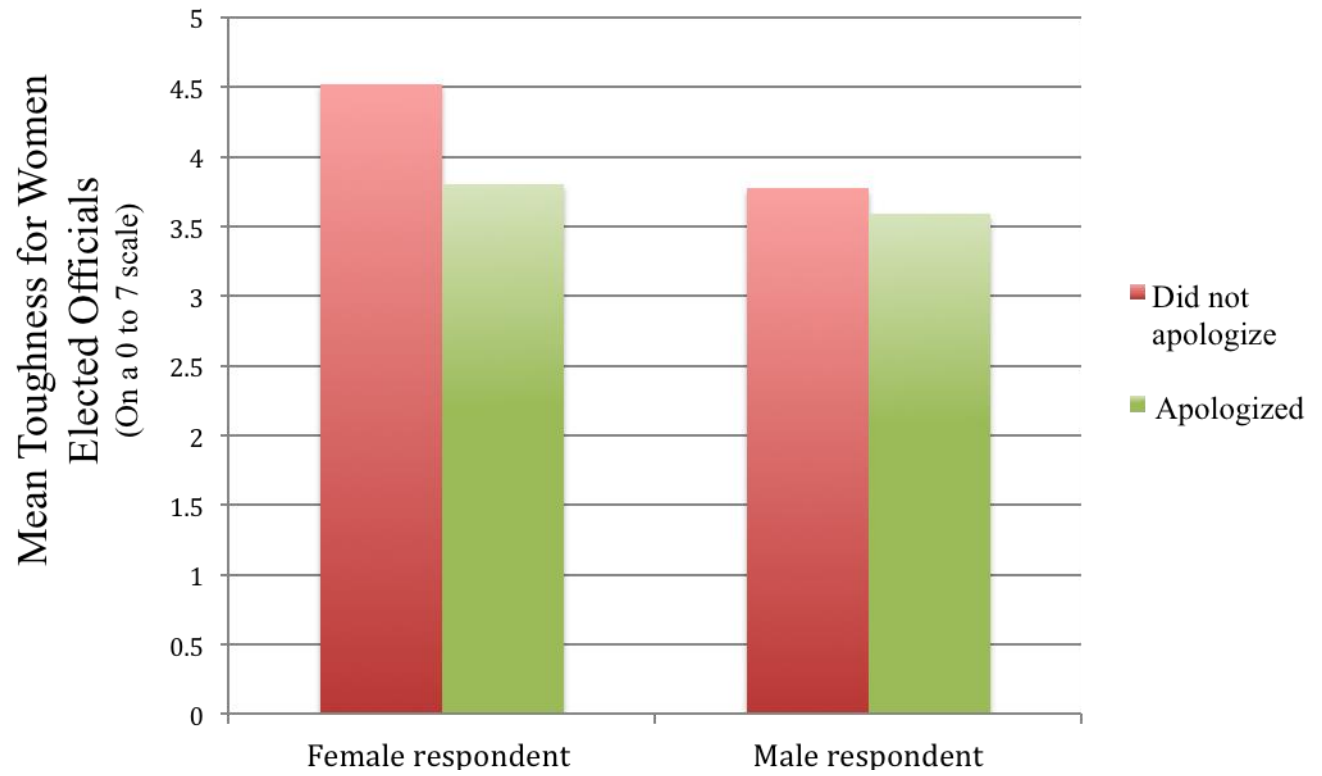
Positive evaluations of competence and likeability of officials increased with age. Respondents who self-identified as conservative rated candidates significantly more positively on competence, likeability and agency, but were less likely to believe the candidate would be re-elected. Similarly, people who consume more political news rated candidates more positively on competence and likeability, but negatively on electability. Gender alone had no significant effects on dependent variables.

A comparison of mean competence ratings for male candidates among partisans found that Democrats perceive male officials as significantly less competent and Republicans perceive male officials as significantly more competent ($p < .0009$). No significant differences existed

when comparing competence means among female candidates. In addition, Republicans gave higher overall feeling thermometer scores ($M=33.58$) and honesty scores ($M=1.88$) compared to Democrats. Differences in ideology shifted candidate evaluations as well. Conservatives rated elected officials significantly more positively on competence, likeability, and agency. However, Conservatives are significantly less likely to believe the candidate will be re-elected ($\beta = -.05$, Std. Err=.01, $p < 0$).

Comparing mean measures of toughness between apology vs. non-apology conditions, I found that respondents believed women candidates who don't apologize are significantly more tough than women candidates who do apologize. As seen in Figure 2, female respondents are driving this trend, giving women who don't apologize a mean of 4.52 out of 7 on the toughness scale, and women who apologize a 3.8 out of 7. This pattern repeats with agency, with female respondents giving non-apologizing women candidates a .61 agency rating and apologizing women a .49 agency rating. In contrast, apologies did not seem to matter for men who evaluated female candidates. Women respondents were also significantly more likely to believe all candidates will be re-elected. Women gave significantly higher electability ratings to male candidates than male respondents ($\beta = .71$, Std. Err=.03, $p < .01$).

Figure 2. MEAN TOUGHNESS OF WOMEN ELECTED OFFICIALS AMONG MALE AND FEMALE RESPONDENTS



Chapter 5

Discussion

Political scandals represent real problems for elected officials. Aside from tainting an individual's reputation in the press, an alleged transgression can lower voters' trust in not only the elected official, but in political institutions altogether. Politicians often wonder how to respond once the media publishes a story about their misconduct- should they openly apologize or should they "stand their ground" and refuse to acknowledge their wrongdoing? The results of this experiment suggest that apologizing is a more effective strategy for candidates involved in a financial scandal. Politicians who apologize are seen as more competent, likeable, and as having more agency than those who do not apologize.

As more women continue to run for office in unprecedented numbers, it is also valuable to understand the implications of misconduct on voters' attitudes toward these women should a scandal arise. Results from this experiment indicate that women are not punished at greater rates than men for committing the same offense. And despite previous research suggesting that men in the workplace are more easily forgiven than their women colleagues, I find no evidence that apologies from Congressmen are more effective than apologies from Congresswomen.

While H1 suggests voters appreciate apologies, President Trump and his staff have only apologized publicly for two incidents, one being the infamous "Access Hollywood" tape and the

White House firing Rob Porter, who was accused of abusing two of his ex-wives. The Administration is constantly defending Trump's missteps and refusing to acknowledge any wrongdoing, even after The President said that good people existed on "both sides" of the white supremacist rallies and protests in Charlottesville, and made morbid jokes about terminally ill Senator John McCain. The results of this experiment suggest that Trump's "never apologize" strategy may not serve him well. Inevitably, factors such as party identification and the difference between Congressional apologies vs. Presidential apologies make his situation different than the fabricated transgression described in this experiment. However, the effect of apologies from partisans at the executive level under the same circumstances could be an area of future research.

Women may be expected to apologize more frequently in the workplace, but not doing so may actually increase their approval ratings from voters, especially from women voters. If women candidates want to appear tough and assertive, they should not apologize for misconduct. For men, apologizing makes little difference in being seen as tough or assertive. It does, however, make a significant difference in being seen as competent or likeable. It's not that apologizing helps men over women, or women over men. Instead, apologizing impacts the perceived competence, likeability, or agency of a candidate vs. a candidate of the same gender who does not apologize.

Although more research is necessary to determine why conservatives give more positive ratings to fraudulent officials, one can infer that the political environment during the Trump Administration may be driving these evaluations. Partisan voters tend to shift their attitudes towards different behaviors depending on which party is in power. For example, a 2016 study found that in 2011, only 30% of White evangelical Protestants thought elected officials who

commit immoral acts could still ethically fulfill their duties. After Trump's election in 2016, this number jumped to 72% (Jones & Cox, 2016). These voters were willing to dismiss their feelings toward immoral conduct because the President's party and ideology was more important.

Therefore the willingness of so many Republicans and Conservatives to positively rate this scandalous candidate may be a reflection of their support for President Trump, despite ongoing accusations of fraud, corruption and collusion. The rationalization of President Trump's financial missteps affects how voters view other candidates involved in a financial scandal. If Republican voters are willing to set their feelings about corruption aside in order to support a politician, this pattern may be occurring in this study as well. It would be interesting to conduct a similar study in the future under a Democratic Administration and see if this pattern changes.

The support for women who don't apologize among women respondents may also be influenced by the Trump Administration and by recent cultural discussions regarding the need for men to take responsibility for their actions. In 2018, the #MeToo movement introduced a national dialogue that aimed to lift women's voices who had been victimized by powerful men, and demand that these men be held responsible for their actions. This movement put a spotlight on the male apology as being necessary and appropriate when a transgression occurs. When Professor Christine Blasey Ford testified that Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh sexually assaulted her at a high school party in 1982, her calm, patient demeanor drastically contrasted with Kavanaugh's angry, emotional testimony where he denied all allegations. Perhaps one of the most powerful news stories in 2018, fueled by emotions, tension and personal connections, the contrast between Blasey Ford and Kavanaugh's behavior during their testimonies continued to drive the national conversation around apology and transgressions. Perhaps women, identifying with Blasey Ford, have decided under the Trump Administration that women public

figures are more tough and assertive when they refuse to apologize for conduct in a political system that favors men and allows them to “get away” with their bad behavior. However, more research should be conducted to see if this pattern exists under a different Administration or cultural context.

Limitations

To suggest that these patterns will play out following every political scandal at every level of office would be ignorant of other factors that determine voter behavior. In a real setting, voters almost always know more information about the elected official that influences their attitudes, such as the official’s party, policy preferences, and other positive or negative stories that have emerged in the news. Realizing that partisanship often drives vote choice, I suspect that had respondents known Representative Hopkins’ political party, their favorability may have changed according to their own party. In addition, the reaction by voters may change depending on the type and timing of the scandal. A politician misusing campaign funds for personal vacations may elicit different reactions than one who uses them to invest in gambling, for example. A further discussion of aspects of external validity and generalizability is necessary to understand additional limitations of the study.

Population

Through Amazon's MTURK recruiting service, 604 respondents participated in the survey experiment. However, I decided to eliminate the 74 respondents who failed the "apology" manipulation check altogether, as they incorrectly answered whether or not the candidate apologized. By eliminating these respondents, I was able to more accurately determine the

relationship between apology and favorability. However, eliminating these respondents lowered the number of participants. The sample of participants tended to be younger and more Democratic than the general population, with 78% of respondents under the age of 42 and 52% of respondents identifying as a Democrat.

Treatment

Participants were presented with a brief news story about an elected official being investigated for the illegal misuse of campaign funds. The story mentions that prior to the offense, the Representative had secured federal funding for a new hospital in their district. However, the majority of the information in the news story is negative. In a real scenario where a constituent might encounter such a news article, they likely know more information about the elected official, including the positive contributions to the district they have made. Therefore, their favorability ratings may be higher in an actual encounter with negative information because their positive recollections of the elected official may balance their view. In addition, this news article outside of an experimental context would likely feature a picture of the Representative, which could potentially affect voters' evaluations based on appearance. In addition, the participants read a story about a member of Congress from Ohio, which may not elicit strong reactions from someone who does not reside in that state as opposed to someone who lived in the District and demanded more responsibility from their Representative. A future study may examine the effects of misconduct when a voter evaluates an elected official within their own district vs. an elected official that resides far away.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Many politicians' natural reaction to the public discovering their misconduct is to deny, lie or refuse to speak on the matter. Often, they deny to the point that an investigation ensues, draining taxpayer dollars and capturing media headlines for months. Scandals have real consequences on voters' feelings toward candidates. During the 2016 Presidential election, the Federal Bureau of Investigation announced that Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton had used a private email server to discuss matters relating to her work as Secretary of State, and that her staff had subsequently deleted roughly 31,000 emails from the server. She initially laughed off the matter in interviews, but as the increasing concern over her actions remained in the media, she began to justify her conduct, insisting that she did nothing wrong and that "everything I did was permitted. There was no law. There was no regulation." Then-candidate Trump capitalized on this issue, inciting "lock her up" chants at rallies. The week before the 2016 election, Trump lead Clinton on honesty and trustworthiness by eight points in a Washington Post-ABC News poll (Chan, 2016). Had Clinton admitted fault and apologized immediately after the allegations surfaced, would the outcome of the election been different? One cannot conclusively say, as many other factors drove the electorate to vote the way it did. However, Clinton may have seen increased competence, likeability, and agency ratings.

Knowing that voters appreciate apologies regardless of candidate gender, political teams may be in a better position to advise their candidates when dealing with a scandal. In addition, the lack of differences in judgments of women candidates vs. men candidates who commit fraud may signify a positive shift in the way Americans perceive women politicians. The next time an elected official is caught in a scandal, they may want to consider apologizing. However, women candidates trying to build a perception of toughness or assertiveness among women voters should consider the implications of apologizing in a different way.

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Appendices

Introduction

Informed Consent Document

My name is Emily Thorson and I am a professor at Syracuse University. I am interested in learning about people's reactions to political scandals. You will be asked to read a brief news article and answer questions about yourself and your opinions. The survey will take about 3.5 minutes.

You will be compensated 70 cents for the time you take in completing this survey, and your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to answer any questions on the survey and you may opt-out at any time. No identifying information about you will be collected, including your name. All information collected during this survey is confidential by law.

By taking this survey, you will be helping us to understand public opinion on political scandals and misconduct. The full purpose of this research cannot be disclosed before you participate, but will be told to you at the end. If you do not want to take part, you have the right to refuse to take part, without penalty. If you decide to take part and later no longer wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty.

Whenever one works with email or the internet, there is always risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. It is important for you to understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the internet by third parties.

If you have any questions about this study or your rights as a research participant, you can contact the primary investigator, Emily Thorson, at eathorso@syr.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, or if you have questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, or if you cannot reach the investigator, contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at 315-443-3013. By

clicking the “Next” button below I confirm that I am 18 years of age or older and wish to participate in this research study.

What is your age?

- 18-25
- 26-33
- 34-42
- 43-51
- 52-60
- 61 or over

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

With what political party do you identify?

- Democratic
- Republican
- Independent
- Other

In general, would you describe your political views as:

- Very Conservative
- Conservative
- Moderate
- Liberal
- Very Liberal

How closely do you follow news about politics in the United States?

- Very closely
- Somewhat closely
- Not very closely
- Not at all closely

Next you will read a news article from *The Barre Times*, a local newspaper from Central Ohio. The article was published last week. Please read the article carefully. You will be asked questions about it after you have read it.

Treatment

Please read the following news article.

→ Condition 1: Male, Apology

Congressman Peter Hopkins Misused Campaign Funds, Apologizes to Supporters

By Riley Baker

BARRE, Ohio – The House Ethics Committee found that Congressman Peter Hopkins misused funds from his 2016 campaign. The independent body stated on Thursday that “there is reason to believe Congressman Hopkins used over \$125,000 from campaign donations to expense private travel, restaurant bills and mortgage payments.”

Records indicate that Hopkins spent the campaign funds on items including first-class airline travel, resort stays, golfing trips, and restaurant meals, as well as family vacations in the Dominican Republic and The Maldives. Hopkins falsely filed many of these expenses with the Federal Election Commission under “campaign travel.”

Prior to this disclosure, Hopkins’ approval ratings were at an all-time high following his successful campaign to secure federal funding for a new hospital in Barre County. Last month, multiple public interest groups filed complaints about his financial records with the Office of Congressional Ethics.

Hopkins held a press conference on Wednesday afternoon to discuss the issue, saying, “I sincerely apologize to the people of my district for my wrongdoings during my campaign for Congress. I knowingly used campaign funds for various personal expenses. I am very sorry to my constituents and to the donors who generously funded my campaign. During my time in Washington and even before, I have worked to bring change to the people of Ohio. I plan to continue working on behalf of the people of Barre County.”

The House Ethics Committee is expected to make an announcement on the matter early next week.

→ Condition 2: Male, No apology

Congressman Peter Hopkins Misused Campaign Funds



By Riley Baker

BARRE, Ohio – The House Ethics Committee found that Congressman Peter Hopkins misused funds from his 2016 campaign. The independent body stated on Thursday that “there is reason to believe Congressman Hopkins used over \$125,000 from campaign donations to expense private travel, restaurant bills and mortgage payments.”

Records indicate that Hopkins spent the campaign funds on items including first-class airline travel, resort stays, golfing trips, and restaurant meals, as well as family vacations in the Dominican Republic and The Maldives. Hopkins falsely filed many of these expenses with the Federal Election Commission under “campaign travel.”

Prior to this disclosure, Hopkins’ approval ratings were at an all-time high following his successful campaign to secure federal funding for a new hospital in Barre County. Last month,

multiple public interest groups filed complaints about his financial records with the Office of Congressional Ethics.

Hopkins was approached by journalists outside of his office on Wednesday afternoon, but refused to address the issue. “I have nothing to say about that. During my time in Washington and even before, I have worked to bring change to the people of Ohio. I plan to continue working on behalf of the people of Barre County.”

The House Ethics Committee is expected to make an announcement on the matter early next week.

→ Condition 3: Female, Apology

*Congresswoman Patricia Hopkins Misused Campaign Funds,
Apologizes to Supporters*



By Riley Baker

BARRE, Ohio – The House Ethics Committee found that Congresswoman Patricia Hopkins misused funds from her 2016 campaign. The independent body stated on Thursday that “there is reason to believe Congresswoman Hopkins used over \$125,000 from campaign donations to expense private travel, restaurant bills and mortgage payments.”

Records indicate that Hopkins spent the campaign funds on items including first-class airline travel, resort stays, golfing trips, and restaurant meals, as well as family vacations in the Dominican Republic and The Maldives. Hopkins falsely filed many of these expenses with the Federal Election Commission under “campaign travel.”

Prior to this disclosure, Hopkins' approval ratings were at an all-time high following her successful campaign to secure federal funding for a new hospital in Barre County. Last month, multiple public interest groups filed complaints about her financial records with the Office of Congressional Ethics.

Hopkins held a press conference on Wednesday afternoon to discuss the issue, saying, "I sincerely apologize to the people of my district for my wrongdoings during my campaign for Congress. I knowingly used campaign funds for various personal expenses. I am very sorry to my constituents and to the donors who generously funded my campaign. During my time in Washington and even before, I have worked to bring change to the people of Ohio. I plan to continue working on behalf of the people of Barre County."

The House Ethics Committee is expected to make an announcement on the matter early next week.

→ Condition 4: Female, No apology

Congresswoman Patricia Hopkins Misused Campaign Funds



By Riley Baker

BARRE, Ohio – The House Ethics Committee found that Congresswoman Patricia Hopkins misused funds from her 2016 campaign. The independent body stated on Thursday that “there is reason to believe Congresswoman Hopkins used over \$125,000 from campaign donations to expense private travel, restaurant bills and mortgage payments.”

Records indicate that Hopkins spent the campaign funds on items including first-class airline travel, resort stays, golfing trips, and restaurant meals, as well as family vacations in the Dominican Republic and The Maldives. Hopkins falsely filed many of these expenses with the Federal Election Commission under “campaign travel.”

Prior to this disclosure, Hopkins' approval ratings were at an all-time high following her successful campaign to secure federal funding for a new hospital in Barre County. Last month, multiple public interest groups filed complaints about her financial records with the Office of Congressional Ethics.

Hopkins was approached by journalists outside of her office on Wednesday afternoon, but refused to address the issue. "I have nothing to say about that. During my time in Washington and even before, I have worked to bring change to the people of Ohio. I plan to continue working on behalf of the people of Barre County."

The House Ethics Committee is expected to make an announcement on the matter early next week.

Dependent Variables (questions after treatment)***Q 1-3: Competence / Q 4-6: Likeability / Q 7-8: Agency*****How credible do you think ___ is?**

Not at all credible

Very credible

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

How intelligent do you think ___ is?

- Very unintelligent
- Somewhat unintelligent
- Somewhat intelligent
- Very intelligent

To what extent do you agree with the following statement?

(Patricia/Peter) Hopkins is trustworthy?

- Strongly Disagree, •Moderately Disagree, •Slightly Disagree, •Slightly Agree,
- Moderately Agree, •Strongly Agree

I would like to get your feelings toward ___ on a “feeling thermometer.” A rating of zero degrees means you feel as cold and negative as possible toward ___. A rating of 100 degrees means you feel as warm and positive as possible. You would rate them at 50 degrees if you don’t feel particularly positive or negative toward ___s.

Unfavorable/Cold

Favorable/Warm



How well do the following words describe ___?

	Not at all well	Not very well	Somewhat well	Very well
Likeable	•	•	•	•
Honest	•	•	•	•

How well do the following words describe ___?

	Not at all well	Very well
Assertive	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
Tough	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	

What is the likelihood that ___ will win re-election in the next election cycle? Just give your best guess.

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not too likely
- Not likely at all

According to the article, did ___ misuse campaign funds?

- Yes
- No

According to the article, did ___ apologize?

- Yes
- No

Debrief

Thank you for participating in the survey. The story you read about Representative Hopkins was fictional. Representative Hopkins is not a real person. The goal of this survey was to better understand how people react when candidates engage in misconduct.

To be paid for your time, please enter the number below into the box on the Mechanical Turk

HIT. $\${\text{rand://int/5000:9000}}$