Fossilized Gender Bias? A sociolinguistics study of how intransigent political habits impact women in American politics & the media industry that drives the stereotypes

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Resumen

Ninguna mujer ha sido elegida presidente en la historia de los Estados Unidos. A pesar de los avances históricos en la inclusión de mujeres en la política, atravesar esa barrera sigue siendo una hazaña difícil de conseguir. El propósito de este estudio es analizar la influencia del sesgo de género en el proceso de elección presidencial en los Estados Unidos. Su objetivo es medir el impacto sociolingüístico de los estereotipos negativos de las mujeres en la cultura política del país. Se estudió la campaña presidencial estadounidense del año 2016, la cual contó con Hillary Clinton como primera mujer nominada para presidente por un partido importante contra un oponente masculino, Donald Trump, quien no contaba con experiencia política. Trump ganó fi-

nalmente unas disputadas elecciones planteando, una vez más, la disputa pública sobre la discriminación sistémica de género en la política estadounidense. Esta investigación es un análisis descriptivo de los debates y discursos políticos basados en el género que aparecen en la cobertura de los medios de comunicación, videos de YouTube y documentales de televisión. La investigación también examina el impacto con el que las películas de Hollywood dan forma a una narrativa ficticia sobre el sesgo político de género, generando la pregunta: ¿está el arte imitando o remodelando la vida? La evidencia apunta a prejuicios culturales fosilizados contra mujeres políticas que aspiran a los niveles más altos de gobierno de la nación. También se puede llegar a una conclusión justa y medida de que tal sesgo de género incrustado continúa reforzando normas, nociones y suposiciones anticuadas sobre el papel político de las mujeres. Pero las cosas podrían cambiar radicalmente más temprano que tarde. Los ciudadanos estadounidenses tienen la oportunidad de votar a favor o en contra de una mujer, ahora que Joe Biden está en la boleta demócrata 2020 como candidato presidencial. Si prevalecen los demócratas, esa candidata estaría más cerca de la posición política más poderosa del mundo.

Abstract

No woman has ever been elected President of the United States. Despite historic breakthroughs by female politicians, shattering the ultimate glass ceiling is still an elusive feat. The purpose of this study is to analyze the extent to which gender bias influences the U.S. presidential election process. Its aim is also to measure the sociolinguistic impact of negative stereotypes of women in the country's political culture. In gathering the research, the study examined the 2016 U.S. presidential race which featured Hillary Clinton. The veteran public servant ran against a male opponent who had no political experience. Donald Trump's stunning victory shocked the world. It also re-kindled a public dispute about systemic gender discrimination in U.S. politics. This research investigation is a descriptive analysis of gender-specific political debates and discourses featured in TV documentaries, news media coverage, as well as in YouTube videos. The inquiry also examines the impact of Hollywood movies that depict a fictional

narrative on political gender bias, generating the question: "Is art imitating or reshaping life?" Evidence from the study points to fossilized cultural prejudice against female politicians who aspire to the nation's highest levels of government. A fair and measured conclusion can also be drawn, which is that such embedded gender bias continues to reinforce outmoded norms, notions, and

assumptions about the role of female politicians. But things could radically shift sooner than later. U.S. citizens get a chance to vote for or against a woman who is on the 2020 democratic ticket as presidential nominee Joe Biden's running mate. If the democrats prevail, this female candidate, Kamala Harris, would be a heartbeat away from the most powerful political position in the world.

Introduction

In its 244-year-old history, the United States has never elected a woman to its highest office. So, why is the presidency so male-exclusive in a country where almost half of the population is female? This research was conducted to explore patterns of sociolinguistic gender bias women face in U.S. politics, and especially to those who seek to become president. Deeply rooted cultural norms shape how American voters weigh political competence and, determine who is fit to run the country. To analyze this ideology adequately, the sociolinguistic view of language, and how women talk, is worth making an examination. For what is dubbed "women's language" may serve as a gauge to assess social inequities.

It's a foregone conclusion that the linguistic behaviors of men and

women are distinctly different. The sexes simply don't communicate in the same way. Women use specific functions of language to convey meaning. For instance, socially prestigious speech forms are common among women. Their language is characterized as polite, empathetic, deferential, and emotional. The style has rising intonations and utilizes tag questions, which may come across as conversational but which could also suggest uncertainty. Women tend to speak in a more shared, intimate, and personalized manner.

While women's use of language is more cooperative, men's language approach is more competitive. The aspects of men's identity are reflected in a more direct, assertive, vernacular, and dominant linguistic style (Lakoff, 1973). These

distinctive linguistic variants carry specific social meanings. And society's interpretation of those meanings often sets up contentious debates about gender bias. As Robin Lakoff argues, sociolinguists states that male linguistics is elevated as the established societal norm, diminishing the female significance. This marginalizes women's experience, rendering them as deviant and inferior. Her reasoning is called the Lakoff Hypothesis. It asserts that, "*characteristics of women's language are a result of linguistic subordination. A woman must learn to speak 'women's language' to avoid being criticized as unfeminine by society. As a result, women appear to lack authority, seriousness, conviction and confidence in their conviction*" (Lakoff, 1973). Lakoff refers to this scenario as linguistic imbalance, which she says reflects imbalances and inequities in real life. So, why does this matter in politics? How might these sociolinguistic gender style differences shape the way voters view women? When society defines "different" as superior or inferior dangerous stereotypes causing gender bias to take root. And when women politicians dare to defy confining stereotypes, they risk being labeled rebels, upstarts, power-hungry or unladylike, especially if or when they challenge men.

Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign offers sufficient evidence of this gender imbalance.   The fallout from this political event, which played out on the world stage, is the target and purpose of this research investigation. This case amplifies how voters can cling to, even consciously or unconsciously endorsing the encoding of gender bias and egregious male leadership behavior, because it is sanctioned by sociolinguistic norms.

The news media captured Clinton's historic political campaign and devoted wall-to-wall coverage. This barrage of TV analysis revealed how sociolinguistic norms penetrate the airwaves and can help reinforce negative gender bias against female political candidates. It was also important, for this study, to determine how the power of movie industry also tackles the issue of gender inequities in politics and serves to either imitate real-life bias or cleverly call it out.

The objective of this study is to investigate gender bias in politics and assess how societal norms may fossilize negative gender stereotypes. The research aims to also analyze how Hollywood movies reflect, influence, or reinforce real life gender inequality, especially regarding political treatment of women in the highest levels of American politics.

Materials and Methods

The sociolinguist research is descriptive in nature. It sets out to, accurately, explain and expound upon a societal phenomenon being investigated. A systematic focus is placed on the "what" not the "why" of the fossilized gender bias occurrence.

Information was obtained from a list of TV political documentaries, topic-related video discourses, YouTube stories, and three big screen movies. The videos were analyzed from 2016 until 2018. The Hollywood movies documented fictional events from 1997 to 2011. Research papers on the topic of sociolinguistic behavior were used as analytical references.

The Candidate

It came as no surprise that a major presidential party in America placed a woman on the ticket for vice president in the 2020 election. For months, leading democratic presidential candidate, Joe Biden, had vowed to choose a woman as his running mate. And there is social desirability for gender equality in the highest levels of politics. Polls states that U.S. voters think a woman is just as capable to lead the country as a man is (Keneally, 2019).

If that is true, how did Hillary Clinton lose the presidential race to Donald Trump in 2016? Barak Obama once called Clinton the most qualified candidate to serve as President of the United States, man, or woman (Nelson, 2016). In 2013, Clinton graced the cover of Newsweek Magazine as "The Most Powerful Woman in American History" (Tomasky, 2013). Time Magazine featured her on its coveted cover page nineteen times over a quarter century (Time Magazine, 2016).

Clinton was a Yale law school graduate, a successful attorney with more than 30 years in public service. She served twice as the country's first lady; then eight years as a U.S. senator; and later, four years as the U.S. Secretary of State, under the Obama Administration. She was the first female ever to capture a major party's presidential nomination. Clinton's billionaire businessman opponent was a newcomer to politics, who had never served a day in a public office and was not predicted to win. But he did.

What makes it so hard for female candidates to break through the ultimate gender barrier in U.S. politics? A clue about gender politics may come from two of the strongest influences that shape America's cultural, political, and social construct. They are the powerful movie industry and the national news media.

Bias on the Big Screen

The first movie examined was the 1997 blockbuster film, Airforce One. Action hero, Harrison Ford, plays U.S. President, James Marshall, whose plane is hijacked by Russian extremists. Both covert gender bias and overt political power come into play quickly, becoming the center stage, as movie viewers meet the vice president, who happens to be a woman (Petersen, 1997).

Famed Hollywood actress Glen Close plays Katheryn Bennet, a tough-as-nails female who approaches the hostage crisis with calm, firm leadership. But she is surrounded by a room full of dominant men, one of them challenges her authority and her ability to manage the situation. The antsy Secretary of Defense, a brash alfa-male, is itching for a power grab. In one scene, he impatiently paces the room and then says to Bennet,

"If you'd just try and relax Katheryn, I am in charge".

She calmly responds:

"I don't know Walter, it seems to me that they (the hijackers) are in charge".

His word choice and demeanor support the sociological theory that men´s and women's linguistical forms contrast greatly. Above all, men seek power in conversation. In the exchange, the Defense Secretary infers that men know best how to handle a crisis. And since Bennet is a woman, she must be less intelligent and more prone to get emotional, even though he is the one displaying anxiousness. The hijacker also questions Bennet's job fitness. He tries to denigrate her, well knowing that she is the only person he can negotiate with. His sharp sarcastic attitude plays out during a phone exchange about President Marshall's safety.

"The president is safe. But then you know that. He ran from here like a whipped dog. I am sure you can't wait for him to get back to making the decisions, so you can stop sweating through that silk blouse of yours".

Here, the hijacker feeds into cultural gender bias, suggesting that Bennet is out of her league and incapable of handling pressure. So, he tries to rattle her with patronizing insults. Bennet remains focused and composed, using standard grammatical forms, unlike the five-star general, in the room who resorts to cursing angrily.

He barks, *"Dam it! Nobody does this the Unites States. The President will get back his baseball gloves and play catch with his (hijacker's) balls".*

Here, we see male vernacular on full blast. On a big screen display, there are men's favorite linguistic forms dripping with raw vulgarity. Men regard vernacular as positive and valuable since it feeds into their idea of machoism and toughness. It's overt prestige. But as

Brennon proves, women can break from sociolinguistic gender norms and cuss, too. Minutes after getting the news of the hijacking, she angrily but privately, rants to a few close aides:

"How the hell did this happen, how the hell did they get Air Force One?"

The ease with which Bennet uses this vernacular is evidence that, in her world dominated by powerful men, gender roles overlap. So, speech forms overlap, too.

In her book, An Introduction to Social Linguistics, sociolinguist Janet Holmes explains it this way: *"In highest society groups, the women's speech is closer to that of men. Class membership is more than gender identity"* (Holmes, An Introduction to Sociolinguistics, 1992).

Hillary Clinton Behind the Scenes

Hilary Clinton is known to fire off vernacular curse words. And like Bennet, she does it in private, not in public. That is captured in a Hulu four-part documentary, called "Hillary," on Clinton's life story and political journey. Once, while waiting back-stage, just before a presidential debate with opponent Bernie Sanders, a campaign staff asked Clinton:

"Are you wearing those shoes on stage?"

Clinton: *"I mean honest to God; do you think anybody talks to Bernie Sanders about his goddam shoes? No more fashion comment…"*

Campaign worker: *"I just want to make sure you look beautiful."* (Documentary, 2020).

The documentary reveals how Clinton lets her hair down with her staff, friends, and supporters. Publicly, she is portrayed as stiff, formal, calculating, even mechanical. But with her tribe of women fans and friends, it is a lovefest of hugs and female bonding, with an easy flow of vernacular speech woven in. This underscores the sociolinguistic claim that, *"Women display preference for vernacular form when they are with each other"* (Holmes, An Introduction to Sociolinguistics, 1992). They use increased intonation, change of voice tone, and vocalization. And that is exactly what Clinton does in safe relaxed informal environments. On the debate stage, she quickly transforms and assumes the expected standard form of speech and behavior.

What's Expected

According to prevailing societal norms women, including female politicians, are expected to be the cultural role models for correct behavior. Sociolinguist Janet Holmes says, *"They are viewed as the guardian of society's values. Society expects better behavior from women than*

from men" (Holmes, Introduction To Sociolinguistics -4th Edition, 1992). The Hulu documentary gives evidence of a woman whose whole life was spent defying the norms and breaking down gender barriers in business, politics, and society. Clinton was a leader in the feminist revolution as far back as her student-activist days at Wellesley College. The video documentary tracks the ups and downs of her thirty-year career in the political spotlight, the shaping of her public image, and her struggle to challenge, conform, and fit in; then, fight again to uproot gender unfairness. The socio-psychological portrait that has emerged indicates Clinton:

- Is viewed as cool, measured, calculating, non-emotional
- Seeks power in the fight of women's equality
- Refuses to be regarded or treated as a subordinate
- Is comfortable with offending, displeasing men, or being less polite
- Uses vernacular language in private
- Has a low and measured voice tone
- Begrudgingly conforms to some societal gender norms
- Works to secure and guard women's rights
- Refuses to be the guardian of "society's values"
- Balks against women being defined by appearance and not intellect

Ironically, amalgamating stern strength, and femininity may have contributed to some of Clinton's public weakness as a politician. Social and cultural factors assign men as the accepted standard in politics. So, women who dare to seek the highest offices and challenge the establishment are viewed as novelties and upstarts. What is worse, displaying too much feminine masculinity may leave female candidates, vilified by people on both sides of the gender, divided.

Margret Thatcher

Margaret Thatcher experienced such vilification. The towering 20th century political figure challenged gender barriers in Great Britain. In 1979, she became Britain's first female prime minister. Her famously stern, aggressive, and no-nonsense policy decisions left her both idolized and villainized (http://www.euronews.com, 2013).

When Thatcher was famously nicknamed "The Iron Lady," by a Russian journalist, it was meant as an insult, not a compliment to her strong-willed, sometimes unyielding leadership style. Under societal norms, her tough leadership practice, resembled more to traditional male mannerisms.

A movie chronicling Thatcher's life, also called "The Iron Lady," reveals her fight as a rebel, taking on a male-dominant parliament. She did it while stylishly

dressed in soft, feminine clothing, pearl necklace, and carrying her famous hand-bag. Underneath that soft power was a woman who did not blink before starting a war in the Falkland Islands.

In one movie scene, Thatcher is captured aggressively scolding her all-male cabinet, saying: *"The problem is that you haven't the courage for this fight"* (Lloyd, 2011).

So, this shows how women speak carefully and politely, as sociolinguistic characterization of how women dictate. Both Thatcher and Clinton demonstrated defiance in the face of gender bias. But in documentaries on "power", women punctuate the reality that no matter how well they performed, institutional bias and gender politics still frowned on them, while giving men a pass in many social, culture and political arenas.

Men's Prerogative

Sociolinguistics touch on what might be viewed as male privilege. Videos of Hillary Clinton's presidential debates showcased some of the luxuries societal norms which have afforded men.

Society:	
• Allows men more freedom.	• Tolerates men's bad behavior more.
• More quickly corrects females.	• More severely frowns on rule-breaking by women.

(Holmes, An Introduction to Sociolinguistics, 1992)

This is backed by clear evidence on display during Clinton's presidential debates with opponent Donald Trump.

The Trump Factor

Throughout his campaign leading up to the 2016 election, Donald Trump routinely attacked his political opponents with vicious insults. He is documented calling women liars, dogs, and disgusting animals, even encouraging campaign supporters to use violence at his rallies (Him T. -K., 2016). His defenders applaud this below-the-belt, vernacular strategy, excusing his behavior as plain-talk they can relate to. During their final 2016 debate, Trump angrily interrupted Clinton thirty-seven times. By comparison, she fiercely cut in on him nine times. In a TV interview, Clinton recalled what she felt was a deliberate male-dominant move by trump to intimidate her while they were locked in a contentious debate.

Clinton:

"He was stalking me, leering me. Leering like an alfa male. If I said, 'Back up you creep, you are not going to intimidate me', would I sound angry? Would people recoil (from me)" (4 H. T., 2020).

So, Clinton chose to say nothing, worried the viewing audience would think she was being rude, not him. Her Communications Director at the time, Jennifer Palmieri, said she did the right thing.

"It would have been a mistake, because the headlines would have been 'Clinton rattled'" (4 H. D., 2020).

Clinton's account in her book, "What Happened", explained her decision not to fight back.

"He was breathing down my neck and my skin crawled… I kept my cool, aided by a lifetime of dealing with difficult men trying to throw me off" (Hulu, Hillary, 2020).

Consider this list of Trump's documented "bad behavior" and male vernacular speech style:

Trump's Documented "Bad Behavior"	Vernacular Language style
Encouraged rally supporters to use violence. Told crowd he wanted to "knock the crap out" out of a protestor (Him T. K., 2016).	Routinely called Clinton crocked, crazy, corrupt (Hokary, 2016).
Said at a rally, "I could shoot… somebody and wouldn't lose any voters (Youtube, 2016).	Called women ugly, fat, pigs (Insults, 2016).
Accused Clinton of being an "enabler" in her husband's sex scandal (Youtube, 2016).	Dismissed women who accused him of sexual misconduct as all liars (CNN, 2016).

Trump supporters brush off his "bad behavior" saying it was just Trump being Trump.

While evidence indicates male politicians get a pass, their female counterparts carry an extra burden of having to prove themselves. That reality was reflected in a Hollywood political drama that dealt with gender bias at the highest levels of U.S. politics.

The Contender

The Contender is a 2000 box office thriller that dramatized the great lengths high-ranking politicians would go to discredit a female candidate. Actress Joan Allen plays Laine Hansen, President Jackson Evans' pick to become the first ever women vice president. The liberal democratic president wants to shatter the proverbial glass ceiling with Hansen's nomination. But she immediately faces stiff opposition on Capitol Hill from powerful male forces. One is Congressman Sheldon Runyan, who plots to kill her confirmation. Why? She is a woman he despises since she cannot be controlled, so he deems her unqualified. Listen to this scene from an exchange in Runyan's office:

Senator Runyan: *I am not confirming a woman just because she is a woman. Laine Hansen has an extra burden. She has to come on the world stage with perfect credentials.*

Associate: *Margret Thatcher did not have perfect credentials.*

Senator Runyan: *The world accepted Margret Thatcher because they knew she had to answer to Ronald Reagan* (Lurie, The Contender, 2000).

The strong inference here is, women are puppets who answer to men. No matter how intelligent or qualified they are, they are not a man's equal. Runyan apparently has a past political score to settle with Hansen and conspires to assassinate her character. His henchmen leak racy, unsubstantiated pictures of an alleged Hansen, in a sexual orgy, when she was a nineteen-year-old college student. Not only does Hansen refuse to buckle under pressure, she also refuses to deny the picture's validity, saying:

"If I were a man nobody would care how many sexual partners I had when I was in college. If it's not relevant for a man, it's not relevant for a woman". "It's nobody's business". (Lurie, The Conternder, 2000). What's ironic, as the movies unfolds, is the shocking revelation that the "straight-laced" vice presidential candidate Runyan backed and staked his political career on. He was later arrested for murder, accused of killing a former mistress to keep her quiet.

The Contender movie was ostensibly made in response to former President Bill Clinton's White House sex scandal. More than twenty years later, the real-life scandal still haunted Hillary Clinton's campaign. Many people seem to have forgiven Bill for his indiscretion, but some still blame Hillary.

Intra Gender Bias

In "Hillary" the Hulu documentary- episode II, a Clinton campaign advisor described a common conversation among women in a political focus group. Former Deputy White House Counsel, Cheryl Mills recalled: *"The fact that she stayed in her marriage kept coming up as a reason people didn't like her. Or (they'd say) it proved all she cared about was ambition".* The focus group members said things like:

I hate her because she is power hungry.	I hate her because she stayed with him—why did she stay with him?

(Hulu, Hillary, 2020)

Mills continued her observation, saying: *"Some ladies said they would vote for Bill Clinton again, if they had the chance. So, he cheated on her, and they took it out on her"* (Hulu, Hillary, 2020).

The lack of gender alliance is discussed in sociolinguistics. So are the societal norms that allow people to tolerate men's bad behavior.

Male Media Take

Certain negative media coverage served to reflect or exacerbate public angst against Clinton. Male TV commentators got personal at times, in their harsh criticism. Video footage from "Hillary" the Hulu documentary included these dialogues:

Male commentator joking on TV:

"Men won't vote for Hillary because she reminds them of their nagging wives. Mood swings…PMS and mood swings. She raises her voice a lot" (4 H. D., Hillary, 2020).

Male protestor at a Clinton Rally: A protestor paraded around with a sign that read:

"Hillary iron my shirt" (4 H. D., Hillary, 2020).

TV news commentator, Chris Matthews:

"Let's not forget, and I'll be brutal, the reason she is a U.S. Senator, the reason why she is a candidate for president is be-cause her husband messed around. That's how she got to be senator from New York. We keep forgetting. She did not win on her merits. She won because everybody felt, my God, this woman stood up under humiliation" (4 H. D., Hillary, 2020).

So, the message, which the male protestor and male media commentators transmitted over the airwaves, was that Hillary Clinton nags talks too loudly has PMS; and mood swings. She is supposed to iron men's clothes, and is not good enough to run for president. Also, the message that Clinton could not have won the New York Senate race on her merits, intellect, and qualifications inferred. Chris Matthews insisted she won because voters felt sorry for her, or she got a "lucky" break because of her husband's sex scandal. So, the twisted bottom line is, she has a man to thank for her victory. The fossilized gender bias was quite evident among these men, whether they were conscious of it or not.

Results/Findings

Study Findings	Supporting Sociolinguistics Theories
• Men & women linguistic forms contrast. Men use vernacular, women use standard. • Men seek power. • Women more linguistically polite, formal, and overtly prestigious.	• Males allowed more freedom. Behavior more tolerated. • Females more quickly corrected. • Rule-breaking by women more severely frowned on.

• Women designated to model the role of correct behavior. • Women are guardian of society's values.	• Society expects better behavior from women than from men. • Women display preference for vernacular form when they are with each other.

Study Findings	Supporting Sociolinguistics Theories
• Men use vernacular linguistic forms. • That expresses machoism, masculinity, toughness. • They regard vernacular as positive, highly valued, overt prestige. • In highest society groups, the women's speech is closer to that of men. • Class membership is more than gender identity.	• In the west where gender roles overlap, speech forms also overlap. • Women tend to speak in a shared way, overlap. • Women use increased intonation, change of voice tone, vocalization.

Gender Behavioral Comparison *Clinton Features*	Gender Behavioral Comparison *Trump Features*
• Clinton looks for empathy in conversation • Syntax: Often uses the 2nd or 1st person plural • Speech interruptions (with friends) are cooperative • Body language: More physical contact • More standard, formal speech form	• Trump looks for power in conversation • Syntax: Always uses the 1st person • Speech interruptions are competitive, to show disagreement • Body Language: more aggressive • More vernacular speech form

(Holmes, An Introduction to Sociolinguistics, 1992)

Defying Social Gender Theories *Clinton Features*	Defying Social Gender Theories *Clinton Features*
• Seen as cool, measured, calculating, non-emotional • Seeks power (for equal rights reasons) • Is not subordinate • Does not mind offending or displeasing men or being less polite	• Seeks to secure/ guard women's rights, not be guardian of "society's values" • Uses vernacular language • Voice tone low and measured • Condemns gender behavioral double standards challenges norms

(Holmes, An Introduction to Sociolinguistics, 1992)

Limitations

The result of the 2020 U.S. presidential election will offer greater opportunities for more collaborative investigation into fossilized gender bias. This should prompt further research yielding more extended analysis of the sociolinguistic tendency in American politics, and it may help determine if this phenomenon will get better or worse, as well.

Conclusion

The study concludes that gender bias exists as part of the cultural fiber of the United States. And whether advertently or inadvertently, it is reflected, reinforced, and perhaps even promoted in movies and in the media. However, it could be said that Hollywood's fictional political dramas are a subtle and cautionary warning that gender bias is still burrowed deep beneath the skin of America's collective social consciousness. That can be ascertained because all three movies examined ended with the female characters being vindicated. Hillary Clinton's real-life drama did not follow those Hollywood scripts.

There appears to be an accepted practice of judging women by a yardstick that appeals to men's desire for female politeness, appearance, and subordination. At the same time women's intellect, skills, and job readiness are downplayed or dismissed. This leaves female political candidates stuck between the proverbial rock and a hard place, especially those seeking the highest levels of power. To win elections they must be competent and qualified. If they are competent and qualified, they are often characterized as too ambitious, power hungry, or unfeminine.

Women must contort, convert, and conform to a political system that was not built with them in mind. Even when they begrudgingly comply to these often-cosmetic societal demands. It isnever enough. At a 2016 videotaped Clinton rally, Senator Debbie Stabenow of Michigan expressed her frustration. *"There is always a message that we get that we are too this or too that. Wait your turn. You smile too much; you must be serious. You don't smile enough; you must not be friendly…I'd love to have a beer with you, but you can't run security for our country… Your hair….. My hair? What about Donald Trump's hair?"* (3, 2020).

There is no doubt that the United States is a progressive nation. But it is slow to evolve on the issue of women

being capable to run the country. And that is due, in part, to deeply rooted societal norms that reinforce male privilege. The evidence analyzed in this study suggests that American voters consistently send mixed messages. Many publicly tell pollsters, they are ready to elect a woman president. But they go into the voting booth and privately vote for a man time and again. More than sixty countries in the world have chosen women to occupy their highest seat of power. Most of them are considered third world countries. Regarding gender politics, they are leaps and bounds ahead of the wealthiest and most influential country on the planet.

In the movie, The Contender, President Evans is determined to crack the political glass ceiling and name the first female vice president in American history. This Hollywood fiction now reflects real-life facts. As stated earlier, presidential candidate, Joe Biden, made good on his promise and selected a woman, Kamala Harris, as his vice-presidential running mate. The 2020 election is bound to be another nasty, contentious battle for ultimate power. Will a woman on the ticket help or hurt Biden? Did Hillary Clinton's failed but historic run for the White House make enough of a dent on the social consciousness? Have gender perceptions shift enough so future female presidential candidates are not seen as a possible threat to sociological norms and values?

In the last episode of Hillary, the documentary, Clinton's spirited concession speech held out hope. She told the crowd, *"Although we might not be able to shatter that highest glass ceiling this time, thanks to you, it's got about 18-million cracks in it".*

"You can be so proud that from now on it will be unremarkable for a woman to win primary state victories; unremarkable to have a woman in a close race to be our nominee; unremarkable to think that a woman can be the president of the United States. And that's truly remarkable" (4 H. D., Hillary, 2020).

The massive wave of excitement, and particularly, female support Clinton enjoyed four years ago, could resurge. It could rise even higher for another female candidate. Many people would like to see former first lady Michelle Obama on a presidential ticket. During her eight years in the White House, she consistently enjoyed higher approval ratings than her husband, President Obama (Garcia, 2016). In an US survey, done last year, Lady Obama was named "the most admired woman" in the world. She has brushed aside any suggestion that she will run for political office (Oppenheim, 2019).

In 2018, Netflix filmed and later broadcast Obama's sold-out "Becom-

ing" book tour. She ended one of her 34-city tour stops by saying, *"There is another chapter waiting for me out there"* (Netflix, 2018). Obama's fans may take this as a reason to hope, fans as William Meehan for example. Last May, the leadership strategist penned a column in Forbes Magazine saying Michelle Obama was "*our one source of hope".* He then declared:

> Biden Obama (Michelle) 2020.
> Michelle Obama For President

2024 (Meehan, Michelle Obama For President, 2020).

Time will be the arbiter of whether the American public finally turns a new historic page, or clutches tightly to a seemingly fossilized societal status quo. Undoubtedly, gender bias has helped keep the presidency out of the reach of women and has maintained the executive office as a "good ole boys club", an androcentric domain for almost 250 years.

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