Falling Behind: Women and the United States Presidency

Why has the U.S. never elected a female President?

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In 2008, Hillary Clinton came closer to the presidency than any other woman in American history. Her campaign generated a huge following and sparked hope in many women who actively work to improve the status of women in American society. It also brought to light many discrimination issues that had scarcely been discussed on such a large scale in the national media. In fact, issues surrounding her campaign caused many to question the status of women as a whole in our government today. Since the end of the Second Wave women's movement, this topic had rarely been discussed by the widespread media and had not drawn significant attention from the public at large. Now that the discussion of women and politics has risen from the ashes, it is obvious that not much has changed in the United States over the past 20 years. Instead, the world has changed around us. As we fall behind, countries around the world are electing female heads of state and ushering women into the halls of parliament at record breaking speeds. This paper will discuss the history of women and politics in the United States, internal factors that continue to hold women back, and unique differences in our government and society that cause the United States to move forward at a different pace than the rest of the world. As a whole, it will address questions like: Why is it that the United States cannot seem to catch up? Why are American women still left out of the political structure? And most importantly, why has the United States never elected a female President?

I. A Brief history of the Status of Women in U.S. Politics-

It was we, the people; not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union.

– Susan B. Anthony

This world taught woman nothing skillful and then said her work was valueless. It permitted her no opinions and said she did not know how to think. It forbade her to speak in public, and said the sex had no orators.

– Carrie Chapman Catt

Women had almost no rights when the United States was founded. They were an extension of their fathers or their husbands. When a woman decided to marry, even if she had accrued wealth of her own, that was taken from her and put in her husband's care. She had no official voice, and her role within society was well-defined and restricted. She was not encouraged to learn or be educated, and her sole purpose was child-bearing. This began to change with the onset of the abolition movement. Many women joined forces in the effort to end slavery and in the process realized that their own rights were being restricted as well.

The Early Years-

Two early trailblazers, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, traveled to London to attend a meeting of the World Anti-Slavery Society in London. Upon their arrival they were denied the right to participate and told to take seats in the balcony because they were women (McGlen et. al. 5). Appalled by this treatment, the two women vowed to start a movement for women's rights. In 1848, their vision became a reality.

The Seneca Falls Convention planned by Mott and Anthony was the first meeting to discuss the social and political status of women, and what must be done to change the status quo. On the second day of the convention, the Declaration of Sentiments was drafted. This document, framed after the Declaration of Independence, changed a few key words and listed their own grievances in replacement of those written on behalf of the colonists. They wrote:

> *We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness (PBS.org)*

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to law in the formation of which she had no voice.

He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men, both natives and foreigners.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

He has made her morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master—the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty and to administer chastisement.

After depriving her of all rights as a married woman, if single and the owner of property, he has taxed her to support a government which recognizes her only when her property can be made profitable to it.

He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration. He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known.

He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her.

He allows her in church, as well as state, but a subordinate position, claiming apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and, with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the church.

He has endeavored, in every way that he could, to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.

Source: Declaration excerpts obtained from PBS.org, Not For Ourselves Alone. <http://www.pbs.org/stantonanthony/resources/index.html?body=dec_sentiments.html>

After the convention, the women's movement grew in conjunction with the abolitionist movement. For the most part, there were no groups vying only for women's rights only. During the period before the Civil War, women working to free the slaves were making connections with other active women and forming networks that would become the basis for the women's suffrage movement. After the Civil War, the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution was drafted. This was a huge turning point not only in the lives of African Americans, but also in the lives of women. This amendment stated, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Upon learning that sex was not included in the Amendment, a huge rift formed among female abolitionists and suffragettes. Many feared that if women were not included in this Amendment it would be years before another amendment would be considered. Some women felt that African Americans should refuse the amendment until

women were included. Others, however, supported the amendment, stating that progress happened in stages rather than all at once.

The Suffragettes-

Legendary suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, both of whom disapproved of the Fifteen Amendment because it did not include women, joined forces after this disappointment. Together they formed the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) to fight for the right of women to vote. But they knew they could not achieve their goals alone. Without the help of other women their efforts were going to fail. In 1890 NWSA merged with AWSA, the American Woman Suffrage Association, a group originally comprised of women who had supported the Fifteenth Amendment. The new group, NAWSA, joined forces with other organizations and movements concerned with women's issues including temperance and working conditions.

The idea of women's suffrage became more acceptable as more and more groups took up the fight once championed by only a handful of women. While only a few organized groups were active on the issue, the stigma that had previously been attached to the idea of female suffrage was disappearing. The new strategy of NAWSA, introduced in 1916 by Carrie Chapman Catt, emphasized a state-by-state push. It began to work, and as support grew Congress began to take note. World War I slowed progress for a time, but ultimately the devoted work done by women during the war helped convince U.S. citizens that they deserved to have a voice in government.. By 1919, the states had done their part and ratified the Amendment (it passed by only one vote in

Tennessee). Women across the nation were elated as a result of this victory. While the Nineteenth Amendment was certainly a cause for celebration, the U.S. had lagged behind many European countries.

After 1920, the women's movement dwindled and became disorganized. NAWSA dissolved but formed the basis for the League of Women Voters. The coalition of groups that had joined forces on the suffrage issue could no longer agree on a route for the future. Some fought for the Equal Rights Amendment in an attempt to make women entirely equal to men. Others ran for office, as the number of women running for Congress began to rise (albeit at a very slow rate). The number of women running for congressional office peaked in 1956, and then stagnated until the 1970s (Palmer and Simon 2008, 22).

The Second Wave-

Women's issues were not atop the political agenda in the 1960s, but scattered events kept awareness of these issues high. For instance, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1964, a work still admired and studied by scholars today. The book created a huge splash and generated an enormous amount of discussion. Following the lead of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, women began to band together to fight for equal rights. The "Second Wave" women's movement began in full swing in the early 1970s. The movement used political means to gain more respect in the home, in the workplace, in politics, and in American society at large. The slogan coined by Carol Hanisch, "the personal is the political" demonstrates the basic view adopted in the 1970s

that politics and personal life were intertwined. Women began to believe that every aspect of their lives was being hindered and controlled by a patriarchal government that denied their rights and liberties. As a result, women in this era used legislation as the main route to change.

During the 1970s more and more women began to run for political office. "Between 1970 and 1974, the number of women running in primaries jumped from 42 to 105, the number of women winning primaries increased from 24 to 43, and the number of women winning the general election went from 12 to 18" (Palmer and Simon 2008, 23). In addition, women's organizations were being formed at an amazing rate, and women were joining the groups in massive numbers. For example, the National Organization for Women (NOW), one of the most famous PACs for women, had a membership increase of 47,000 in 1974 alone. Further, in 1972 Congress passed several bills regarding women's issues, including Title IX (Palmer and Simon 2008, 23). The most significant political effort during this time was the new and improved attempt at passing the ERA. Many women saw the ERA as the only way to achieve equality. Laws can be easily overturned by a court ruling, but an amendment would provide a solid and unmoving base for the advancement of women. The amendment was passed by both the House and the Senate in 1972, but it ran into trouble during the ratification process. Those who opposed the ERA worked hard against it. Surprisingly, many of the staunchest opponents of the ERA were women. Because the ERA would make women equal to men on virtually all levels, some women saw it as a threat. For example, many women feared that they would lose protective legislation in the workplace if the ERA was adopted. In addition, some women

were afraid that the ERA would require women to register for the draft. These groups began to counteract the progress made by the National Organization for Women (NOW). For example, Phyllis Schlafley, the ERA's most outspoken opponent, began her STOP ERA campaign in 1973 after 30 states had ratified in the first year (Freeman 1988). Immediately after, there was an abrupt halt in the state ratification process and ten years later, the ERA had still not gotten the required 38 states to ratify. Ultimately the amendment failed.

The 1980s and Beyond-

Although the failure of the ERA was an enormous blow to the women of the Second Wave, the movement continued into the 1980s (although at a slower pace). While the media attention and enormous progress of the 1970s and 1980s resulted in obvious progress, there was still work to be done. The early 1990s brought new life to the movement. In 1991 the Clarence Thomas scandal caused an unprecedented number of disillusioned women to run for political office. The nationally televised Senate hearings on Anita Hill's accusation of sexual harassment revealed a skewed judicial committee. American women watched in disgust as Hill was harassed and treated callously by the entirely male committee. It was obvious from the decision of the Senate committee that women needed to be directly involved in politics for their opinions and viewpoints to be considered. In 1992, "the Year of the Woman," more women were running and being elected to public office than ever before. In races for the House of Representatives, 209 female candidates ran in primaries, 104 won their primaries, and 47 were elected to the House (Palmer and Simon 2008, 26). Successful campaigns require money, and the

population was surprisingly forthcoming. Supporters of women gave an exceptional $11.5 million to women's PACs in 1992 compared with a measly $2.7 million in 1990 (Palmer and Simon 2008, 26). Before 1992 lack of money had hindered many female candidates. . The events preceding the 1992 elections "crystallized into the most spectacular success female candidates have ever seen" (Palmer and Simon 2008, 27). While the Year of the Woman illustrated progress, women were not as active in subsequent elections.

The Third Wave?

By the mid-1990s The Second Wave was losing steam. Nonetheless, women's presence in politics has continued to grow (though slowly) over the past 10-15 years. Some feminists believe we are now in the midst of the "Third Wave," that is not as visible or cohesive as previous eras. Though some of the fervor for women's rights has died down, women continue to make gains in American society and American politics. Nonetheless, women continue to be underrepresented in the halls of power. For example, in the 106th Congress (1999-2001) women occupied only 56 seats in the House and 9 seats in the Senate, for a total of 12.1 percent of members of Congress (MCs). The corresponding number of women in the next Congress was a total of 13.6 percent.. This is an improvement, but only a small one (Thomas and Wilcox 2005,8). In the 108th Congress (2003-2005), women held only 13.7 percent of the total seats, and only 14 women served in the Senate (McGlen, et al. 2005, 86). Currently, in the 111th Congress, women hold almost 17 percent of seats in the House and Senate combined, for a total of 93 out of 444 members (Congress.org). As these statistics show, women have made

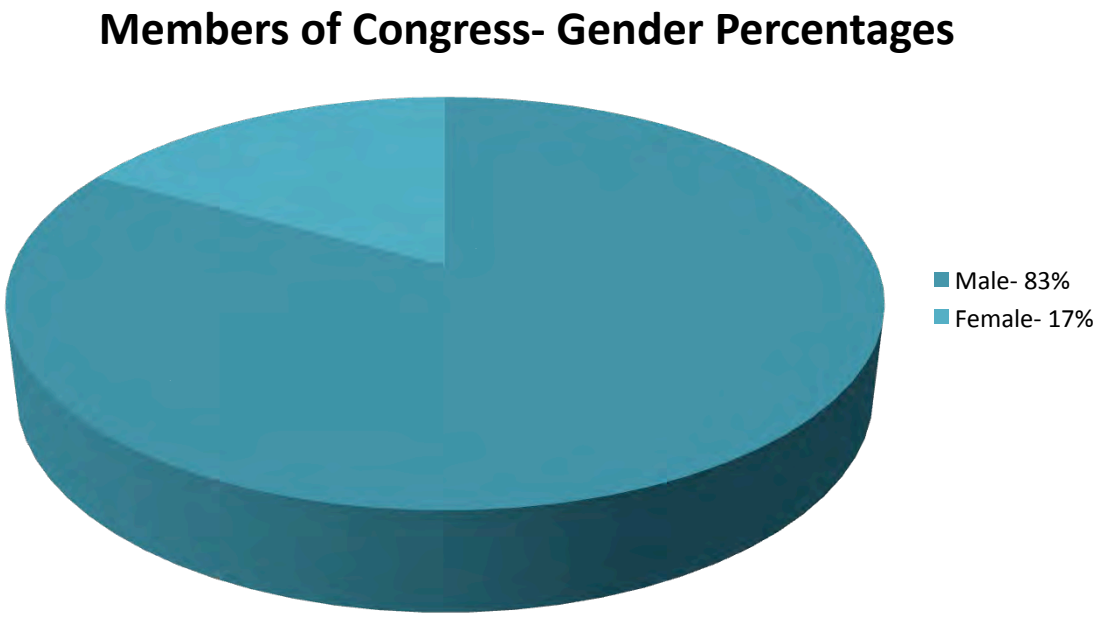
gains, but they are not monumental. Women continue to be underrepresented in non-federal offices as well. State governors, possibly more likely candidates for the presidency than senators, are mostly male. Currently, the U.S. has only eight female governors. Table 1 and Figure 1 illustrate the drastic differences in female and male representation in political offices in the United States. Women do tend to fare better in state legislatures, but the numbers are not too much higher. Percentages of women in State Legislatures averaged 22.46 percent from 2000-2004. The percentages never dropped below 22 percent but also never reached 23 percent (Thomas and Wilcox 2005, 8). Clearly, women remain woefully underrepresented.

TABLE 1. FEMALE GOVERNORS IN THE UNITED STATES, 2009

STATE	NAME	YEAR ELECTED
Alaska	Gov. Sarah Palin	Dec. 4, 2006
Arizona	Gov. Jan Brewer	Jan. 21, 2009
North Carolina	Gov. Bev Perdue	Jan. 10, 2009
Connecticut	Gov. M. Jodi Rell	Jan. 3, 2007
Hawaii	Gov. Linda Lingle	Dec. 2, 2002
Kansas	Gov. Kathleen Sebelius	Jan. 13, 2003
Michigan	Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm	Jan. 1, 2003
Washington	Gov. Chris Gregoire	Jan. 12, 2005

Source: The National Governors Association and Governors' Websites http://www.nga.org/portal/site/nga/menuitem.42b929b1a5b9e4eac3363d10501010a0/?vgnextoid=d54c8aaa2ebbff00VgnVCM1000001a01010aRCRD&vgnextfmt=curgov

FIGURE 1. WOMEN IN THE 111TH CONGRESS



Source: Women in Government Relations (WGR).

http://www.wgr.org/news_events/index.cfm?fa=whatarticle&id=244

II. WHY ARE WOMEN STILL SO FAR BEHIND?

Young women today often have very little appreciation for the real battles that took place to get women where they are today in this country. I don't know how much history young women today know about those battles.

– Sandra Day O'Connor

Despite two women's movements and dedicated work over the course of decades, women still lag behind politically. There are many reasons for this. For example, social norms encourage the subordination of women. These norms are the basis of

many gender biased policies and attitudes that serve to hold women back. Also, beginning in childhood, socialization plays a huge role in grooming men and women for careers later in life. For the most part, women simply are not socialized to strive for public office or powerful positions of leadership. Even women do seek prestigious positions, their paths are frequently blocked. Family un-friendly policies and pay discrepancies keep women from being on equal footing in the working world. In this section I will discuss these three reasons that women find it so hard to reach high political positions in the U.S. despite their most industrious efforts.

Socialization-

The emotional, sexual, and psychological stereotyping of females begins when the doctor says, "It's a girl."

-Shirley Chisholm

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.

-Eleanor Roosevelt

Women in the U.S. are socialized differently from men. In a study of parents with newborns less than 24 hours old, female babies were characterized by their parents as littler, softer, finer-featured, and more inattentive even though there were no differences in the size, weight, or health of the female and male babies (Graham and Birns 294). In a university study, students were shown a video of the same baby and asked for responses. One group was given a comment sheet that indicated that the child was a female, while the other half received sheets that said the baby was a boy. Students given the female comment sheet said that the baby was “afraid” when she cried. However, students given the male comment sheet indicated that the baby

was crying because he was “angry” (Graham and Birns 295). These studies show that adults prejudge children and are very likely to play a huge role in their socialization before they can even talk or walk. Pink outfits, bows, unicorns, and fairies are commonly found in the rooms of young girls, while boys’ rooms are strewn with G.I Joes, trains, cars, and Tonka trucks. Even Barbie has been a message to young girls that beauty is necessary, and they should try to achieve her elusive image. Brian Sutton-Smith argues that parents encourage these gender-role stereotypes as early as 18 months by giving girls fewer and less complicated toys. Boys, by contrast, are given better, more expensive toys that allow for more creative responses. For example, boys usually receive vehicles, educational materials, animals, sports equipment, and military paraphernalia. Girls are more likely to be given dolls, dollhouses, kitchen toys, and other domestic materials. Sutton-Smith states that limiting the toys that girls receive to this narrow range of options does not allow them to explore different fantasies and imagine themselves in multiple contexts. Because boys are given a wide variety of more stimulating toys, they are able to branch out in their imaginative realm (Sutton-Smith 237). Meanwhile, many people hold the attitude that “boys will be boys” and even encourage boys to participate in violent and highly competitive activities. Girls are discouraged from this type of behavior and are taught that manners and proper etiquette are imperative. Phyllis Katz asserts that the preconceived notions of adults tend to continue these ideals when children enter preschool. Boys are expected to have shorter attention spans, be troublesome and aggressive, behave independently, and engage in physical activity.

In contrast, teachers expect girls to be quieter, docile, and dependent (Katz 14). While some argue that these differences are biological, preschool environments can actually increase or decrease the likelihood that girls will behave differently from boys. Some preschools, like Montessori schools, do not promote stereotypical toys related to gender, but rather keep only toys that attribute to cognitive learning and educational advancement. Children in these schools do not tend to show the same level of gender and behavioral differences that are present in preschools that have kitchen corners and vehicle race tracks (Katz 14).

Socialization continues throughout grade school and eventually has extremely negative effects on girls' self-esteem. Throughout the educational process, young girls experience a sense of devaluation. Adult expectations of girls are constantly low compared to what is expected from their male peers (Graham and Birns 300). As a result, young females begin to expect less of themselves and underestimate their full potential. Studies show that when questioned females assumed they would make lower scores on tests than male students and are frequently mistaken (Graham and Birns 300-301). Even when they have a tendency to consistently receive higher grades than male students females continue to predict lower grades. Further, when females do receive good grades or succeed at some task they automatically do not relate success to personal skill or talent. Instead, females consistently insist that luck plays a major role in their accomplishments. Finally, even though the ability of male and female students were equal, all subjects in the study believed that males were smarter and more capable (Graham and Birns 301). Later in life, this lack of

confidence resurfaces in the political world. Women continue to underestimate their capabilities and doubt their own electoral viability, and men tend to overestimate theirs. As a consequence, women consider themselves less qualified to run for office than men (Fox 264).

In short, research highlights a troubling pattern in the socialization of American females beginning at birth. As a whole, females are encouraged to be soft spoken, dependent, mannerly, subordinate, and less inquisitive. Moreover, women are confined to certain areas of interest like domesticity. These expectations eventually lead to a female psyche that is distorted and broken. Self-esteem is a necessity in the world of politics, and women are socialized to lack it. To be a political leader one needs confidence and an independent nature. Without these attributes decisions cannot be made in a timely and effective manner. A leader must also be assertive and imaginative in order to solve problems in a way that pleases the constituency and affirms power over opposition. While boys are treated in a way that fosters these kinds of characteristics, women are not. In fact, women are discouraged from becoming leaders and are purposefully kept from achieving these kinds of roles. Because of this kind of treatment early in women's lives, they are less likely to develop the needed personal attributes and run for office as adults.

In fact, there is evidence that women become less interested in politics as a whole later in life as a result of early socialization. Only 25 percent of American women reported being interested in politics in the year 2000. In contrast, thirty-six percent of men indicated interest (McGlen et. al. 73). Further, women lack a strong

fundamental knowledge of political information. In one study, men were more likely to answer nine out of ten questions regarding politics and government correctly and 64 percent of women admitted that politics was too complicated for them to understand compared to only 50 percent of men in the year 2000 (McGlen et. al. 2005, 74,75). While we could hope that the future holds promise, a 2002 study shows that these discrepancies in political knowledge and involvement will, more likely than not, continue in the future. Only 29 percent of female respondents and 38 percent of male respondents in a survey of college freshman believe that keeping up with political affairs is important (McGlen et. al. 2005, 74). While these gaps may appear to be small, they still show a fundamental difference in knowledge about political affairs. Indeed without much knowledge about politics, women are less likely to be engaged and run for office. Without being properly informed, there is little chance for large scale female involvement in the political arena.

Career Patterns-

At work, you think of the children you've left at home. At home, you think of the work you've left unfinished. Such a struggle is unleashed within yourself, your heart is rent.

–Golda Meir

I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas, but what I decided to do was to fulfill my profession which I entered before my husband was in public life.

–Hillary Rodham Clinton

As a whole, women choose different career paths than men, often as a result of the socialization process. While it is true that our democracy allows people from

all walks of life to become involved in politics and run for office, patterns show that a majority of politicians have approached this career in a way that is hard for many women to replicate due to familial obligations and societal structure.

The most important factor affecting the ability of women to be active in the workforce and politics is the common notion that women should be wives and mothers. Women have always been viewed as the primary caregivers in familial situations, and this creates a different reality for men and women in the working world. Women are more likely to work part-time, to stay at home for a few years before children are old enough for school, and to be stay-at-home parents. Traditionally, a woman's place was in the home, and with the exception of lower-class and minority women, women in the workplace were viewed with disgust and shame. In fact, women who did not stay at home with their children were often criticized for harming the child's psyche. These attitudes have lessened gradually over time, mostly due to the second women's movement. But women are still the primary caregivers in our society. In fact, in a 1997 poll, a majority of the population (55 percent) believed that even if it was financially necessary for a woman to work in order to support the family it is better for women to stay at home and take care of the children and the house (McGlen et. al. 2005). Attitudes like this help to explain why women either enter the workforce late or at random intervals or never enter it at all.

Companies often have negative attitudes towards women and motherhood, creating an even more difficult environment for working women and mothers. While the Family and Medical Leave Act guarantee time off in some cases, leave is unpaid

and many women cannot afford to take time off. Lack of adequate child care exacerbates the problem. Because childcare expenses are outrageous and families often cannot afford quality childcare programs, many women are forced to stay at home. In a work environment that is not supportive of motherhood, women face a huge dilemma when considering the option of starting a family. This problem becomes even more serious for single mothers who do not have another income to supplement their own. In fact, while it seems logical that single mothers would need a larger income to support themselves and their children, they actually make only 56-66 percent of what men earn, much less than the average for women as a whole (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 165).

A number of women are now choosing to balance home and work life rather than choosing one or the other. There are several ways women attempt to fulfill the dual roles of caretaker and breadwinner. First, some mothers take several years off while their children are young and then reenter the workforce once their child has reached school age. This method, called “sequencing” by Rowe-Finkbeiner, has dire consequences for women’s career opportunities (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004). For example, if a woman in an equivalent position as a male counterpart opts to take time off to care for a child she will lose the opportunity for future raises and will most likely never again reach a position equal to that same male counterpart. Further, she will most likely never gain a position as prestigious as one she could have reached had she stayed at work. Interestingly, this is not an issue divided by gender. Men who take time off face similar consequences. But since women are most often the

ones responsible for caretaking, it negatively affects more women than men. Further, women who have children and take time off also earn less than women who did not take time off. This can be shown through a persistent pay-wage gap that is never closed, even when a mother has been back at work for 20 consecutive years. After three years of being back at work, mothers who took time off earn 20 percent less than those who have taken no time off, and after 20 years they still earn 5-7 percent less than women with comparable experience (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 169). Author Sylvia Ann Hewlett refers to sequencing as a series of "off-ramps" and "on-ramps" in a woman's work life. Her data show that women lose an average of 18 percent of their earning ability when they take time off work. This seems a harsh penalty when that time off is on average only 2.2 years (Hewlett 423). Any longer than that and women stand to lose 37 percent of their earning power over the course of their working lives. For some, even a lesser salary would be a blessing because many women simply cannot find jobs when they attempt to re-enter. Only 74 percent of women who want to return to work are actually hired. Only 40 percent of those are hired full time. Twenty-four (24) percent are forced to accept only part-time work, and nine percent opt for self-employment (Hewlett 420-421). The large numbers of women who are unable to re-enter properly are being kept from opportunities, careers, and contacts that could influence their decision to run for office and their probability of success. Plus, a lower salary or no salary at all means a very small possibility that these women will be able to campaign since it is such an expensive process.

Even if a woman can overcome all of these obstacles and has a desire to run for office, she may not run because of societal standards that negatively stereotype working, political mothers with young children. In fact, it is not uncommon for women in this situation to report hostile attitudes from the media and the public at large. Many are asked who is taking care of the children while they are working (McGlen et. al. 2005, 94).

In short, as a consequence of many factors a substantial number of women opt out of political careers. Even if they do not opt out entirely, their entry is significantly delayed. Women are now waiting longer to have children. College attendance and less societal pressure are allowing women to start family lives at increasingly older ages. While these are positive trends in some ways, they mean that many women do not enter politics until after their children get older. This gives them less time than men to advance. A woman's childbearing years are certainly important in the world of politics. Lester Thurow, an MIT economist, agrees with this observation saying that, "The thirties are the prime years for establishing a successful career. These are the years when hard work has the maximum pay off. Women who leave the job market during those years may find that they never catch up" (Hewlett 2008, 424). Women in their late 20s and 30s are missing out on valuable years of experience and networking. This is extremely detrimental in politics, where seniority reigns. A lot of men are perfectly able to balance politics and young children because women are helping them. As young men they are not forced to decide between family and politics. Consequently, they get a head start and

are able to reach prestigious political positions at much younger ages. Women have less time to advance in politics.

In 2003, 57 of the current 100 U.S. Senators had held their first political office before the age of 35, as had 215 representatives in the House and half of all governors (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 222). In other words, most successful federal politicians start early. Women start later, and thus are at a disadvantage. Nancy Pelosi agrees that there need to be changes in the political and societal structure to accommodate families and younger mothers. "I came to Congress in my 40s, after my five children were grown," she says. "Most of my male colleagues had a 10-year advantage in terms of seniority. The single biggest difference in women rising to the highest levels of power would be to have young women coming in and building the seniority and experience and judgment needed to be governor, Senator, President. We have to make politics more family-friendly" (McGlen, et. al., 2005 94-5). The problem is that without young women in political office, solutions are unlikely to arise. Gale Morales, project manager at the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) states that,

> "The perspective of young women is being missed, and their expertise is missed. We're missing a whole segment of the population that could really be doing great things—especially issues dealing with young children, health insurance, daycare and more. The perspective of young mothers should be in politics, looking at it through their lens," (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 172).

Still, young women are not likely voters. In 2004, only 50 percent of single women voted compared to 71 percent of married women. If single women had come to the polls in the same numbers as married women, they would have contributed an

additional 6 million votes (Fleischer 2006). Further, in the 2004 presidential election only 45.4 percent of women aged 20-24 voted compared to 48.6 percent of women aged 25-30. The national average of women of all ages was 60.1 percent (CAWP 2008). This shows that women in older age groups provide a large percentage of women's voting numbers. Also, it is well known that the older portion of the American population votes most often, and campaigns are geared toward their wants and needs. If young women understood the impact they could have, things would change. Senator Murkowski agrees that a larger portion of young women voting could "change the face of Congress." And Governor Kathleen Sebelius of Kansas believes that women could determine many leadership positions. "There aren't too many elections that are impervious, or immune, to that number of people coming to the polls and voting," she says (Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004, 219).

Hopefully women will soon realize their power as an electoral bloc and take that power to the polls. Even if women cannot directly run for office they have the ability to make the changes that would allow more women to run. For instance, if politicians needed the support of women to keep their positions they would most likely consider family leave a more important issue. If issues like this begin to take center stage, policy changes may make it easier for women to enter the political field at younger ages. For now, there is a vicious cycle that continues to keep women from making a difference and gaining more power in the political world.

Sexism-

"And Hillary Clinton's camp says she is not actively seeking the vice presidential nomination. Passive-aggressively seeking it, yes."

-Jay Leno

Because I am a woman, I must make unusual efforts to succeed. If I fail, no one will say, "She doesn't have what it takes." They will say, "Women don't have what it takes."

-Clare Boothe Luce

Sexism also plays a role in keeping women from attaining parity with men in American politics. Sexism can be present in almost every aspect of our society and attacks from many different angles, making it difficult to combat and hard to control. Several aspects of sexism are important to this topic.

Perceptions and Discrimination-

In a recent poll, 92 percent of the American population stated that they would definitely be willing to vote for a qualified female presidential candidate. This is an astounding percentage when just a little over 50 years ago (in 1955) only 52 percent said they would consider a female candidate (Wilson 2008, 272). Over the decades this percentage has grown rapidly. Yet women still have not been able to break into the higher ranks of government. Is the public telling the truth? Judith Warner attempts to answer this question by explaining the “social desirability” factor. According to scientists, many people are dishonest when asked questions about touchy subjects like race and gender. Today, there is significant pressure to be politically correct. Instead of answering honestly, some survey respondents lie to

make themselves appear more progressive than they are. As a result, when actual elections roll around, public sentiments seem to switch back to traditionalist views. This phenomenon is known as the "Bradley Effect" and was named after a black mayoral candidate who lost a California election even though polls showed that he would win (Warner 2007). Traditionally this has been an issue among white voters who indicate false support for black candidates. But many voters may treat female candidates the same way. Supporting gender equality is seen as politically correct, and some people voice false support for women to avoid embarrassment. In short, an apparently accepting public might secretly have major qualms about electing women.

Why might the public have doubts about electing women? Women entering the political arena face negative stereotypes from fellow politicians and a large part of the voting population. Because women are stereotypically caretakers and not leaders, many doubt their ability to lead. In contrast, the public perceives men to have traits like ambition, dominance, assertiveness, confidence and independence (Carli and Eagly 2007, 127). All of these qualities are closely associated with leadership. One of the most cited reasons by American citizens for keeping a woman out of the White House is the inability of a female to be commander and chief. To gain legitimacy many assume that a woman would have to demonstrate the ability to be tough, stern, hardheaded, and uncompromising. Yet displaying these characteristics does not win women votes; it may actually cost them votes. This situation leads to the double standard dilemma. Women are expected to be calm, motherly, sensitive, and warm. But these expectations limit their ability to achieve

respect in politics. In order to command attention and be treated as a respectable leader, one must display confidence, charisma, and control. When women attempt to take on more assertive characteristics and prove their leadership capabilities they are negatively labeled. It hardly seems fair that women have to try to maneuver around such contradictory public sentiment when men are not faced. Trying to be strong and womanly at the same time is a daunting task. It severely limits the ability of women to ascend to leadership roles. Unfair as it may be, traditional gender stereotypes are ingrained in American society. Women need to find successful ways to cope with the effects of gender stereotypes and the double standard they face.

Linda Carli and Alice Eagly argue that in order to avoid a public backlash, women leaders have to develop a unique and careful leadership style. Their evidence shows that women who are dominant in leadership roles tend to elicit anger, irritation, and hostility. Men in the same positions do not (Carli and Eagly 2007, 129). To attract public support female candidates must find ways to be competent and viable without sparking anxiety or negative responses. For example, Hillary Clinton was a very dominant political figure but also a divisive one. Her strong, independent leadership style displeased many Americans and she was often chided for her “masculine” persona. In reaction to the double standard some successful political women develop an alternate leadership style that combines masculine and feminine traits. This style allows them to assert dominance while still maintaining the soft touch people expect from women. Their styles are interpersonally oriented and allow for democratic participation. They are also more transformational (Carli

and Eagly 2007, 139). Transformational leaders, as described by James MacGregor Burns, are more intimately connected to their followers and can alter the way society views a certain issue. In contrast, transactional leaders cannot truly alter public thinking and must provide rewards to keep their followers loyal. When women are able effectively to blend feminine and masculine characteristics their leadership style is actually quite successful. Men and women both respond well to a woman in power when she uses a warm approach mixed with an air of competency and control. There is actually no basis to the argument that women's leadership styles explain their absence from leadership roles (Eagly and Carli 2007, 139). A new approach to leadership is actually welcome in most cases, and a woman's ability to connect with employees on a personal level is appreciated and effective in many professional environments. However, this may not be the case in the higher echelons of the political world. Eagly and Carli assert that while the feminine approach to leadership does work in many fields, it is much less effective and may be resisted in male-dominated fields (2007, 140). People in male-dominated fields are sometimes resistant to change and have little reason to hold a progressive attitude about gender issues. Women only constitute a very small percentage of office holders and appointed political positions. Under these circumstances, their approach to leadership can meet with intolerance or hostility since traditional ideas about gender still very much prevail (Eagly and Carli 2007, 140). If more women enter Congress, perhaps their leadership styles and personality traits will be more appreciated. While it seems contradictory because of the double standard, women in male-dominated fields like politics are forced to use the more masculine style to avoid being trampled by their

male peers (Eagly and Carli 2007, 140). This may be why Hillary took up a powerful persona and relied little on her feminine qualities to gain her position in the Senate and in her attempt at the presidency. While her dominant and assertive approach may have been necessary within the confines of Congress, the public may have responded more favorably if she had used a mixed approach.

Studies also indicate that self-promotion and conceited behavior are tolerated far more in men than in females (Eagly and Carli 129-130). Lois Wyse once stated, "Men are taught to apologize for their weaknesses, women for their strengths." This is an extremely important point when it comes to political campaigns. It is the job of any political candidate to promote him/herself as much as possible. Essentially, candidates must sell themselves to the public in order to be elected. Because self-promotion is seen as a fault in women (but tolerated in men) campaigning as a woman is very difficult. In fact, if a woman's campaign touts her personal accomplishments it may actually backfire. By highlighting her strengths and stressing her accomplishments, a female candidate could be sparking negative reactions and turning public sentiment against her. One study showed that modest women tend to have more influence and be better liked than less modest women, but their accomplishments and qualifications are more likely to be ignored or forgotten. Striking a reasonable balance between boastfulness and modesty is difficult. Perhaps as a result of neglecting to mention their achievements, women are viewed as less competent (Carli and Eagly 2007). In order to prove competency, women have to work much harder than men and gain better results. Consequently, women are often

unable to exert as much political influence due to lack of respect from colleagues and voters. Still, if a female tries to openly display or discuss her competency in order to gain respect and power she is viewed with aversion. In short, the double-edged sword of stereotypical gender expectations makes politics a difficult arena for women.

Once women have conquered the campaign process and have actually been elected into Congress, they are faced with an 85 percent male majority and may run into difficulty breaking through the barriers of long standing "old boy" networks. For social and psychological reasons men promote men while women remain outsiders. For example, a career in law is a likely in-road for many politicians, and a majority of legislators were attorneys or worked in the legal field before running for office. While working in this profession, many attorneys gain valuable contacts and connections that boost their probability of winning an election and/or being recommended for a prestigious political position. But almost two-thirds of women of color reported exclusion from valuable informal and formal networks and other opportunities in comparison to only 4 percent of white men who feel this way (Reeves 2008). Kellerman and Rhode report that 60 percent of white women also felt excluded (2007). This exclusion of women continues in state and federal political systems. For example, stereotypes also keep women from the most prestigious appointments in regard to Congressional committees. Only six women have ever chaired committees in the Senate, and only 19 have been committee chairs in the House (WomeninCongress.house.gov) In fact, a woman is much more likely *not* to be

appointed to the finance and revenue committees, two of the most powerful in legislative bodies in the U.S. (McGlen et. al. 2005, 105). Instead, women are disproportionately assigned to committees that deal with traditional women's issues such as education and healthcare. In fact, two of the women chairs in the House of Representatives headed the House Beauty Shop committee (WomeninCongress.house.gov) Such committees lack the prestige and power of those dealing with issues traditionally coded as masculine (McGlen et. al. 2005, 105). Even when the occasional woman does receive a position on a prestigious committee, she is most often a token member and holds little power or sway with the other members (McGlen et. al. 2005, 105). Until women are given equal opportunities in Congress they will not be given consideration by other politicians when positions like the presidency or even senior party positions are involved. Women must be treated like capable, qualified members of the political profession before they can viably run for such offices.

In the end, women face many forms of discrimination before they enter politics and even after they become elected officials. These realities make it extremely hard for them to be elected. Negative stereotypes, lack of confidence in their leadership abilities, and double standards make campaigning and winning difficult. Further, once women do get elected, fellow politicians actually serve to hold them back. In an attempt to battle these problems, women have tried to develop a compromising political style. Hopefully as more women become leaders this style will become well respected and appreciated by the public and male politicians. For now, it is extremely discouraging that male politicians are likely to exclude women and keep them from reaching prominent positions. Without prestigious appointments

and proper recognition, it is extremely difficult for women to gain the national attention that could catapult them to the presidency.

The Effect of Media-

If I want to knock a story off the front page, I just change my hairstyle.

– Hillary Rodham Clinton

Women also suffer through inappropriate, demeaning, and negative coverage in the media. Women do get equal media attention, but the attention is much different. Constantly referring to women in ways that highlight stereotypes and concentrating on their personal lives is the most common infraction. Instead of listing women's credentials, the media concentrate on issues such as a candidate's family size, the ages of her children, her physical appearance and her emotions, but certainly not her policy platform. An analysis of the mixed-gender races in 2000 reinforces this reality. While the analysis does state that the situation is slightly better than in past years, it is still unfairly slanted in favor of males. In conclusion they argue that

> "not only does the greater mention of female candidate gender suggest their 'other' status in the male-dominated world of politics, but also the defining of female candidates through mentions of their children and marital status reinforces the images of mother and wife—which have traditionally carried less authority and competence in the public arena" (Banwart et. al. 2003, 671 originally from Witt, Paget, & Matthews, 1995).

As this quote notes, referring to these topics automatically reduces a woman's viability in the political world and strips her of any authority she may have held previously.

The 2009 election coverage of both Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin provides excellent evidence of how females are treated in the media. Clinton endured endless critical comments about her pantsuits, makeup, and hair. Her age was also a very popular topic of conversation. Despite the agedness of numerous presidents in our past, Hillary was criticized for having wrinkles, and many people began to bring up suggestions of Botox and facelifts. Popular talk show host Rush Limbaugh even went so far as to ask "Will Americans want to watch a woman get older before their eyes on a daily basis?" He went on to say that she would have to avoid an aging appearance or her popular support would wane and it would affect the perceptions of the American population (Freidman 1). Comments like these are inexcusable. Certainly science has yet to prove that wrinkles cause a person's brain to cease function. Still, her age was not the principal complaint of the media. In large part, Clinton was made to seem as if she were not feminine enough and displayed too many masculine qualities. Nevertheless, the media is fickle and completely forgot about her masculine tendencies as soon as she took a stab at appearing more feminine. On this occasion, members of the media claimed she showed too much of her womanly assets due to the nature of her blouse. Yet instead of treating this incident as an indication of her femininity the press capitalized on the moment by criticizing her risqué attire choice. In yet another instance of negative gender stereotyping, her tone of voice was criticized by radio host Glenn Beck. He referred to her as a "stereotypical bitch" and likened her to a nagging wife. He continued by saying that he would not be able to endure an entire term of listening to her speak because he always felt as if she was telling him to "take out the garbage." To end the

discussion he begged America to please not elect her so he would not suffer through a full term (NOW.org). Surprisingly, hardly any media complaints about Hillary have to do with her policies. Tucker Carlson admits this on his MSNBC show during campaign season. When speaking about an internet ad against Clinton he said, “It does get right to heart of people's instinctive problems with Hillary, which don't have to do with policy” (NOW.org). He went on to say that he disapproved of Clinton because she made the impression of being “castrating, overbearing, and scary” (NOW.org). This again goes back to the double bind that women face in politics. At the start of her campaign Hillary had to work extremely hard to prove that she was tough enough for the top spot. Yet, in the process of proving her capabilities she appeared to be threatening the manhood of some individuals in the U.S. who are not comfortable with women displaying masculine traits. As the campaign progressed, Clinton began to receive less and less good press. In late January of 2008 one report stated she was only receiving 47 percent of good press compared to Obama’s 84 percent (Herle 18).Overall, the focus on Clinton’s gender took away from her policy goals and initiatives which should be the real focus of any political campaign. The comments made by various media personalities prove that our nation still cannot treat men and women in leadership positions equally and that women are still disadvantaged by persistent stereotypes.

Quite the opposite of Hillary, Sarah Palin was not often criticized for her clothing choice, style, looks, or age. After her first speech at the Republican National Convention, Palin was an overnight sensation, but not because of her accomplishments or leadership capabilities. The next morning, Donny Deutsch

claimed that Palin had finally figured out how to sell a woman in power (video can be found at NOW.org). Interestingly, he likened her to a cereal and listed the ingredients in her cereal that made her a good political candidate. These ingredients included: Super Mom, Sexy, Perfect Age, Lioness, Funny, Real, Rock Solid, Smart. Several aspects of this statement need to be discussed. First, he is continuing stereotypes about women and motherly instincts. While motherhood is a very important experience in women's lives, it does not necessarily need to be discussed in political settings. News about women's families takes up far too much of the media coverage during campaigns and even while women are in elected positions. If this was mentioned only in the context of personal background it would be appropriate, but it is most often associated with a woman's ability to do her job. For example, women with young children are commonly scrutinized because people fear either that mothering will take away from their focus on political issues, or that holding office will cause them to neglect their children. Men with children are rarely if ever subjected to this type of analysis. Second, Deutsch is insinuating that women in leadership positions cannot be over a certain age in order to be successful. He stated that Sarah Palin was old enough to have experience but young enough to be sexy. Again, this shows that shallow perceptions of women continue to hold them back from positions of power. Note that he did not mention what experience she had or how qualified she was for the vice-presidential office. In reality, older women would be more likely to have valuable political experience and knowledge that is directly applicable to elected office. But this is overlooked and devalued because the

population is more concerned with a woman's appearance. Later, Deutsch said that the last ten minutes of her speech, in which she talked about energy policy, didn't matter because the nation was already sold. In other words, when it came to her competence and knowledge about real issues he quit listening. Comments like these prove that sexist ideals about beauty and physical appearance still rule. How can women achieve great things when their words are not heard due to a commotion over hair color, eye shadow, or an outfit? It is truly demeaning to women when their minds are the last things to be considered.

The Public Speaks-

A Pew Research Study in August 2009 asked Americans what they personally thought of women as leaders, potential leaders, and the lack of women in high office. This study is extremely important and interesting since it clashes with the reality of women in politics. The survey asked respondents to identify the eight most important characteristics or traits that were essential for leaders to have. Respondents used the following eight words most often: Honest, intelligent, hardworking, decisive, ambitious, compassionate, outgoing, and creative. These traits were listed in order of rank, honesty being the most sought after leadership quality. Respondents were then asked which gender they felt was more likely to possess each trait. Surprisingly, Americans believed that women were more likely to possess a majority of these traits. In sum, the public thinks that women are more likely than men to be honest, intelligent, compassionate, creative, and outgoing. In contrast, men were considered more decisive. Both sexes were thought to be equally hardworking and ambitious.

The following chart illustrates the relationship between the traits and each gender group.

Most Important Leadership Traits	*% saying trait is "absolutely essential" to leadership*	*% saying trait is more true of women*	*% saying trait is more true of men*	*Outcome*
Honest	*52*	*50*	*20*	*women +30*
Intelligent	*46*	*38*	*14*	*women +24*
Hardworking	*45*	*28*	*28*	*no advantage*
Decisive	*39*	*33*	*44*	*men +11*
Ambitious	*30*	*34*	*34*	*no advantage*
Compassionate	*28*	*80*	*5*	*women +75*
Outgoing	*22*	*47*	*28*	*women +19*
Creative	*20*	*62*	*11*	*women +51*

Source: Pew Research Center Publications, August 2008 http://pewresearch.org/pubs/932/men-or-women-whos-the-better-leader

By examining these outcomes, it is obvious that Americans do not doubt the leadership abilities of women. In fact, if this chart is any indication, they believe that women are likely to be *better* leaders than men. If society really has evolved to the point of celebrating the abilities of women to lead our nation, what continues to hold them back? This survey asked Americans this very question with less than satisfying results. Overall, no single reason stood above all others as the answer.

The statement that "many Americans are not ready to elect a woman to high office" met with widespread agreement. Fifty-one percent believed it was a major reason for gender inequity and 28 percent considered it at least a minor reason (Pew Research Publications 28). In all, a total of 79 percent of respondents believe the United States still is not comfortable with the idea of a woman leading our nation. Unfortunately the survey did not go one step farther and ask Americans *why* they are not yet ready. This is maddening especially given prior results showing that many people believe that women

have the “right stuff” to lead. What is it about women that American cannot bear to see in high office? If Americans do not have to explain their qualms, if we continue to allow this answer to be used as an amorphous scapegoat, the underlying problems can never be addressed.

The survey also showed that many Americans blame gender discrepancies in politics on the fact that women in politics are held back by their male counterparts (Pew Research Publications 28). In other words, many people agree that men stick together to the detriment of female politicians. If men choose to support other men instead of endorsing female politicians, women are less likely to be appointed to positions that give them greater opportunities and broaden their resumes. Without these advancements women must fight much harder to reach the highest levels of political positions. Further, in order to run for any prestigious position, support from other politicians and the party is crucial. Without high-level endorsements it is impossible to even dream of being nominated for the presidency. If women are less likely to be endorsed by men who make up the present majority, they are far less likely to be nominated for the roles that really matter.

Interestingly, the third most cited reason for lack of women in politics is that women face discrimination in all areas of society (Pew Research Publications 28). Yet becoming involved politically is one of the best ways to alter discriminatory acts and behaviors. It is important that women play a larger role in politics so that laws can be enacted that encourage gender equality. For example, as I mentioned in a previous section, women face discrimination in the workplace due to their roles as primary

caretakers of children and family. If more women entered politics laws preventing future discriminatory practices would be more likely to pass. Further, if more women were in political leadership roles the public might respect their abilities to a higher degree. If women were given the opportunity to lead and demonstrate their true abilities, some stereotypes might lose their grip on the American psyche. It is a circular process, and that circle must be broken. The public cannot be complacent and accept discriminatory practices, and women must fight to reach positions that will allow them to influence positive movement toward an equal future.

Summary-

This section has shown that deeply entrenched gender ideals affect a woman's life from the moment of her birth. Gendered socialization of girls and young women stifles their ability to grow in their own way. Teachers and parents instill stereotypes that do not allow women to be independent, outspoken, curious, and adventurous. Beautiful Barbie dolls, cooking toys, and stories of fairytale princes to the rescue teach girls that they have a set role in life--to be attractive homemakers. Men are the only heroes. In order to be successful leaders, girls must be taught stronger character traits and encouraged to be daring and imaginative. As young women grow up the public must celebrate the role of a mother and make it easier for women to simultaneously achieve career success and give her children the attention they deserve. One should not mean the failure of the other. After all, this nation would be nothing without its children. While it may take time, stereotypes need to disappear. In fact, it may take even longer for women themselves to disavow them. After being subjected to stereotypes for literally centuries, women have

internalized these stereotypes and may have created a psychological glass ceiling for themselves (Kellerman and Rhode 8). Yet if women do not have faith in their own abilities the cycle is likely to continue. The media could lead the way in this process by refraining from running gender biased stories and making blatantly sexist comments about female political candidates. Media are an engine for change, and if the public is exposed to negative stereotypes on a daily basis few alterations in public attitude are likely to occur. It is very important that we as a nation try to create a society in which women would be recognized as equals in the world of politics so that the public may actually be ready to see a woman in the highest office.

III: The U.S. in Comparative Perspective

One perplexing twist here is that women in other countries face a lot of the same barriers they do here but have somehow managed to achieve higher levels of political participation and status. For example, during the 2005 General Election campaign in Britain, male candidates appeared ten times more often than women in the media (Childs 2008, 144). Not only that, but gender stereotypes still prevail in media stories that do cover women, and female British politicians feel as if 'their appearance is the focus of more column inches and airtime than anything they might say' (Childs 2008, 143). Christine Fletcher, an MP in New Zealand, says that the she was constantly being asked, "Oh, Chrissie dear, who's going to take care of your family?" when she was campaigning for Parliament. In an attempt to legitimate herself, she tried to explain her network of childcare support. But she grew very bitter by the end of the campaign because she was required to explain herself one too many times. She lost her first election. The second

time around the same question came up. But this time Fletcher treated the situation much differently. She explains, “When the delegates asked me who was going to look after my kids I told them it was none of their business—why didn’t they ask me about my administrative capabilities” (Baysting et al. 18). This time she won. New Zealand is only one example; women have historically been considered the inferior gender in most if not all nations around the globe. Public views of women outside the home, and especially in leadership roles, continue to be negative in many societies. In areas of the world like Latin and South America, the notion of *machismo* still has a huge effect on public sentiment toward women in politics and other professions. Yet women leaders in South America are gaining ground by the day and multiple female presidents have been elected. Also, in countries like Pakistan, religious views pose apparently insurmountable barriers to women’s political participation. Yet Benazir Bhutto rose to the top.

The United States claims to be a world leader in human rights and democracy. But it lags behind in female political representation. In a country that applauds diversity and scorns discrimination this seems puzzling. Currently, the United States is behind countries like Singapore, Turkmenistan, Sweden, Zimbabwe, the Philippines, Rwanda, Spain, Mexico, Canada, Australia, Tunisia, Mozambique, and Uzbekistan in female political representation. In 2005, women made up 20.2 percent of women in the lower legislative house of *China*, while women in the U.S. constituted only 15.3 percent of our own (Kirk and Rey, 577). The United Nations began a Millennium Development project to encourage the improvement in lifestyles of women around the world. Part of this project is dedicated to the idea governments around the world should strive to include

more women in national and local governmental structures. According to UN statistics gathered in 2005, in developed nations, women made up an average of 20.9 percent of unicameral legislative bodies or the lower house. The world average was a mere 15.9 percent (UN Statistics Division, 2005). In recent years, women in the United States made up 15.3 percent of the lower house, less than the world wide average. When looked at in these terms female representation in the United States is abysmal and embarrassing. Seventeen countries worldwide have legislatures that include at least 30 percent women. Rwanda is by far the world leader in gender parity for women in politics. In 2005, Rwanda elected a record 48.8% percent of women to its lower house. Better yet, in 2008 women actually received the majority of parliamentary seats (56 percent) for the first time in world history. (UN Statistics Division, 2005) (Baines, et al. 2008). There are currently eleven women heads of state, and the U.S. only just got close last year. While other countries have made great strides in an attempt to close the gender gap in politics, the United States continues to make only marginal improvements. What in particular makes the U.S. different from other countries?

Why is the U.S. lagging behind?

There appear to be many reasons women lag behind men in the United States more so than in other comparable countries. In this section I will examine some of these reasons.

Stability-

One theory regarding high levels of female participation is related to political crises. In some legislative bodies women are elected in greater numbers when the country

has recently endured some kind of political crisis and is trying to achieve stability. For example, Africa has seen a huge increase in the number of women involved in politics in recent years. Long histories of war and poverty have been extremely hard on these desperate populations. In a keynote address given at the Policy Seminar on the Gender Implications of Peacekeeping and Reconstruction in Africa, the Director of UNIFEM Noeleen Hayzer describes this situation saying, “Women will no longer accept that the world expects war makers to be peacemakers while women’s perspectives, experiences and contributions to shaping a sustainable future are rendered trivial” (Heyzer 2008, UNIFEM.org). This statement mirrors the attitude developing in many parts of the world. When men have continually failed to run a successful, prosperous, or peaceful government, the population turns to women. As I mentioned previously, Rwanda is a clear example of this trend. In 2003, the first democratic election since the horrific conflict in 1994, women were elected in droves. Rwanda has had the highest percentage of women in a legislature anywhere in the world for the last six years.. In a way, women serve as a beacon of hope for change in countries where change is needed most. UNIFEM created a publication entitled *Women at the Peace Table: Making a Difference* to encourage women to become more involved in African politics, and it also highlights stories and strategies of women who have already joined the fray. This publication claims that,

> The process of reconstructing a society emerging from war requires the equal contributions of men and women. Ensuring women’s participation in such negotiations enhances the legitimacy of the process by making it more democratic

> and responsive to the priorities of all sectors of the affected population" (Anderlini 2000: 5).

Liberia also demonstrates the effect of crisis on a voting population. In 2003 after a long period of civil war and political disorder, an election was held that resulted in the victory of the current Liberian President, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. The economy was in ruins and Johnson-Sirleaf's economic training at Harvard was a selling point. Certainly economic stability is a top-priority for all who live in the country. However, voters cite another reason for her election—she is a woman. Many in the nation felt that a woman's touch was needed after corruption and violence were allow to run rampant in the country under male rule. In her own words, President Johnson-Sirleaf believes that she can "bring motherly sensitivity and emotion to the presidency" that is crucial to healing and piecing her broken country back together (BBC News 2005).

The U.S. has not had to face this type of crisis and thus does not have the same reasons to value a woman's approach to political problems. While it may be astonishing that developing countries in Africa have embraced women in power while America has not, regional circumstances in Africa made a progressive switch to female leadership more likely. In the United States, we find ourselves afraid that a woman will not be able successfully to command the unmatched power of the U.S. military. In war torn countries of Africa, a top priority for the people may be to distance themselves from even the possibility of yet another armed conflict. Thus, electing someone who is able to prevent the need for military force at all costs seems like the most desirable choice. Desperation serves as a strong catalyst for change and has resulted in more equal gender

representation in crisis-ridden countries around the world. Countries in South America have also opted for female representation as a way to combat militarization and corruption. Even in the United States the desire for change after the last administration was very influential in the election of Barack Obama, the nation's first African-American president.

Electoral Factors-

The United States has a unique electoral system. However, several aspects of this system have kept women from advancing to high political positions. I say this for several reasons.

The incumbency advantage-

First, women in the U.S. face barriers to entry because of a very evolved and entrenched system of incumbency. Incumbents in the U.S. have a huge advantage edge in elections. To begin with, they have high name recognition. Even though this is not ideal, American voters do not pay enough attention to politics to know each candidate and have a thorough knowledge of their views on important issues. In short, it is common for apathetic and inattentive voters to opt for the candidate whose name they recognize on the ballot. Incumbents also have a fundraising advantage. Studies consistently show that candidates with deep pockets do significantly better in races than poorer candidates, and incumbents enjoy a distinct monetary advantage in most American elections. This is the case due to the "franking" privilege (Palmer 37), fundraising experience, established donors, and lack of strong opposition. Often, challengers simply cannot raise the money that incumbents can. For example, in 2006, Senate incumbents outraised their challengers by a six to one ratio; they raised an average of $11.3 million while challengers raised on

average $1.8 million. This pattern also held for House incumbents, who raised an average of $1.3 million compared to $300,000 for challengers (Palmer and Simon 2008, 38-9).

Incumbency advantage aside, fund raising issues are an even bigger concern for female candidates than male candidates. Many women cite lack of funds as a serious problem in running for office, and many women refrain from running because they have trouble raising money. On average, campaign contributions are smaller when given to female candidates than males. Moreover, men give more often than women, and women are rarely advantaged incumbents. As such, women have to secure donations from a much larger group of supporters in order to raise the same amount of money. Even worse, women actually need more money than men to win. Studies show that women need to raise more money than their male opponents to secure a viable campaign and establish credibility (Tovar 2007, 4). The combination of these campaign realities makes it extremely difficult for women to run and win against their male counterparts and incumbents.

Perhaps as a result of all this, few people and even fewer women challenge incumbents. Sometimes the uncompetitive nature of races essentially gives incumbents a free ride. In the years from 2002-2006, an unprecedented 97.3 percent of incumbents were reelected as state representatives in the House. A full 77.5 percent of incumbents faced no primary opponent and thus automatically won re-nomination. Even more surprising, a full 16.7 percent of incumbents running for reelection faced no major party opponent at all, and a total of 12.5 percent got a free pass into the House of Representatives (Palmer and Simon 2008, 40).

In short, incumbents have numerous advantages over challengers, and women pay the price. The nature of incumbency and campaigning in the United States has especially negative consequences for women first and foremost because few women are incumbents. Right now, men hold almost 85 percent of seats in Congress, and they are not letting them go. Women continue to accomplish bigger and better things in the world of politics, but breaking through into the House and Senate by defeating virtually invincible opponents is difficult. Slowly, as incumbents retire, more women can begin to take their places. In contrast, other democracies' electoral systems are not so friendly to incumbents. More competitive races and turnover in political office would certainly encourage the advancement of women in the political arena.

The presidency-

The nature of the American Presidency also hinders women's' progress. In the United States, party support helps tremendously, but the mass population actually decides the leader of the country (the Electoral College aside). We have already discussed the fact that 51 percent of Americans think that the United States is not ready to elect a female president and another 28 percent have similar though less serious doubts. If a majority of Americans do not vote for a female candidate simply because she is a woman, she is already doomed to fail, despite her policy views or merit.

In contrast, the head of government in a parliamentary system is the leader of the majority party in parliament. The public does not vote directly for the prime minister. Instead, they vote for a party and the leader of the party usually becomes prime minister by default. While, the public is usually aware of who will become prime minister in the event that a party wins the majority, they vote for a party rather than an individual. The

personality and gender of the Prime Minister to-be is unlikely to have an enormous effect on their vote. As a result, a parliamentary system allows a woman to work her way up through the ranks of her party and become head of government without having to win a direct election. In a parliamentary system a woman can gain power and prestige based on ability and accomplishments. In contrast, presidential candidates rely on personality, charisma, and looks to a large degree. Because candidate success depends upon public support, women have a more difficult time in the United States. If the public does not agree with a woman in office, there will not be a woman in office. If a parliamentary system of government existed in the United States, our political candidates for the highest office might be quite different. In fact, Nancy Pelosi may have even been elected as Prime Minister after she attained her position as Speaker of the House in 2007.

Even candidates for less conspicuous positions in the legislature are disadvantaged by the American electoral system. For example, in proportional representation systems voters support a party's list rather than a single candidate (Paxton 4). This way, multiple women make up members on a list of many candidates and are less likely to stand out and be individually scrutinized for their gender. In contrast, in the United States it is impossible to run for office as a woman without being seen as an obvious deviation from the norm. Because of the attention they draw, women in the U.S. become riskier candidates for parties to support (Paxton 4). In fact, according to the Women's Environment and Development Organization, almost all countries that now have legislatures in which women hold at least 30 percent of seats are proportional representation systems (WEDO.org 2008).

As a rule, the American political system operates in a very individualistic way; it is each candidate for him/herself. Candidates for office in the United States have to sell themselves and rely on personal attributes and capabilities to be elected. Other systems rely much more on the idea that voters support a party rather than a single person, and individual candidates are less likely to be forced into the spotlight and examined. Because of these differences, female candidates are much more likely to be noticed in the United States, and they face more scrutiny from the media and the population.

Cultural Differences-

The United States has a unique and very distinct culture that affects the way our society functions. As I have shown throughout this paper, the political world is deeply affected by cultural norms and ideals. Patriarchal tendencies have been present in America since its conception, and they played a large part in the creation of our government. Overall, America has been slow to change, and monumental nationwide efforts like the civil rights and women's movements have been necessary to alter the course of politics and society. Even after these movements succeeded remnants of the old ways remained. The nation has only just seen its first African-American president, and women are still waiting. The gender pay-wage gap persists despite constant pressure to eradicate it. Black women still make lower wages than white women and are more likely to live below the poverty line. And while this paper focuses on women as a whole being outsiders in politics, minority women fill far fewer political roles than middle-class white women. In general, history shows us that the American people can change. But change is often slow.

In comparison to some foreign cultures, the U.S. is socially conservative. The Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Finland, and Denmark, for example, are quick to embrace change and are often leaders in liberal social policy. These countries have supported ideals of equality for decades. For example, these countries were quick to offer paid family leave for new mothers and fathers while the U.S. fidgeted and killed time.. In general, social democracies and welfare states empower women by endorsing policies like paid family leave that allow women to maintain a level economic playing field with men. In line with their political policies, public attitudes in these states support the equal status of men and women. After her research indicated that Scandinavian countries were likely to have 17-18 percent more women in legislature than other European countries Pamela Paxton asserts that, "The Scandinavian countries provide an example of an egalitarian ideology realized through politics to result in definite increases in women's status" (Paxton 12).

Other countries have proven to be friendlier to women heads of state as well. For example, countries in the Middle East and Asia have already elected female heads of government. This might surprise many Americans who believe that the status of women in many countries of that region keep them from attaining high political office. In reality, while these countries may have elected a female as their head of government, it is true that their parliamentary systems are still unrepresentative and do not contain large percentages of female legislators. Many of these women attained office because of familial connections. In fact, most women had husbands or fathers that were heads of government or important political figures before they ascended to high levels. Essentially, name recognition and family ties give these women a legitimate chance of

winning elections that could not have otherwise been won by a female candidate. Women in the United States cannot count on winning positions solely because of public sentiment in favor of their husbands or fathers. Connections may help with name recognition, but candidates are ultimately judged on ability and experience. For example, Hillary Clinton was constantly associated with her husband, but the public still did not see that as a legitimate reason to vote for her.

In order to emphasize the effect that family ties have elsewhere in the world, I will focus on Asia. There have been quite a few women leaders in Asia over the past decades. For example, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Bangladesh,--every Islamic country in the region but Brunei-- have had women heads of government (Derichs and Thompson 2006).On the surface it appears that these countries would be non-receptive to female leadership because of their strict belief in the traditional roles of women as wives and mothers. In these countries family is often a sacred institution and divergence from family roles is looked upon with doubt and aversion. However, women in these countries have been able to use their "other" status to gain support during elections, especially in countries where cruel, unjust, and corrupt governments hold power. In a project funded by the German Science Foundation entitled "Dynasties and Female Top Political Leaders in Asia" Derichs and Thompson highlight a process by which many women ascend to high political office. First, women capitalize on their "victim" status to gain support from the population. Most of the women running for leadership positions in these Asian countries lost fathers or husbands due to the corrupt political system in place before their election. Their status as victims results in their establishment as symbols of change and hope. Further, because they are running to "avenge" or continue the work of their dead

husbands or fathers, their gender is accepted and does not become a major issue. After they are established symbols, they are adopted as leaders of the opposition movement. Women tend to be effective under these circumstances because they can "use their 'housewife image'" to appeal to voters. This image fills the needs to fight against a regime that is perceived as unjust, cruel, dictatorial and morally corrupt (Derich and Thompson 2006). Men with family ties are not able to provide such a righteous image, and the mere fact of their gender establishes a positive difference in women. After women become the established leaders of the opposition party, they can then become career politicians (Dedrich and Thompson 2006) (Newsweek 2007). Still, once in office these women are held to high standards and any slight misstep can lead to a total dissolution of their rule. Benazir Bhutto, for example, was quickly stripped of power after accusations of corruption (Derich and Thompson 2006).

The examples of Asian female leaders prove that culture and family affect female participation in government. But unfavorable cultural ideas can be used to the advantage of women when a regime change is demanded. Corruption in Asia functions much like the crisis situations in Africa; it causes a disenchanted population to look to "outsiders."Even so, because the people are still attached to traditional ideas about gender roles, it is still necessary that the women have ties to well-known men. Without these ties these women most likely would have failed.

Women in the U.S. are less capable of using their positions as "outsiders" to ascend to high office. Though our culture also perpetuates the idea of women as mothers and wives, our government has not been inundated with violence, cruelty, and rampant corruption that would encourage the election of women. However, the 1992

congressional elections signal that if corruption and unethical practices were present in the United States the election of more women might follow. In 1992, the Year of the Woman, voters in the U.S. were generally disenchanted with government and many women were disgusted with the male bigotry displayed in the Anita Hill hearings. Scandal also played a large role in the number of women running that year and influenced the degree of their success. In 1991, it was discovered that 269 representatives in Congress had been far over-spending their budgets. The General Accounting Office reported that 8,331 bounced checks had been covered with no penalty or interest to the representative. This incident signaled the unethical behavior of many representatives who were purposefully taking advantage of the system. Many retired due to the bad publicity (Palmer and Simon 2008, 46-47). In response, many women ran as "outsiders" to highlight their differences from men. In essence, "the farther away a woman was from power, the better her position to attain it" (Palmer and Simon 2008, 27). The congressional elections that followed resulted in record breaking numbers of female victors and the largest spike in female participation in American history.

This section has shown that American political and social culture is very different from that of other countries. Many countries have allowed women to hold high positions of power in the government. Our society is generally slow to accept social change, and the view of women as wives and mothers continues to prevail among a large portion of the population. Scandinavian countries prove that women can become near-equal members in politics presenting progressive societies. Further, countries that are more conservative in their religious views than the United States tend to value family as the cornerstone of society. Because families are held in such high regard, women with

familial connections are more likely to be allowed to occupy powerful leadership positions. Many of these countries have also endured corrupt and possibly violent regimes that have given women the opportunity to step in as outsiders and use a feminine persona to attract voters. Women in the United States cannot rely on family ties to attain political success, and outsider status is rarely enough to convince the American people that women should hold more elective positions.

Gender Quotas-

One of the most-cited reasons for the success of women in legislatures elsewhere in the world is the presence of gender quotas. There is certainly no lack of evidence that quotas produce astonishing results. For example, in the case of Bangladesh, the number of women in the legislative body decreased from thirty to six when gender quotas were not renewed. The number of women increased substantially when the quotas were reintroduced (Nanivadekar 2006). In Latin America, gender quotas have resulted on average in a 10 percent increase in the number of women in legislative bodies. After Rwanda instituted a gender quota system, female participation in the legislature shot up to first in the world, passing even the traditionally egalitarian countries of Scandinavia. Basically these quota requirements function as built-in mechanisms that enable women to overcome the advantages of men (WEDO.org 2008). Ideally, quotas will be removed over time as members of the population begin to accept women's roles in the political world and more women were elected to office. In the past 15 years, quota mechanisms have spread like wildfire. Approximately 100 out of the world's 192 countries have developed some kind of quota system in an attempt to give women more equal opportunities (Dahlerup 2007). Because they have raised female participation in

governments across the planet by large margins, many scholars are avid supporters of a gender quota system in the United States. Jane Mansbridge of Harvard University, for example, argues that quotas are the only viable method of reaching gender equality in any established polity. (Mansbridge 2006).

At present, there are two types of quota systems. First, some countries have gender quota laws written into their constitutions or legalized through other legislation. These laws are often backed by some sort of sanction or punishment if quotas are not met. WEDO identifies disqualification from elections or withdrawal of government campaign funding as possible measures that can be used against parties to enforce quotas. The second type is a voluntary measure taken by political parties to ensure that they support and promote near equal numbers of men and women candidates. For instance, party short lists in Great Britain aim to increase the number of women aspiring to become candidates for office (Dahlerup 2006). There are no legally binding ramifications if a party fails to comply.

Of all the reasons that the United States lags behind other countries, the lack of gender quotas is the most important. It is slightly perplexing that the U.S. has not been willing to adopt even non-binding party quotas. All of this raises the following questions: Why does the U.S. have an extreme aversion to such quotas? And would quotas work in the U.S.?

Though quotas have produced promising results in other countries, they have been controversial within the United States. Those who oppose quotas are winning the battle. They base their opposition on several factors. First, they view gender quotas as a form of affirmative action. As Mona Lena Crook states, “adopting quotas in a society

where support for positive action is already waning is not very likely." Instead, our culture views affirmative measures as ways to "privilege groups over individuals, undermine equality of opportunities, and ignore other more pressing social cleavages" (Crook 2006, 115) Both men and women, believe that the negative attitudes towards affirmative action measures and gender quotas in politics would actually de-legitimize the role of women as political actors. If women are seen as getting a free-ride into office, the public will lose respect for them instead of becoming accustomed to their presence and gradually gaining confidence in their abilities. Women are afraid that they will be stigmatized and thus will be less effective in office (Crook 110).

Are these concerns valid? Quotas have not been in place long enough to for us to answer this question (Dahlerup 2007). From a different perspective, Medha Nanivadekar, an author of an article regarding quotas in the Indian governmental system, explains that, "Quotas indicate that underrepresentation of marginal groups is not a statement of the groups' poor performance but of the system's poor performance at creating a level playing field" (2006, 119). If quotas are addressed from this point of view, the population is likely to see their necessity instead of viewing women as beneficiaries of unfair advantage.

Another argument against quotas in the United States concerns their incompatibility with our electoral system. Most scholars agree that our electoral system poses insurmountable barriers to the adoption of a quota system. For this reason the United States is simply not a good candidate for quotas regardless of our embarrassingly low percentages of women in legislature. It has long been established that proportional representation systems or mixed member systems are more amenable to quotas. Our

single member districts and primary elections make it almost impossible for parties to control who their candidates will be. Further, only one candidate is chosen per party to represent a district. Therefore, an explicit decision must be made by the party to support a female or male candidate, and thus balancing the ticket is out of the question (Matland 2006, 4). Therefore, it would be difficult for the parties to decide which districts would be required to back female candidates. In most cases the party would prefer to support the male candidate because he has a better chance of winning (Larserud and Taphorn 2007). This may be an explicit reason why parties in the U.S. are wary of adopting internal quotas. Further, due to primary elections, the voters have the ultimate power to choose which candidates will represent a party during a general election. This is not the case in proportional representation systems (Larserud and Taphorn 2007). In fact, research done by Larserud and Taphorn for IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance) shows that implementing quotas in the U.S. --because we operate under a FPTP (first-past-the-post) system—either would be nearly impossible or would require significant structural change (2006).

Yet at the current rate it will be decades or generations before parity is reached (Dahlerup 2007). If the U.S. continues to allow women into the system at the same rate it is today, we stand to fall even farther behind other nations. Instead of gender quota systems, Medha Nanivadekar suggests that the United States ratify CEDAW, which it has avoided doing at all costs so far, and finally adopt the ERA. By ratifying CEDAW, the United States would become accountable to the international system at large and would be bound by international law to help women gain better political positions. She concludes that the ERA would establish a basic sense of equality in our society and in the

workplace by creating an atmosphere in which all people are equal under the law. Right now, men and women are only constitutionally equal in regard to the right to vote. She further states that no form of discrimination against women can be currently deemed as unconstitutional (2006). Even without quotas in the United States, the number of women in our legislative bodies has been steadily rising since the women's movement of the 1970s. If the ERA passed, surely this representation would rise at a faster pace and negate the need for gender quotas. In essence, the ERA would be our gender quota. As Nanivadekar explains, "Guarantees of equal opportunities, equal pay, and protection from violence will ensure women's better access to and greater control over resources. This will create a level playing field that may eventually translate into higher political representation" (2006, 127).

In summary, quotas have been very successful in countries acsross the world. Quotas lead to more women in politics, and more women in politics means a greater possibility of passing legislation that promotes women's equality. However, while quota systems are effective, quotas are unlikely to be accepted in the United States. Instead, women in the United States should look to legislation such as the ERA and CEDAW. Once gender equality is established in law, women can begin to fight for further legislation that enables them to have the same professional and political opportunities as men.

IV. CONCLUSION

Women around the world are still behind when it comes to equal representation in politics. Inequality starts at birth when parents begin to socialize their children differently based on sex. Girls are taught to be quiet, self-conscious, reserved, mannerly, dependent,

and unimaginative. It seems that their paths are chosen for them long before they have a chance to choose for themselves. Boys get a wide variety of toys that expand their horizons and encourage them to branch out, while girls are given toys that concentrate on fashion, beauty, and homemaking. Because boys are taught to be assertive and independent, they are better suited for politics from the start. Our nation needs to recognize biased socialization and encourage young minds to explore life for themselves. For example, Montessori schools have adopted a practice of keeping only gender neutral toys and treating young children in the same manner regardless of sex. In fact, I went to a Montessori as a child and experienced this atmosphere for myself. I was always encouraged to play outside, explore, and get dirty. We were expected to do school work independently in order to learn the nature of responsibility. And I never played with any kitchen toys. I believe it is hardly a coincidence that I am extremely interested in politics and plan to run for office at some point in the future.

Further, stereotyping has to be controlled. Because of stereotyping women are perceived to be less capable leaders than men, especially when the office of the President is concerned. In fact, women have proven themselves to be very worthy candidates for office and their new leadership styles may be a refreshing change. The media plays a huge role in promoting sexist attitudes. The media need to realize the huge impact they have on the American people and take responsibility for their words and actions. If the media provided non-biased coverage and portrayed men and women politicians as equal members of the political profession, the public would be better off. It is simply unacceptable for political news coverage to focus on a woman's body while neglecting to

mention her views or policy proposals. If the media would focus on the credentials, maybe the public would too.

Further, as more women enter politics they need to push for more woman-friendly legislation. Men are much less likely to be concerned with women's issues and it is a woman's job to bring attention to topics that are currently ignored. This is called substantive representation and it is absolutely necessary. As more women enter office support for women's bills is proven to increase proportionately. For example, if a large portion of the legislative bodies at the national and state levels is made up of women, legislation like the ERA, more helpful family leave laws, and measures to ensure equal pay will stand a better chance of passing. Until then women are kept out of the political circle due to unfair practices that punish pregnant women, keep returning moms from reaching their potential, and permanently cutting pay for women who leave the workplace. We cherish our role as mothers, but many of us are forced to give up motherhood in order to have successful careers, especially in politics. Women must be supported and accepted as equal members of society, and legislation must work to fix injustices that presently hold us back from positions we want and deserve. Also, if more women were in political office there is a better chance that more women would reach high positions. As more women become senior members of Congress, more will be assigned to powerful committees that are now almost inaccessible.

America is very different from many other countries in the world, socially, governmentally, and electorally. Our government is established, and changing its basic tenets is extremely difficult. When the constitution was written women's rights simply were not considered important. Newly forming governments have the advantage of

capitalizing on world trends in favor of gender equality and are able to include women-friendly legislation in their constitutions or basic law. Further, our country has not experienced any extremely disruptive crises or political unrest that would promote a public desire to elect women leaders because of their viewed outsider status. Our electoral system also makes it difficult to run for election based on family ties or implement successful gender quota systems that have worked for so many other countries around the world. As a result, our nation has to come up with its own way to battle gender injustice. The ways I mention above are only starting points. However, if we don't start now women will never stand a chance.

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