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# Individual Differences In Psychological Evaluations Of Electoral Risk: Furthering The Explanation Of The Gender Gap In Candidate Emergence

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**INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATIONS OF  
ELECTORAL RISK: FURTHERING THE EXPLANATION OF THE  
GENDER GAP IN CANDIDATE EMERGENCE**

by

**JENNIE SWEET-CUSHMAN**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

2014

MAJOR: POLITICAL SCIENCE

Approved by:

---

Advisor

Date

## DEDICATION

*For Ray:*

*Whose love and devotion has been unparalleled and has quietly and sacrificially mitigated any risk I have had in pursuing my own dreams. It is not every man that could reinvent himself daily to accommodate the demands of his militantly feminist wife, and I am infinitely better off for having forced you to marry me.*

*But Also:*

*For the women who do run, for inspiring me daily to believe that gender equality is possible.*

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Shirley Chisholm once said: “The emotional, sexual, and psychological stereotyping of females begins when the doctor says: It’s a girl”, and for anyone who studies women in politics, it is hard to avoid the obstacles women face literally from day one. I am fortunate to have either not faced or overcome many of these obstacles because of the support and dedication of so many throughout my life. I will acknowledge some below, but with an asterisk for many others along the way.

Not every PhD student (especially women with such family commitments!) has the luxury of devoting his or herself as I was able to. I am fortunate and I know it. To my parents, Phil and Maureen: for giving me a foundation that never allowed me to self-doubt. For my sister, Emilie: for “getting it” and listening to me drone on and on when no one else cared to hear. For my husband, Ray: for being so patient and tolerant of this process. For my sons, Christopher, Kaden, and Brody who have each inspired me in their own ways and have been more than good sports when it came to sharing mom with school. Chris, I am so proud of you. We kind of proved the whole stinking world wrong, didn’t we? You get all the credit for that. Kaden: my budding political scientist, I am so inspired by your interest and your sweet spirit. Brody: my baby, who loves me so unconditionally and whole-heartedly—you remind me to take nothing for granted. I am a lucky daughter, sister, wife, and mother.

To two friends, Kelly Krawczyk and Nichole Fifer, who as fellow grad students (not to mention women) have shared my struggles and provided countless opportunities for decompression and laughter. Your support of me, particularly through the roughest parts, made all the difference. Specifically, Kelly, thank you for doing all of the hard VBM stuff (and I do mean all) first, so I could learn and have a smoother road when it was my turn—you made me better and more rock star-esque in every way. Nichole, when no one could or would understand, you made sure I never feel abandoned. You are my partner in crime, my cornerstone, a rare and beautiful gift, and I know it.

To my undergraduate research assistant, Eir: you have no idea how your commitment to helping with Chapter Six inspired me to keep working. I could not have asked for a brighter, more devoted research companion—and friend. It has been a great pleasure of my life getting to control your every waking academic moment and I am quite indebted for your assistance to getting me across this finish line.

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Finally, I wish to formally acknowledge my failures. I have no regrets, and I am grateful for your persistence in my life for because of you, I know: 1) just how deep my own strength goes, 2) the power of both maintaining hope and letting hope go, 3) the importance of making the most of what remains when you come up empty on your dreams, and 4) that in a universe of ambiguity, this kind of certainty does—for me—come only once. Next time you show your face, call me “doctor”, for this time I have won.

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## Chapter One: Studying Gender-Based Differences in Political Ambition through the Lens of Electoral Risk

### Introduction

United States Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) likes to remark how when she and five other new women joined the U.S. Senate in 1993, the first women's restroom had to be built near the Senate Chamber to accommodate them (Hotakainen, 2012) . With so few women having served in the Senate up to that point, there had been little need for restroom facilities specifically for women. While a lack of restrooms for female senators may seem an easily (and now permanently) resolved matter, it could be seen as a metaphor for a much more serious concern facing American women: There was no women's restroom for the U.S. Senate because no one was there to need one. What women's policy considerations have not been made because there has been no one there to demand them?

This metaphor is not a theoretical proposition. In February 2012, the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform's all-male panel conducted hearings on health insurance coverage of pharmaceutical contraceptives. Controversial as the hearing's subject matter was, it might have been quite expected that much attention be paid to the content of the participants' testimony. There was. However, more significant was the attention paid not to what the participants said, but rather their one unifying trait: none of them had personally used the female birth control medications being discussed because all of them were men. Women who were originally slated to testify were prevented from doing so. Outraged, Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) was quoted as saying: "I'm saddened that here we are in 2012 and a House committee would hold a hearing on women's health and deny women the ability to share their perspective (Washington Post, February 17 2012; ABC News, February 17, 2012)."

With this dissertation, I endeavor to add to the understanding of why there are not more women in U.S. politics by exploring an angle of political ambition—electoral risk—that has been widely ignored in discussions of the gender gap in representation. Using both experimental methods and an analysis of decisions made in actual candidacies, the study aims to discover whether gender-based differences in electoral risk perception are contributing to the gender gap in ambition. In this chapter, I will provide a brief introduction to the contextual backdrop for this research. Specifically, I will introduce the theoretical framework that connects gender-based differences in psychological risk assessment to gender differences in political ambition.

### Background to the Study

Understanding why men are more likely than women to seek political office is important because, in reality, there are countless examples of women being unable to, in Shaheen’s words, “share their perspective” in the political process. This results, not necessarily because they are prevented from doing so, but rather because there are just too few women represented in the process. Most notably, women are significantly and historically underrepresented in elective office. According to the Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers University, 2,445 women sought state legislative office in 2012. While a slim majority of these women won, they remain only roughly 24 percent of state legislators in U.S. states (CAWP, 2012).

The number of women holding state legislative office may be considered a bellwether statistic. State and local offices are training grounds for higher-level political office. If women are scarce in lower-level elective office, there will naturally be fewer women in the candidate pool for higher elective office. The availability of experienced women candidates is often cited as one of

the primary reasons so few women serve in Congress and why there has been such a paucity of women presidential candidates (Lawless & Fox, 2010).

This so-called “pipeline effect” is magnified because it also hinders women in areas—such as the corporate and academic worlds—that often serve as pre-cursors to political candidacies as well, further limiting the candidate pool (Lawless & Fox, 2010). The business world has very few women holding top-ranking positions, in part, because the pipeline of women from which to draw qualified candidates is severely limited (Helfat, Harris, & Wolfson, 2006). Academia suffers from similar limitations (Vilian, 2004).

It is important to articulate why the disproportionately low participation of women in elite politics (i.e. on aggregate lower political ambition than men) is a problem, one worthy of examination and action. The conversation on this topic is intertwined with both theoretical and empirical discussions of descriptive representation—the idea that representatives should and actually do resemble those being represented (Pitkin, 1972). The justification for concern over the absence of women becomes twofold. First, normatively, if an elected body is not descriptive in nature, what are the implications for the legitimacy of a representative democracy? Second, empirically, are women’s interests and policy needs being appropriately reflected in the decisions of elected officials who are non-descriptive? Jane Mansbridge (1999, p. 629) articulates these bifaceted criteria well, “The primary function of representative democracy is to represent the substantive interests of the represented through both deliberation and aggregation.”

Mansbridge (1999) identifies four functions of descriptive representation that should be considered when weighing the importance and effectiveness of descriptive representation. The first two are normative. In the context of women’s representation, the first function is to build the

perception of women as effective governors. The second, more generally, is to provide “de facto legitimacy” (628) of the governing body by displaying its representative qualities. Third, substantively, descriptive representation can both serve to mediate distrust that women may have historically felt about governing bodies. Finally, it can improve the quality and depth of the conversations that occur about public policy and political decision making.

Descriptive representation for women can only be achieved in the United States if there are adequate numbers of women candidates seeking and winning political office. Thus, political ambition among women is paramount for achieving the benefits Mansbridge describes. There is evidence that lacking political ambition (and thus low percentages of elected officials) among women is problematic in both the normative and substantive accounts described.

Firstly, women voters seem to want more women representatives. Women voters have historically tended to favor women candidates (Rosenthal, 1995). Voters have been demonstrated to have a “baseline” gender preference in their vote choices (Sabonmatsu, 2002) . Furthermore, they often use gender stereotypes to make judgments about candidates (i.e. traits, beliefs, issue positions or policy preferences) (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Kahn, 1994; King & Matland, 2003; Koch, 2000; Rosenwasser & Seale, 1998; Sapiro, 1981, 1983). In some cases, voters—male and female—have seemed to indicate that they prefer women candidates (Burrell, 1996), such as several analyses of the 1992 election indicate (Burrell, 1996; Dolan, 1998).

Secondly, women representatives may help ensure women’s interests are being appropriately addressed. Research indicates that women are more effective than their male counterparts in representing women’s policy interests (Carroll, 2001a) . Women are more likely to have a broader concept of what issues affect women, support legislation that promotes women’s

interests, and rate those interests higher on their personal legislative agendas (Barrett, 1997; Boles, 2001; Carroll, 2001b; Dodson & Carroll, 1991; Leader, 1997; Little, Dunn, & Deen, 2001; Reingold, 2000; Saint-Germain, 1989; Thomas, 1994, 1996). Even when considerations for other strong influences such as ideology or party are made, gender still matters in influencing how legislators vote on key issues—particularly those of interest to women (Swers, 1998).

It is possible that the effectiveness of women representing women is still questioned because, in many cases, women in elected bodies have failed to meet the threshold of what is often referred to as “critical mass”—the idea that any minority in an organization must meet a certain threshold of presence before they become relevant within the body (Kanter, 1997). Applied to women in politics, the theory argues that the effectiveness of women in an elective body can best be understood by virtue of the size of their minority—smaller minorities cannot effectively offer descriptive representation (Dahlerup, 2007). While political scientists have often tossed around the threshold of 15-30 percent as being a point where women are effectively seen as having a seat at the representation table, others have argued that the number depends on contextual factors and can vary and even token women can be effective legislators (Bratton, 2005; Childs & Krook, 2006; Dahlerup, 2006). Regardless of whether there is a threshold for women’s effectiveness, their generally small numbers mean it is more difficult to generalize from samples of women officeholders either across time, in certain environments, on certain issues, or comparatively (Grey, 2006).

However, the availability of qualified candidates is only part of the explanation for why women continue to hold such a relatively small number of elective offices in the United States. There is a plethora of individual-level factors that depress political ambition among women as

well—including factors of political socialization, family commitments, and personal efficacy (see Lawless & Fox, 2010) which will be discussed in depth in Chapter 2.

One individual factor that has been only tangentially mentioned in modern analyses of candidate emergence<sup>1</sup> is the element of risk inherently involved in acting on political ambition. The all-too-obvious reality of democratic politics is: for every contested seat, risk plays a role in that there is one winner and (at least) one loser. Electoral contests are inherently risky. This suggests that psychological dispositions that affect perceptions of and the resultant aversion to *electoral risk*, the likelihood of exposure to loss in an attempt at political office, may be influential in fostering or depressing political ambition.

As I will discuss in Chapter Two, contemporary political ambition research has been heavily focused on the gender gap in ambition. The groundbreaking work by Lawless and Fox (2005, 2011) in the Citizen Political Ambition Panel Studies reveal the most confounding aspect of this gap: even when men and women are similarly well-qualified as potential candidates, the men tend to have much higher levels of interest in running and efficacy in their ability to win and govern. The curious aspect of this is that these less-eficacious women are no slackers—they are successful lawyers, businesswomen, and activists who have achieved much success in their lives and, in most cases, have balanced the demands of work and family, too.

I suggest that it seems incongruous that such successful women would feel less efficacious than similarly situated men about their political prospects and abilities considering the impressiveness of their non-political achievements. To explain this anomaly, I propose that these

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<sup>1</sup> More dated research, including Rhode 1979 and Black 1976, are exceptions to this statement. The line of inquiry seems to have transitioned off the topic of risk not long after it began and, while these works are often cited in political ambition literature, risk as an independent variable is not.

differences may actually be measuring psychologically-based gender differences in how men and women respond to electoral risk.

Electoral risk is a term relevant to putting specific and unique considerations around the risk involved in seeking political office. So, while risk is a common topic in psychological (and other fields) literatures, I make connections to discussion of risk, more generally. This clear gap in political science literature and narrow one in the psychological literature means there is also not a discussion of what gender-based differences we might expect. Psychological research, in general, is rich, however, with examples of gender or sex-based differences (Eagly, 1995; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974)—the intersection of these overlapping considerations is the subject of Chapter Three. Significant differences have been found between men and women in evaluations of personality (Terraccinano & McCrae, 2001; Feingold, 1994; Kling et al, 1999), cognitive abilities (Halpern, 2000, 2004; Hyde, 1981; Hyde, Fennema, & Lamon, 1990; Mann et al., 1990), verbal skills (Hyde & Linn, 1988; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1972), and spatial aptitudes (Kail, Carter, & Pellegrino, 1979; Lawton, 1994; Linn & Petersen, 1985; Newcombe, Bandura, & Taylor, 1983; Voyer, Voyer, & Bryden, 1995), and other areas of human psychology (Gove & Tudor, 1973; Nolem-Hoeksema, 1987; Rosenfield, 1989; Wood & Eagly, 2002).

These differences have been well-examined in considerations of risk, as well. Byrnes et al.'s (1999) meta-analysis of 150 studies of gender-based differences in risk offered an overarching conclusion that: “male participants are more likely to take risks than female participants (377).” Among the high-profile examples in the academic literature is the finding that men are more likely to take more risks when operating an automobile (Byrnes et al., 1999; Konecni, Ebbeson, & Konecni, 1976; Waldron, McCloskey, & Earle, 2005). Much inter-disciplinary research has also gone into demonstrating that men are more likely to engage in riskier financial

decision-making (Eckel & Grossman, 2002; Powell & Ansic, 1997; Sunden & Surette, 1998; also see for a mild contradiction Schubert et al., 1999). Similarly, men are consistently found to engage in riskier behaviors in terms of sexual decision making (Clark & Hatfield, 1989; Oliver & Hyde, 1993). A trove of additional academic studies in a varied arena of risk-oriented contexts seem to point to the same general conclusion that men are more likely to engage in risky-behaviors and make higher-risk choices.

It is important to note that this research has not been without controversy. Following the publication of Maccoby and Jacklin's 1974 seminal book, "The Psychology of Sex Differences", a lengthy same vs. difference debate ensued. Unsurprisingly, discussions of differences between men and women, regardless of the topic, can be controversial academically and politically. Some have argued that psychological research into sex differences has been viewed as an attempt to demonstrate women's inferiority (Hyde, 2005; Hyde & Plant, 1995). Others have defended it as appropriate and non-sexist in nature (Eagly, 1995). Both sides have raised methodological concerns about both feminist and anti-feminist bias as well as elements of the research such as reported effect sizes, consistency of the findings, the over-representation of college students, and lack of longitudinal data (Eagly, 1995). While dramatic accusations of overt bias seem to have died down within the field, two camps persist. One side, often referred to as "The Beta Bias", recognizes that there are sex-based differences, but that they are generally small and should be minimized. The other, known as "The Alpha Bias", is said to emphasize the differences and exaggerate their significance (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988). The spirit of this dissertation is merely to observe potential differences in a specific context, following Eagly's viewpoint (1987): "In practical terms, the importance of a difference depends on the consequences of the behavior in its natural settings."



Regardless of which camp psychologists fall into, the same vs. differences controversies involved in sex or gender-based psychological differences have been both clarified and complicated by more contemporary research that has shown differences to have both theoretical and empirical foundations in evolutionary theory, specifically evolutionary psychology (Buss, 1995; Gaulin & FitzGerald, 1986; Moffat, Hampson, & Hatzipantelis, 1998). It provides recognition of both the role of “nature” and “nurture” as well as a recognition that the two are intertwined. I address the potential for an evolutionary component in explaining gender differences in electoral risk taking in Chapter Four.

Scholars have used evolutionary theory to analyze a multitude of sex differences in human traits. Obviously, sexual behavior predominates (Oliver & Hyde, 1993), but differences in other traits like spatial ability (e.g. Eals & Silverman, 1994) and social behaviors (Archer, 1996) have been investigated as well. The evolutionary-based explanation of behind gender-based both physical and psychological differences is: where men and women have, throughout the environments of history, faced different adaptive problems specific to their sex, they have evolved different biological tools for coping with them (Buss, 1994). From an evolutionary perspective, then, not only should psychological sex differences be unsurprising, they should be expected. Buss profoundly sets out the argument widely held by evolutionary psychologists: “To an evolutionary psychologist, the likelihood that the sexes are psychologically identical in domains in which they have recurrently confronted different adaptive problems over the long expanse of human evolutionary history is essentially zero (Buss, 1994).”

Briefly, consider this framework as applied to this dissertation’s topic: political ambition. Throughout much of humankind’s evolutionary and political past, patriarchy has all-but exclusively dominated human society (Smutz, 1995). Most importantly, for the 99 percent of

human evolutionary history when humans everywhere were hunter-gatherers, it was men who led political communities, not women. Arguably, patriarchal political communities presented significantly different adaptive problems for men and for women as each approached their roles within the political system. Employing the evolutionary psychology framework (Buss, 1994), men would benefit from being politically ambitious in a patriarchal political community since such ambition would help them compete successfully for rank (i.e. leadership), whereas women would have had little need to develop (and thus pass down through human evolution) these traits.

This study will attempt to add to the growing literature on candidate emergence which has, as of late, focused heavily on the gender gap in political ambition by adding both experimental findings (Chapter Five) and evidence from extant candidacies (Chapter Six). Chapter Five employs an experimental design to examine 1) how men and women evaluate electoral risk scenarios differently, 2) how different components of risk may interact and 3) how these interactions affect each gender's political ambition. Chapter Six examines existing data in a set of actual candidacies to look for reinforcement of these patterns of gender-risk influences on candidates' emergent, or an individual's first attempt at office seeking, and progressive, or an individual seeking additional higher office, ambition.

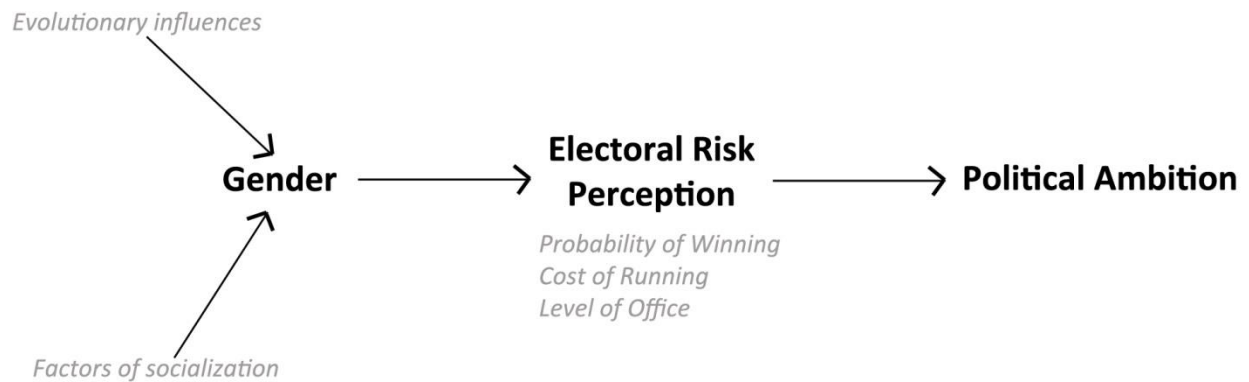
Scholars of political ambition have willingly noted that women's political ambition is a puzzle and our understanding of how to put the pieces together is incomplete. This dissertation examines whether specific gender-based psychological differences in the area of risk perception in the electoral context contribute to what we know about gender differences in candidate emergence. Explaining gender differences is never a simple equation and differences in political participation have long-been no exception. This study employs methodological triangulation, using more than

one method to close in on a unified conclusion, in an attempt to uncover yet unexplored differences between men and women that add to the calculus that creates differential political ambition.

The theoretical model being explored is as pictured in Figure 1.1. It identifies the proposition central to this work: that gender interacts with electoral risk perception to create different propensities for political ambition for men and women. The causality in this model suggests that the distal causes of political ambition appear before the proximate ones. From this model, I propose the following general research questions

1. Does the risk level in the electoral environment influence whether men/women actually pursue electoral office or express likelihood to do so?
2. Do differences exist between men and women in electoral risk perception? In other words, will men and women view the same electoral environment as differentially risky?
3. Do differences exist between men and women in electoral risk aversion? In other words, given the same risk evaluation of an electoral environment, will men and women exhibit differential propensities to pursue a candidacy within that environment?
4. Do men and women perceive specific components of electoral risk in different ways? Specifically, are certain elements or components of electoral risk more influential in determining risk depending on one's gender?

Fig. 1.1. Theoretical Model of the Influence of Gender and Risk Perception on Political Ambition



### Organization of the Study

Following this introduction, *Chapter Two* will review the academic literature on political ambition based in political science, providing background on the study of political ambition in the United States starting with the first political science-based studies of ambition in the 1960s with the work of Joseph Schlesinger to the latest theories stemming primarily from the works of Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox in the last eight years. The influence of the under-examined concept of risk on political ambition will be discussed.

*Chapter Three* will illuminate areas where psychology has examined, and discovered, the existence of gender-based differences. This chapter introduces risk as factor in political ambition and tackles the psychological role it plays in the decision to seek electoral office. This chapter will pull from a broad literature within psychology to demonstrate the basis (outside of decision-making about political candidacy) for gender differences in how risk calculations are made. This chapter will also introduce the terms risk perception and risk aversity, clarify their meanings, and demonstrate how they have been evaluated in the psychological literature. These psychology-

based considerations will then be brought into the realm of politics by introducing the concept of electoral risk.

In an effort to understand the theoretical and empirical reasons that these psychological differences exist, *Chapter Four* will explore the two main causes of gender-based psychological differences—differential socialization, and evolutionary adaptation. While this remains an area of scientific dialogue with much grey area, I will attempt to use this discussion to provide some theoretical ties from the proximate psychological findings of this research to ultimate biological ones using an evolutionary psychology framework. The idea behind this effort will be to argue that evolutionary theory provides insight into why men tend to be more politically ambitious than women tend to be by speaking directly to the role risk would have played in the politics of human evolutionary history. While some minimal effort to describe why men tend to be more engaged in politics has been made (Low, 2001), potentially adaptive components of risk have—to my knowledge—never been considered in these discussions.

My study will then move on to providing a two-stage empirical examination of gender-based differences in electoral risk perception, and its effect on political ambition. *Chapter Five* will discuss Stage One of this project’s methodology: the experimental survey of MTurk participants<sup>2</sup> about electoral risk, risk components, and political ambition that manipulates the level of risk among treatment conditions. It will describe the between-subjects experimental design employed and analyze the results in the context of hypotheses designed to respond to the relevant research questions outlined above.

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<sup>2</sup> A research subject pool recruited through use of Amazon’s Mechanical Turk “human intelligence tasks” request service.

Having identified the nature of gender-based differences in perceptions of electoral risk and the varying effects of political ambition under experimental conditions in Stage One, *Chapter Six* will attempt to provide methodological triangulation by offering a study of the actual electoral environment. By collecting data from candidacies in a stratified sample of U.S. states, external validity of the project's findings will be improved. This chapter will discuss Stage Two of this dissertation's methodology: the data collection from candidacies in U.S. states examining how risk factors influence emergent and progressive ambition. It will describe the data collection, the variables examined, and analyze the results in the context of hypotheses designed to further address the research questions outlined above and provide consistency with the experimental findings in Stage One.

The final chapter, *Chapter Seven*, will tie the existing literature on the role of risk in human behavior with the findings demonstrated throughout this unique research project. The goal would be draw a complete narrative of the distinct nature of electoral risk. This narrative will describe how this research reveals that individuals make different assessments of how risky some electoral conditions are (risk perception) and make different decisions about the appropriateness of pursuing a candidacy given those different levels of risk (risk aversion). Most poignantly, these individual differences can be described in terms of gender differences; men and women perceive and make decisions differently as a result of varying degrees of risk in electoral environments. I will discuss how this finding adds to the growing literature on candidate emergence and helps to explain the gender gap in political ambition.

## Chapter Two: Traditional Examinations of Gender and Political Ambition in American Politics

*“There is a substantial gap in political ambition: men tend to have it, and women don’t.” (Lawless and Fox, 2008)*

In only one country in the world do women outnumber men in national political representation; on average, they make up only about 18-19 percent of national legislatures (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011). This gender gap persists in spite of that fact that women have gained greater access to political participation than ever before. In the United States, Congress has consistently been 16-17 percent female over the last several decades. Some state legislatures have seen as much as 35-40 percent of their bodies made up of by women at times, but despite decades of women participating in elite politics, there are scant high-profile examples of gender parity in political representation in the United States or elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

While this gap in representation in the U.S. system is attributable to a myriad of socialization and institutional features, the most common academic explanation is that the gap exists primarily as a reflection of a gap between men and women in political ambition. Women simply seek political office far-less frequently than men do. Why? Research has shed much light on this differential ambition over the last 30 years, but understanding of the “ambition gap” is still far from clear.

### *Political Ambition*

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<sup>3</sup> This notable exception is in Rwanda where, as a result of the 2008 elections, women hold 45 of the nation’s 80 seats in parliament (Interparliamentary Union 2012). Following the 1994 genocide that left 800,000 Rwandans (a significant majority of which were men) dead, the country’s new constitution initiated gender quotas in political representation and the proportion of women holding elective office has grown steadily since.

Political ambition was originally studied as a personality trait. One of the first social scientists to offer objective analysis of politicians, Laswell (1948) illuminated political ambition as the individual desire for political *power*. He identified political personalities according to the interplay between the power achieved (or desired) and the particular trait an individual relies on for achieving that power. In some cases, he noted that individuals drew upon their physical stature, or knowledge, or skills to obtain power (Lasswell, 2009). His intent was a prescriptive one: if the motivations of different types of politicians could be understood, perhaps a democratic society could encourage the right types of motivations in their leaders.

Lasswell's typology, however, didn't offer much more insight into political ambition than the countless biographies of politicians that had preceded his contribution. The first empirical examination of political ambition came from Schlesinger (1966) who introduced an institutional measure of expected ambition. Schlesinger introduced the concept of the "political opportunity structure", a measurable condition of the political environment that provides a way of making a connection between the attributes of the opportunity structure and the type of ambition that would manifest in a politician in that environment. Political opportunity in the United States is relatively vast, in that the federal system offers an abundance of offices to run for and, both constitutionally and statutorily, there are few restrictions on who can run, where, or when (Schlesinger, 1966). These institutional features of the system make it slow-to-change and predictable. This stability allows for measurement of the opportunity structure.

Political opportunity though, is inherently variable to each particular candidate. It is identified by two predominant features: differential risk<sup>4</sup> within the electoral system and the two-

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<sup>4</sup> Differential risk means there are unique considerations of risk in different offices and environments.



party system. Schlesinger's conception of differential risk is entirely institutional and based on the electoral structure. A U.S. Senator, for instance, who is considering a run for the presidency but has two years remaining in his or her term of office in the Senate faces less risk than a term-limited governor looking to make the same move. The two-party system also dictates opportunity in many cases. For example, historically the Democratic and Republican parties have had predictable vote shares in certain seats. This predictability can offer an easy calculation when a candidate is considering a run for office. The nature of these two conditions will dictate the type of ambition that a politician will develop. This is a seminal contribution of Schlesinger's work; he identifies the type of ambition a politician—discrete, static, or progressive—would be expected to have given the political opportunity structure they face (1966).

Black (1972) later built upon this concept of opportunity to discuss how seeking political office was a “risk-taking venture” (148) that forced those with developing political ambitions to weigh the structural elements of the political environment. In doing so, he acknowledged the role of the rational actor model. Taking into account elements of the political opportunity structure (which, in Black's case, consisted of population, or size of the district, and margins of victory), candidates could be expected to weigh costs and benefits in determining the risk involved in pursuing the office. By Black's logic, only those whose desire to win the office exceeded the risk would pursue that office.

These early examinations and virtually every other discussion of political ambition in this foundational research had the same limitation, however. Researchers neglected any discussion of unrealized, or nascent, ambition<sup>5</sup>. It's a particular challenge, of course, to identify individuals who

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<sup>5</sup> Nascent ambition converts to “emergent” ambition when it becomes realized in a new candidacy. I use evidence of emergent ambition as one way to examine ambition, which is a more recent trend in political ambition research.

may have political ambition since so few ever seek political office. Ehrenhalt well-describes this methodological hurdle:

It is comparatively hard to find out what politicians think, or even who they are and where they come from. They are not interchangeable. In any one election year, fewer than a thousand people are active candidates for Congress. One cannot draw a sample of 10 percent of them and claim to have learned anything meaningful at all. There is scarcely any choice but to approach them on an old-fashioned, unscientific, one-by-one basis (Ehrenhalt, 1991, p. 6).

Furthermore, analyzing only those who sought (whether successful or not) political office provides a different type of insight than getting at the heart of why some people run and why some people never do. To the extent that throughout U.S. history most political offices were run for and held almost exclusively by men, the sample available for analyzing political ambition becomes exclusively male, too. Thus, it has been difficult to evaluate why this sort of growing gender equality has not taken much root in political candidacy as well. Studying political ambition and candidate emergence has been traditionally limited to studies of elected officials or candidates—individuals who have *expressive* ambition because they did, indeed, choose to seek political office. Our understanding is thus hindered by the de facto lack of information about individuals (both men and women) who perhaps harbor some nascent political ambition but choose not to seek political office. The decision-making process of candidates who never emerge (and thus make themselves difficult to identify by researchers) has been mostly elusive.

Early theories of political ambition were not only limited in scope, but also notoriously not inclusive. Original research of the concept proposed theories of male ambition and ignored the possibility that women may aspire to political office or political advancement. Presumably, much of this early work could be applied to both men and women as political candidates, but there were so few women in politics at the time that any differences in the political ambition of the two

genders did not make research agendas. Early research thus identified what motivated the men who sought political office and revealed absolutely nothing about the men *and women* who could or should have considered running, but never did.

### *Women in Politics, Women and Ambition*

However, a paradigm shift was on the horizon in social science research that reflected changes in American society. Starting in the 1960s, attitudes towards women in politics prompted more women to be visibly engaged in the political realm (McGlen et al., 2011). As The Women's Movement grew, so too did the representation of women in politics. In 1975, a mere 3.6 percent of Congress and 9.3 percent of state legislative offices were held by women, which was actually an increase over tallies in a handful of previous years (CAWP, 1975). By 1992, the so-called "Year of the Woman," more women than ever before were running (and winning) political office and public support for women in politics had reached all-time highs—more than doubling at virtually every level of office (CAWP, 1992).<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, it goes without saying that there are still far fewer women in politics than there are men. The most recent election (2012), for instance, brought a record number of women to the U.S. Senate (20) and a record number of women ran for the U.S. House of Representatives (CAWP, 2012), but there were few other bright spots for women's representation. In fact, politics presents a bit of an anomaly in the advancement of women. Why, despite decades of persistent (if only incremental) advancement—in many aspects of gender equality such as education, career advancement, and parenting—has political representation not followed the same upward slope?

<sup>6</sup> At the state legislative level, 18.4 percent of elected representatives were women—quadrupling the number holding state legislative office in 1969.

In fact, the narrowing of the gap in representation has been mostly stagnant since the much-acclaimed Year of The Woman in 1992.

The seeming persistence of disproportionately low political ambition among women seems confounded by evidence of changing patterns of ambition in a host of additional areas. In 2011, the U.S. federal government released a major report on the status of women from the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women (Department of Commerce, 2011). The traditional argument for why women did not (or could not) participate more substantially in politics has been the idea that their roles as mothers and wives in the private sphere made it insurmountable (Shapiro, 1984), but these conditions have changed significantly. Two sets of findings in the Status of Women report speak to why something greater than gender role forces are at play in the persistence of the gap in electoral political participation: 1) the decline of conditions that would have traditionally been seen as social hindrances to women's participation and 2) the conspicuous progress of women in non-political realms. For instance, the report found that:

- Women are more frequently delaying marriage, or choosing to remain unmarried;
- On average, women are having fewer children, at later ages, or choosing to have none-at-all;
- The cesarean birth rate is at all-time high, suggesting a greater level of control over when, where, and how women give birth;
- Women report at least equal access to a flexible work schedule;
- Men are more frequently taking on the role of primary caregiver (Department of Commerce 2011)

These trends are concomitant with the second set of findings in the report that show women having increasingly greater success in the public sphere (e.g. education and careers), namely that women are more likely than men to have earned not only bachelor's degrees, but graduate degrees as well and they are less likely to be unemployed than men (Department of Commerce 2011).

Women also recently, and for the first time in U.S. history, narrowly (51.1 percent) make up a majority of managers in workplaces (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010).

In the realm of politics, women seem to have closed the gender gap in many other ways as well. The contemporary American woman is actually more likely to vote than a man is. They are just as likely to be involved as a political activist (Burns et al., 2004). Gaps in political efficacy and political knowledge have shrunk to much-less significant levels (McGlen et al., 2011).

This pattern, of women gaining ground in other areas of society but not in elected political positions, is prevalent around the world. Save for a handful of countries that have built gender representation quotas into their political systems, women typically do not advance much beyond making up one in five (or fewer) of elected elite political bodies.

#### *Why Fewer Women?*

Even with relatively meager numbers, more women in politics meant—for the first time—gender was a variable in play in analyses of political representation. Researchers began identifying potential causes for women’s continued underrepresentation. While no single factor seemed to be the smoking gun, explanations were often grouped into two general categories: sex/gender role socialization factors and institutional barriers (Carroll, 1994). Accordingly, hypotheses often addressed factors such as the role of family, patriarchy, role models, recruitment patterns, and incumbency. More recently, the focus has turned to factors within the candidate emergence process that discourage women from pursuing candidacies (Fox & Lawless, 2005; Lawless & Fox, 2010). There is an important point to be made here about the scholarship that has addressed women’s political ambition: it began distinctly as an effort to explain the lack of gender equality in

representation and evolved, drawing on much of the same theory, into investigation into factors that promote and depress candidate emergence.

Researchers were initially primarily concerned about the lack of women participating at elite levels of politics. With the Women's Movement in full-swing, in the 1970s feminist researchers began responding to myopic analyses of men's political ambition by contributing to the literature with discussions of differences between men and women. Initial observations about women in politics indicated limitations not present in considerations of men's political ambition. Women were more likely to be older, have older or grown children, be divorced, widowed, or never married (Diamond, 1977; Stoper, 1977), have significant support from their husbands when they are married (Kirkpatrick, 1974), and be more significantly influenced by their employment status (Sapiro & Farah, 1980). Contemporary research however, has gone past individual-level considerations to evaluate institutional considerations for why men continue to hold the vast majority of elected political positions.

*Family Obligations.* Virginia Sapiro (1982) was the first to offer an empirical examination of factors that affected political ambition where gender was a consideration. Using a sample of political activists (delegates to the 1972 party conventions), she shed light on how family dynamics and responsibilities affected political activists' decisions about running for office. This particular approach to understanding political ambition was crucial to enhancing understanding about women's ambition because, "(W)omen, we are told, have such central, intense, and demanding commitments to their family roles that they have little time or energy for making major commitments to political activities (Sapiro, 1982, p. 266)." Sapiro (1982) discovered that both genders had marital and parental considerations—particularly for activists with young children—however, these considerations were much more likely to depress the ambition of women than they

were to affect men's aspirations to public office . More recent studies have reported similar findings among officeholders (Dodson, 1997).

Family obligations, thus, originally became one of the most obvious and oft-cited explanations of the underrepresentation of women (Kirkpatrick, 1974; Lee, 1976; Stoper, 1977). Beyond a discussion of private versus public prioritizations, other theories of political ambition argue primarily that women don't seek political office as frequently as men because they are differentially socialized in a number of ways.

*Symbolic Representation.* At the most basic level, many scholars have argued that a critical way women are politically socialized is through their exposure to “symbolic representation”, or women role models. Phillips (2010) notes that when women see other women in political roles they are likely to have increased self-esteem, aspire to political office themselves, and perceive politics as more than just a role for men (185). Mansbridge (2010) has made similar claims in advocating for descriptive representation—women as a traditionally excluded group, she argues, women gain social legitimacy as potential officeholders if they have sizeable representation in political office. Because women make up such a small percentage of the high (and not-so-high) profile political positions, potential woman aspirants don't have an abundance of women officeholders as role models (Burrell, 1996). This may be particularly crucial for the socialization of adolescent girls, who have reported being more likely to see themselves as politically engaged when exposed to political female role models (Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2006).

*Discrimination.* If it was conventional wisdom that women were conflicted about their obligations to their families, it was also generally believed that women candidates faced electoral disadvantages as well. Initially, political scientists were apt to focus on indirect forms of

discrimination or how cultural norms regarding sex roles, for instance, discouraged women from running (Kirkpatrick, 1974) and marginalized women who were elected (see Githens & Prestage, 1977). Active discrimination was also discussed, like ways that women who did seek office or were elected faced gender-based harassment. Women candidates obsessed over the proper amount of femininity to display or single women were advised to have a father or brother escort them on the campaign trail (Witt, Mathews, & Paget, 1995) . Most successful women candidates had an anecdote spotlighting the type of, perhaps, benevolent sexism their candidacies had provoked—sexism that was with seemingly no malicious intent.

Other scholars emphasized the likelihood that many were prevented from making the decision to run by electoral gatekeepers (Burrell, 1993; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Norris, 1997a; Norris & Lovenduski, 1994), concluding that men were more likely to be recruited as candidates—though little conclusion has been reached regarding whether these patterns are intentionally discriminatory or not.

By the 1990s, and especially on the heels of the 1992 electoral successes for women, many scholars were prepared to suggest that women no longer faced systemic discrimination as political candidates or potential candidates (Black & Erickson, 2003; Burrell, 1996; Carroll, 1994; Darcy & Choike, 1986) or, in some cases, at least it was becoming more rare (Woods, 2001). Some studies continued to reveal bias against women candidates (Fox & Smith, 2002; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993) or at least stereotyping in vote decisions that hindered women (Koch, 2000; Lawless, 2004; McDermott, 1997, 1998). However, many found no evidence of bias (Cook, 1998; Dolan, 1998; Fox, 2010; Lawless & Pearson, 2008; Thompsen & Steckenrider, 1997), particularly in elections for the U.S. House of Representatives. Smith and Fox (2001) even found that in U.S. House races, women may have an advantage over men because of the popularity of women



candidates with educated women. Ultimately, many researchers have concluded that sex of a candidate is not, overall, a deciding factor in who wins or loses elections (Darcy, Clark, & Welch, 1994; Dolan, 2004; Seltzer, Newman & Leighton, 1997). As a result, theories of active discrimination are mostly ignored by contemporary scholars.

Women appear to be acquiring other advantages, as well. Donors do not appear to be hesitant to contribute to women's campaigns (Burrell, 1996; Conway, 2001; Uhlaner & Scholzman, 1986) and some of the most effective fundraising political action committees (PACs) (i.e. EMILY's List and WISH) are devoted to funding and promoting the candidacies of women. These efforts have been tremendously effective. EMILY's List, for instance, reported that 70 percent of the PAC's endorsed candidates won their competitive primaries in 2012 (EMILY's List, 2012).

Public opinion shows similar trends. National surveys have shown dramatic shifts in opinions about women in politics since the 1970s. For example, the percentage of the American public that believes women are not suited for politics is down by almost 50 percent (see Figure 1). More dramatically, only the smallest of percentage (3.8 percent) would not support a woman for president in 2010 (see Figure 2.1).

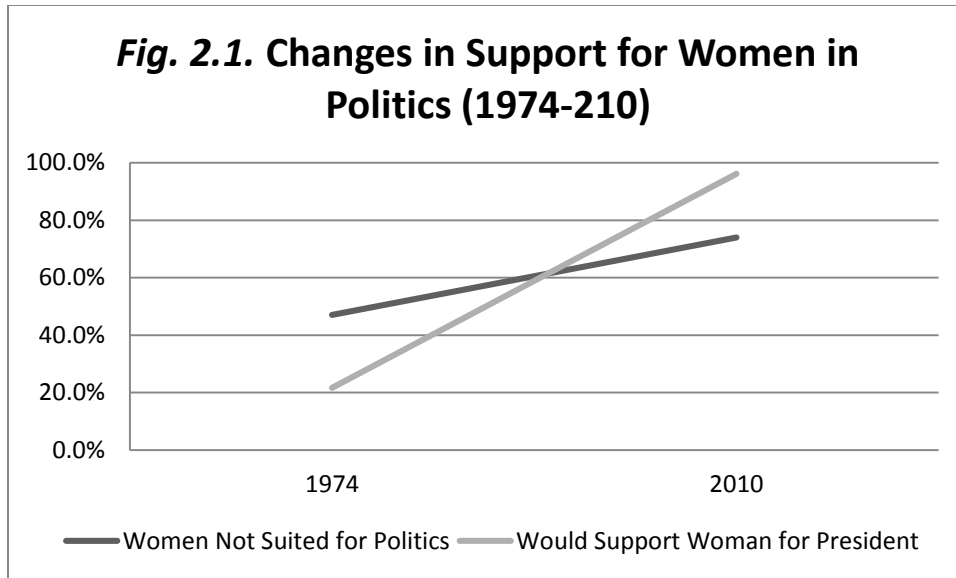


Figure 2.1. General Social Survey. Changes in Support for Women in Politics (1974-2010)

Despite all of this promising evidence, some continue to argue that residuals of bias against women candidates do exist in less direct ways. One study suggested that traditional measures of support for candidates—namely financial support—doesn't offer direct evidence about the (women) candidates who were discouraged from running (Niven, 1998). Niven (1998) asked party elites and women elected officials directly about discrimination. Two-thirds (64 percent) of respondents identified some form of gender bias whether it be in terms of “good-old boy” networks that kept more qualified women out, overt discouragement based on gender, or multiple types of bias. Niven attributes some of this treatment to an “Outgroup Effect”, the human tendency to show preference for individuals of one's own group. In this case, the in-group is comprised of party leaders, and these are—in many cases—almost exclusively men. The natural tendency, then, in recruitment situations is to view other men as like-minded and capable and to prefer them over women (the presumed outgroup) (Niven, 1998).

Another area where bias does seem to persist is in the media's treatment of women candidates. Scholars have identified ways in which the media differentially treats men and women

candidates (see Devitt, 2002; Kahn, 1994, 1996) and have established that voters' perceptions of candidates are influenced by the media (Kahn, 1992, 1994). While at least one leading scholar has found evidence—from an international analysis—that there is no media bias against women (Norris, 1997b), most empirical studies in the United States find the media's handling of men and women candidates varies significantly and presumably in ways that disadvantage the campaigns of women.

Analyses of U.S. Senate and gubernatorial races have consistently revealed a number of differences in how the media handles men and women candidates. For example, specifically in Senate races women tended to receive less overall coverage and more of the coverage tended to focus on their viability (or lack thereof) as candidates (Kahn, 1994, 1996; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991). While there was no gap in the amount of coverage in gubernatorial races (Devitt, 2002), women candidates experienced the same difference in treatment as their Senate counterparts in that more attention was paid in their coverage to personality traits such as their personal lives, appearances, and personalities (Devitt, 2002) and less to their positions on issues. These findings are consistent with anecdotal complaints from women candidates (Ferraro & Francke, 2004; Hansen, 1994; Peters & Rosenthal, 2010; Schroeder, 1998; Witt et al., 1995).

Heldman, Carrol, and Olson (2000) found similar treatment of Elizabeth Dole in her brief bid for the Republican presidential nomination in 2000. Despite being a popular candidate who consistently held the number two spot (behind eventual nominee George W. Bush and ahead of John McCain) in early polls, Dole received less coverage than would have been appropriate for such a strong candidate. Furthermore, much of the coverage she did receive focused on her personality or appearance or merely negatively focused on the horserace—some coverage of which was unflattering. When Dole did receive in-depth coverage, it was often gendered, focusing on her

as the “first woman” to compete for the Republican presidential nomination. In fact, this type of media bias against women has been identified in all the significant efforts by a woman to be elected president from Victoria Woodhull in the 1800s to Hillary Clinton in 2008 (Falk, 2008).

When the media treats women differently than men in campaign coverage, it can activate certain stereotypes that disadvantage women (Kahn, 1992). These stereotypes are not necessarily conscious. In fact, as public attitudes towards women in politics become more inclusive, they likely are not at all conscious. Rather, researchers believe that the messages the media sends about candidates may trigger gender schemas, or “organized knowledge stored in memory” (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1986). Schemas aren’t necessarily negative, but when the media frames women in one way and men in another, they can activate subconscious biases stored in memory. For instance, media accounts of male candidates frequently paint men as being active, tough, rational, and aggressive, while women possess traits like warmth, caution, and sensitivity (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). This can lead individuals to identify politics (schematically viewed as a rough and tumble world) as more appropriately handled by candidates with traits that men are more associated with than are women: “Simply put, politics is ‘normal’ for men, with the result that his gender does not play a distinctive role for a male politician as her gender plays for a female politician (Chang & Hitchon, 1997, p. 31).”

### *Institutional Factors*

Other factors that deter women candidacies are made worse by two related institutional factors: incumbency success rates and a candidacy pipeline that has a deficit of women.

*Incumbency.* Electoral environments are undoubtedly improving for women in many ways. However since men hold most elected positions, women remain at a disadvantage because of the

advantages associated with incumbency. In fact, with incumbency re-election rates around 90 percent and as many as 75 percent of elected officials seeking re-election each election cycle (Duerst-Lahti, 1998), women who do run are typically faced with the added obstacle of running as a challenger. With few open seats, the incumbency advantage enjoyed by predominantly-male elected officials is a major contributor to the slow progress towards gender parity in elected representation (Darcy et al., 1994; Duerst-Lahti, 1998; Nixon & Darcy, 1996; Plamer, 2008). One early study of representation in state legislatures even concluded that increasing the number of women returned to legislatures (through incumbency) would be more effective in increasing the number of women legislators than would increasing the number of woman candidates (Darcy & Choike, 1986).

A momentary glimmer of hope for women's representation came in the early 1990s when efforts to institute term limits on state elected officials became very popular. While term limits have been ruled unconstitutional at the federal level,<sup>7</sup> a number of states wrote limitations on the number of successive terms elected officials could serve into their constitutions. Today, 15 states have limitations of some kind and have had them long enough to allow for analysis of the effect. The results are discouraging. While most scholars believed that the combination of improved electoral conditions and term limits would offer more open seat options for women aspirants to increase their numbers, they did more harm than good as established women elected officials were frequently replaced by newly-elected male representatives (Carroll & Jenkins, 2001). States with term limits wound up with no increase (or even a reduction) in the percentage of women in their legislatures (Kousser, 2004).

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<sup>7</sup> See *U.S. Term Limits Inc. v. Thornton* (1995).

*Pipeline.* Compounding the lack of women candidates is the relative lack of women in the “pipeline”—individuals in positions that help them develop skills, networks, and experiences that make them most likely to move into the political realm or to advance within it. Lawless and Fox (2005) call this theoretical group of potential candidates the candidate eligibility pool. They operationalize this pool as emerging from the most common career paths that have been traditionally taken by politicians in recent decades. Namely, these “pipeline professions” are: law, business, education, and political activism (Fox & Lawless, 2005, 2011). Regardless of the level of government, political candidates almost exclusively claim one (or a combination) of these four backgrounds.

Thus, many researchers point to the historical and contemporary gender imbalances in these four areas as reasons why fewer women are in the candidate pipeline; representation patterns ultimately mirror career patterns. Historically, with the exception of only the most recent of generations, women have faced significant barriers to establishing successful careers outside of the home, let alone in the four pipeline professions. While many of these barriers have either faded significantly or eroded completely, important disparities still exist which influence the number of women building the successful careers in these fields that are apt to promote elite political participation. Success in these other fields, it would seem, has the potential to translate to the realm of electoral politics.

Worldwide, attorneys account for the largest demographic political candidate professions. The United States is no exception. Law is the most common background reported, for example, by members of the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress. According to the Congressional Research Service, 39 percent (211 members) of Congress practiced law at some point before being elected (Manning, 2013). Thus

gender disparities in the world of law would likely affect the largest portion of the candidate pipeline.

Important indicators of gender integration in the legal profession have shown much promise (see Figure 2.2). Much attention has been paid in recent years as women have closed the gap in law school enrollment, where they are nearly as numerous as men in terms of enrollment and degrees awarded (American Bar Association, 2012) and are outnumbered by a relatively small margin on law reviews (New York Law School Review & Ms. JD, 2012).

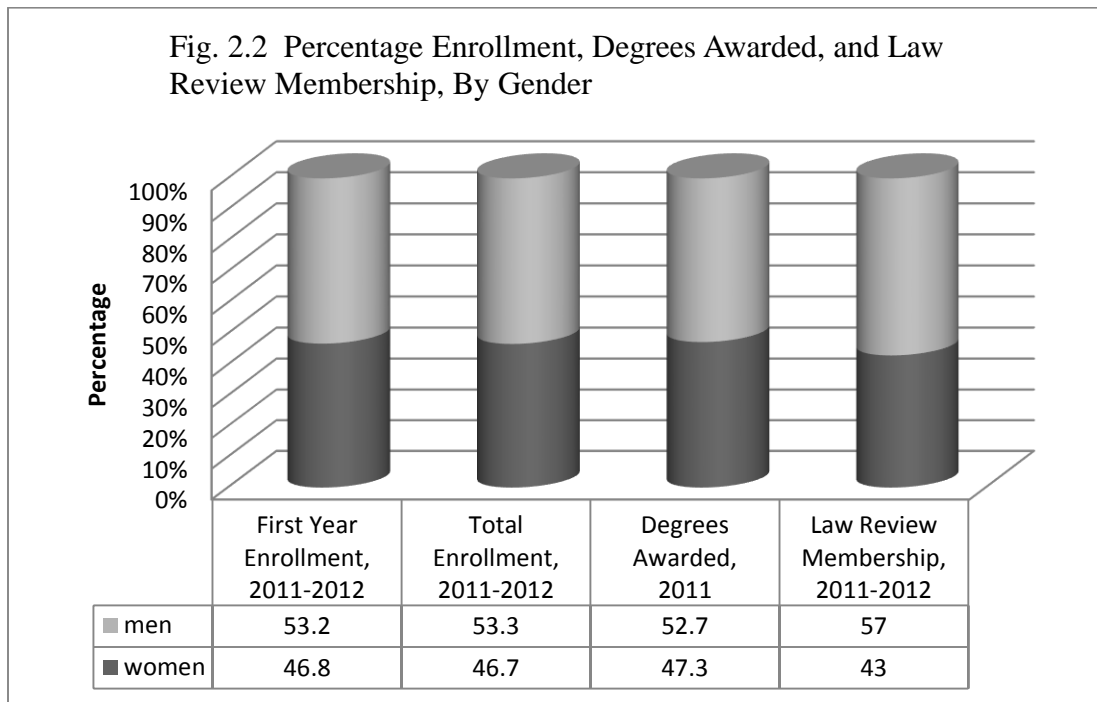


Figure 2.2. Enrollment in (2011-2012) and degrees awarded from (2011) U.S. law schools, American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar. Women on Law Reviews. Law Review Diversity Report. New York Law School Law Review and Ms. JD, October 2012.

However, gains in these areas seem to have peaked in 2004 and the number of law degrees awarded to women has been declining each year since (Flom & Scharf, 2011). Other indicators are discouraging as well. The latest American Bar Association report on the status of women in law firms indicates that women made up a smaller percentage of associates at law firms in 2011

than they did in 2010.<sup>8</sup> While the dip was small, the gap between men and women increased at each successive rung on the legal career ladder: only 15 percent of full-equity partners are women. Furthermore, the survey found that women tended to dominate in areas of law (e.g. staff attorneys and counsel jobs) that offer the least opportunity for prestige and/or advancement. Women, on average, also earn less at every stage and in every position and are noted for not being responsible for as much of firms' revenue as their male counterparts (Flom & Scharf, 2011).

Even though forward progress in the legal field seems to be stalled or even moving slightly backward, it remains much more integrated than the business world. While women now constitute a slim majority of middle managers (Department of Commerce, 2011), they do not seem to be ascending into positions of the highest managerial ranks that might best position them for political candidacies or recruitment. Indeed, the corporate glass ceiling remains very much in place. Most notably, the highest managerial ranks of business are held almost exclusively by men. In 2013, only 42 (4.2 percent) of the *Fortune* 1000 corporations were led by women ("Women CEOs of the Fortune 1000", 2013). The potential for progress isn't very promising, either. The pipeline of lower-level executives poised to ascend to higher ranks just doesn't exist. One study of the *Fortune* 1000 found that nearly half of the companies represented (48 percent) had no women executives whatsoever and 29 percent had only one. Furthermore, the study predicted that based on the existing pipeline (where more than twice as many men as women were specifically in positions likely to be promoted to CEO) and other promotion influences, progress would be excruciatingly slow. In fact, the authors predict that by 2016, women will still likely only make up six percent of CEOs in the top companies (Helfat et al., 2006).

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<sup>8</sup> Down from 48 percent to 47 percent. The survey represents the nation's largest 200 firms. The all-time high was, however, in 1993 when enrollment was 50.4% women "Women in Law in the U.S.", Catalyst <http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-law-us> (accessed April 30 2013)..



The relative paucity of women in high-ranking careers has been the backdrop of much recent discussion about whether women can or cannot “have it all”. A recent essay in *The Atlantic* by high-profile career woman Anne Marie Slaughter about the (still) impossible choices women make between career and family (Slaughter, 2012). Slaughter, a top government official and Princeton academic, chose to scale back her promising and intense career to be more available to her husband and two teenage sons. The public discussion that ensued following her very public step back from her career shed light on a stark reality: whether or not women can have both career and family, they often times just *choose* not to. A recent *Fortune* survey revealed that 33 percent of women stay home with their children and half of those who do not say they would be happier if they did—citing financial pressures as the main reason they remain in the workforce (Casserly, 2012). *The New York Times*'s Lisa Belkin famously (or infamously) termed this pattern, among women posed for career success, the “Opt-Out Revolution”, writing in 2003 about the rise in women choosing family or worklife:

They are recruited by top firms in all fields. They start strong out of the gate. And then, suddenly, they stop. Despite all those women graduating from law school, they comprise only 16 percent of partners in law firms. Although men and women enter corporate training programs in equal numbers, just 16 percent of corporate officers are women, and only eight companies in the Fortune 500 have female C.E.O.'s. Of 435 members of the House of Representatives, 62 are women; there are 14 women in the 100-member Senate. Measured against the way things once were, this is certainly progress. But measured against the way things were expected to be, this is a revolution stalled (Belkin, 2003).

It is also difficult for even the most talented of women to leave their careers, spend a few critical years nurturing their families, and return to rebuild a promising career (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). Williams (1999) notes that even those who do continue their careers often find themselves on what she refers to as the “mommy track”, the less-demanding, less-advancement route. There is some evidence, as well, that women may be less concerned about advancement anyway. Powell

and Butterfield (2003) surveyed business students about their ambitions for upper management in 1976-1977 and then again in 1999. In both samples, the male students were more likely to aspire to top jobs than were women; there was no narrowing of the ambition gap over the more than 20 years.

It may be that until political gatekeepers routinely scour more entry-level positions or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) committees to recruit political candidates, women who “opt out” of the corporate world are inadvertently opting out of the candidate pool as well.

Of course, the educational environments where leaders in both law and business are getting their training are not exactly bastions of gender equality either. Law schools and business schools almost without exception have a disproportionate number of men in both faculty and administrative positions (Damast, 2011; “Women in Law in the U.S.”, 2013). But it’s not just these high-powered fields that are dominated by men. While women make up a majority of today’s college students (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013), they are disproportionately being taught by men. Women are under-represented in academia as well—especially the farther along the career track they go. Compared to their male counterparts, few women move up the ranks in academia (see Figure 2.3).

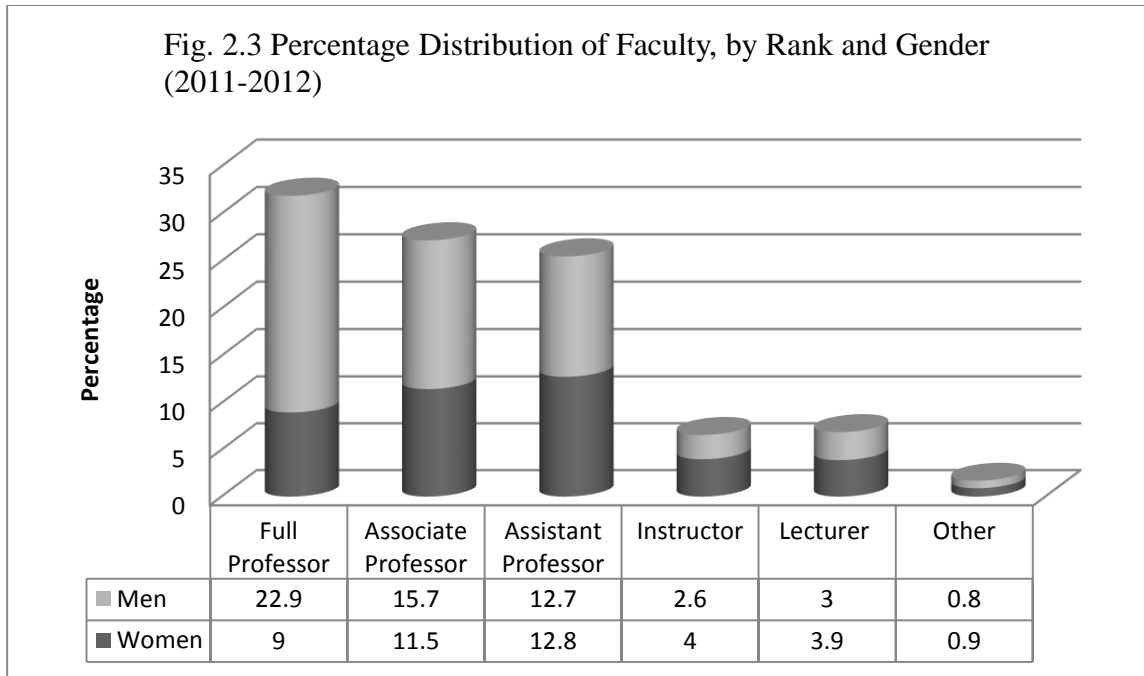


Figure 2.3. Percentage distribution of academic faculty, by rank and gender. American Association of University Professors, "Distribution of Faculty, by Rank, Gender, Category, and Affiliation, 2011-2012 (Percent)" (2012).

Deficits in accomplishment in law, business, and education combine to create fewer women well-positioned for political candidacies. Naturally, to the extent there are fewer women obvious to political gatekeepers within the eligibility pool, there are fewer opportunities for them to be encouraged to or recruited to run for political office.

*Recruitment Patterns.* Lawless and Fox (2005) have demonstrated that women are less likely to be encouraged by others within their social network or recruited by political gatekeepers to seek political office (also see Djupe et al 2007). This is in-line with earlier findings by Norris (1997) which indicate that political parties, which—in most cases—are the institutional mechanism for candidate recruitment, vastly prefer candidates with specific demographics—namely men. Also relevant here is that many democracies (i.e. The United States and Great Britain) tend not to have large percentages of competitive races and where incumbents are advantaged, women, who have not traditionally held many offices to begin with, are further disadvantaged from

having incentive to seek offices when they have little chances of winning (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995).

*Candidate Emergence.*

While all of the socialization and institutional factors discussed thus far have been recognized as contributing to the gap in representation, little can be done to increase the number of women if women do not put themselves forth as candidates. As such, political ambition has to be the focus of further investigation: “Prospects for gender parity in our electoral system cannot be evaluated without an in-depth assessment of the manner in which gender interacts with and affects levels of political ambition.” (Lawless & Fox, 2010, p. 33). Fox and Lawless (2005) and Lawless and Fox (2010) have offered the most comprehensive investigation of how the ambition gap can be blamed for the paucity of women in politics; they call the relationship between gender and political ambition the “missing piece” (33) in explaining the gap in representation.

Their contribution to this puzzle is in response to major shortcomings of previous rational choice theories (Goodliffe, 2001; Kazee, 1994; Maestas et al., 2006; Moncrief, Squire, & Jewell, 2001; Stone & Maisel, 2003) and seminal examinations of political ambition (Black, 1972; Ehrenhalt, 1991; Moncrief et al, 2001; Rohde, 1979; Schelsinger, 1966). Namely these studies simplistically considered only the political opportunity structure and assumed that ambition was a constant and ever-present in considerations of whether to run or not. More critically, there was no consideration given to the possibility that men and women might reach their decisions differently, perhaps using different criteria, putting different weights on some criteria, and having different perceptions of risk. Fox and Lawless’s (2005) and later Lawless and Fox’s (2010) theory comes from a panel study they initiated in 2001 with participants who hailed from the four professions

most-common to emergent politicians—law, business, academia, and political activism. They sampled men and women disproportionately within each profession so there would be equal representation of each sex within the sample. As such, they began with 3,765 respondents. Seven years later, the participants were surveyed again. The sample, unsurprisingly, revealed an ambition (considering a candidacy) gender gap of 16 and 17 percent in 2001 and 2008, respectively, and 5 percent more men than women actually pursued public office (Lawless & Fox, 2010).

The theory of gender and political ambition Fox and Lawless (2005) developed from this investigation looked at candidate emergence as a two-step process of first considering a candidacy and then deciding to run. Within these stages, they point to three gendered factors that combine to adversely and disproportionately affect the candidate emergence process for women: 1) family dynamics, 2) political recruitment, and 3) self-perceptions of viability, each of which is described below.

This theory creates the image of a woman candidate that never even considers a candidacy because she has a more complex set of family considerations, is likely never asked, and feels inherently less secure about her potential.

*Family Dynamics.* Family dynamics illuminates the impact of the dual role between public and private lives described in the above discussion of traditional gender roles. First, women are at a disadvantage from the very beginning. As young girls and throughout their lives, they are less likely to be raised in politicized environments that prompt political participation at any level (Beck & Jennings, 1982). A girl's family is less likely than a boy's to encourage her to aspire to hold political office or consider politics as a career; Fox and Lawless's (2005) male respondents were

8 percent more likely to be encouraged to run for office by their parents and were also more likely to be spoken with about politics by their fathers (6 percent).<sup>9</sup>

As adults, many of the women expressed concerns about the double-bind, or seemingly impossible balancing act between professional and familial success, women face in considering adding a political career—since it would inevitably mean adding a third job to their career and family obligations. For example, Lawless and Fox (2010) report:<sup>10</sup> “Of the one hundred women we interviewed, sixty-five stated that children made seeking office a much more difficult endeavor for women than for men. In the one hundred interviews with men, only three raised the issue of children serving as an impediment to running for office (80).” An unexpected and puzzling finding of this study is that empirical data from the Citizen Ambition Panel Studies did not reveal any significant depression of political ambition from familial considerations. Although the study identified, among those with families, the presence of more traditional gender roles, it offered no support for the idea that traditional gender roles negatively influenced a woman’s decision to seek political office (Fox and Lawless 2011). Fox and Lawless (2012) conclude:

Neither marital and parental status, nor the division of labor pertaining to household tasks and childcare, predict political ambition, regardless of how we measure it. Further, traditional family arrangements do not influence patterns of political recruitment or potential candidates’ self-evaluations of their qualifications to run for office. Finally, there are no gender differences in how perceptions of family life alter potential candidates’ assessments of the feasibility of pursuing a political career. This is not to downplay the fact that the gender gap in political ambition remains substantial and static, but it is to suggest that family arrangements are not a primary contributing factor (3).

<sup>9</sup> Consistent with other general population surveys of U.S. adults (see Lawless, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the panel surveys, Lawless and Fox also conducted 200 (100 each male and female) in-depth, qualitative interviews with a random subset of the study’s participants.

In other words, despite the intuitiveness of attributing the ambition gap to women's role as wives as mothers, women do believe they can balance a family with a political career but generally do not for a reason other than the burden of motherhood.

One factor that did serve to depress the ambition of women was that women's families, spouses, and friends were less likely to encourage them to seek political office than men's families, spouses, and friends were to encourage them (Fox & Lawless, 2005; Lawless & Fox, 2010). This finding speaks to the importance of political recruitment in the candidate emergence process, another factor considered in the theory of gender and political ambition.

*Political Recruitment.* Recruitment of political candidates is key to candidate emergence. Being asked to consider a candidacy by an "electoral gatekeeper" (e.g. party leaders, elected officials, and other political activists) is often what plants the seed in a potential candidate's mind or pushes them over the edge of considering to actually running. While Fox and Lawless (2005) and Lawless and Fox (2010) didn't find evidence of overt discrimination in the recruitment patterns of gatekeepers, they did find that the highly-qualified potential women candidates in their sample were less likely than their male counterparts to: 1) be encouraged to run and 2) be encouraged to run as intensely. This recruitment gap was somewhat smaller within Democratic Party (where women tend to be more prevalent both as voters and as candidates) recruitment efforts, but persisted nonetheless.

Some of this gap is mediated by strong recruitment efforts by well-established women's groups such as Emily's List and ShePAC that work to specifically identify and support women candidates. The importance of the recruitment gap to women candidacies should be emphasized because it is women who indicate that they require more and stronger encouragement to seek

political office than do their male counterparts (Fox & Lawless, 2005; Lawless & Fox, 2010). This particular finding is relevant to the final major factor the authors identified: women's disproportionately lower confidence in their qualifications and abilities as candidates and/or elected officials.

*Personal efficacy.* The most striking finding from the Citizen Political Ambition Panel Studies is likely the confidence gap that exists between highly-qualified, professional women in the sample and their male counterparts. Despite being accomplished and high-achieving women, they consistently reported feeling they were unqualified to seek public office.<sup>11</sup> Across the board, men tended to have much more confidence in their abilities (Lawless & Fox, 2010).

These findings are consistent with an abundance of research in social psychology that finds gender differences in all manner of confidence issues (see Kling et al., 1999 for meta-analysis on gender differences in self-confidence). For example, men tend to be more confident than women in abilities they do not have or actually weak in and are more apt to boast about their accomplishments (Wigfield, Eccles, & Pintrich, 1996). Men are also more likely to overestimate their own intelligence, while women tend to underestimate theirs (Beloff, 1992; Furnham & Rawles, 1995). These types of differences clearly come into play when individuals are making self-evaluations about their personal efficacy as political candidates and potential elected officials. Women are often more self-critical than are men (Roberts, 1991). Fox and Lawless (2005) attribute this efficacy gap to a sexist socialization environment and gender-based differences in defining the threshold for qualification for political office (women set the bar higher)(Lawless and Fox, 2010).

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<sup>11</sup> Women in the sample reported statistically significant lower levels of agreement with: being knowledgeable about public policy, professional experience relevant to politics, good public speaker, good fundraiser, and good self-promoter (Lawless and Fox, 2010).



These differences are critical to candidate emergence. In fact, a potential candidate's perception of their own qualifications was the single biggest factor in predicting the political ambition of the individuals in the study. It is also interesting to note that there were not significant differences between age cohorts in any of the factors discussed above. Younger women and men demonstrated similar patterns as did older potential candidates, despite changing attitudes about the role of women in society.

The Citizen Political Ambition Study contributed much to understanding the candidate emergence process and the factors that depress women's ambition but left much to be revealed. Among other questions this research has provoked, scholars are attempting to sort out the incongruent nature of the findings surrounding familial obligations. Qualitative evidence suggests considerations such as child care and housekeeping responsibilities do influence a woman's decision, while the authors found that it has no statistically significant bearing on political ambition. Also curious is the fact that the women in the study were highly successful, presumably confident women who, nonetheless, expressed insecurities about their own worth as candidates or elected officials. Admittedly, researchers have been hard-pressed to accurately diagnose enough factors influencing the gap to be in a position to understand its origins (see Lawless 2012). Other factors that affect men and women differently must be added to the calculus. One such factor is considerations of the risk involved in pursuing political office.

This chapter has identified the history of both the study of political ambition and, more recently, the distinct deficit of ambition among women. Researchers have identified a number of factors that seem to contribute to an overall suppression of the number of women who ultimately emerge as candidates. Most profoundly, the work of contemporary standard-bearers in candidate emergence research (e.g. Fox & Lawless, 2005; Lawless & Fox, 2010) has identified the

importance of personal efficacy as an important component of political efficacy. However, there is general admission that all of these established explanations for the gender gap in political ambition do not provide the complete picture as to why men are more likely to run for office than are women. It is thus appropriate to search for additional factors. In particular, I suggest, the role of differential risk perception of the electoral environment.

## Chapter Three: The Role of Risk in Office-Seeking and Related Psychological Considerations

*“...knowledge of men’s more dominant behavior could contribute to exclusion of women from some kinds of leadership roles. Which type of outcome would predominate would depend on many factors, including the strength of the women’s desire to change their status, their political power, and their interest in using psychological research to help them effect[sic] change (Eagley, 1995, p. 155).”*

### **Introduction**

No one would dispute that running for office typically has some level of risk associated with it. Despite this conventional wisdom, however, political scientists have done little to investigate how electoral risk influences decisions to run. While a number of seminal studies of progressive ambition were introduced several decades ago, contemporary investigations of candidate emergence fail to seriously consider the role risk may play in whether an individual decides to run—whether the pursuit would be for a very first political office, for re-election, or a higher level office. The level of risk is often considered qualitatively and without much conceptualization of the multitude of facets it might include. Furthermore, if different individuals respond differently to risk, it might offer a deeper level of understanding about who exercises their political ambition and who does not.

Considering the abundance of research available in the field of psychology about individual differences in risk-seeking, failing to incorporate it specifically in terms of electoral environments seems detrimental to understanding candidate emergence. Psychology has much insight to offer this study. While electoral risk is not considered in any of this previous research, many elements of risk have been identified as demonstrating individual variations. Critically, men and women often differ in their perceptions of many types of risk.

Most political scientists are not also psychologists, and vice versa. Nevertheless, in exploring risks in office seeking, their theories do often overlap. The section below first summarizes the work by political scientists on risks in office seeking.

### **Risk in Office seeking**

*Seminal conceptualization of the role of risk.* The first theory of political ambition in the United States focused on the opportunity structure—primarily in terms of institutional features of the political system—that either encouraged or discouraged (progressive) political ambition. Schlesinger (1966) did, briefly, note the inherency of risk in office seeking:

An elective system of opportunities is full of risk for the politician. But if we look at the American system from the standpoint of ambitions we can see that the risks tend to foster some ambitions and reduce others. The risks for those with progressive ambition are not equally distributed among officeholders (Schlesinger, 1966, p. 17)."

Schlesinger seemed to acknowledge the idea that there may be individual differences in how risk affects ambition, but it was not, however, an important part of his argument. His emphasis on the political opportunity structure gives way to one way of identifying risk, but not how those risks were interpreted by potential candidates.

Black (1972) later built upon this concept of opportunity to discuss how seeking political office was a “risk-taking venture” (148) that forced politicians to weigh the structural elements of the political environment in developing their political ambition. In doing so, he accepted the rational actor model and its assumptions. Taking into account elements of the political opportunity structure (which, in Black’s case, consisted of only population and margins of victory), candidates could be expected to weigh costs and benefits in determining the risk involved in pursuing a political office. Black was concerned that so many variables had been left out of risk considerations in Schlesinger (1966), that too little was understood about ambition, “particularly those factors

which move an individual to seek his first political office (145).” He pointed to two such factors that would complement Schlesinger, hypothesizing that risk would be greater in larger political units and those with greater electoral competition—because potential candidates would require more resources in order to pursue political offices in them.

Rohde (1979) further developed the concept of risk-taking into a theoretical model of (progressive) ambition. He assumed that all elected officials would tend to have progressive ambition if there was no cost or risk involved with pursuing higher office. Naturally, there is likely never a truly risk-free scenario associated with seeking political office, so Rohde, building on the work of Black (1972), proposed a cost-benefit calculation that, assuming a rational actor interested in maximizing his or her<sup>12</sup> utility, predicts an elected official will seek higher office only when the expected utility outweighs the costs associated with seeking higher office. The model was as follows (adapted from Rohde, 1979, pp. 4-5):

$$\begin{aligned} (1) \quad E_{(a1)} &= P_{1(O2)} U_{(O2)} - C_{(a1)} \\ (2) \quad E_{(a2)} &= P_{2(O3)} U_{(O3)} - C_{(a2)} \end{aligned} \quad ^{13 \ 14}$$

Where E is the expected utility of:

A<sub>1</sub>=running for re-election  
A<sub>2</sub>=running for higher office

P is the probability of:

O<sub>2</sub>=actor is re-elected  
O<sub>3</sub>=actor wins higher office

U is the utility received if:

<sup>12</sup> Rohde consistently used male pronouns in his formulation. Given the general acceptance of gender bias in social science at the time, we will assume—for the purpose of this endeavor—that he would apply his model to women as well.

<sup>13</sup> Rohde offers no consideration for the condition O<sub>1</sub>=no office is obtained (actor didn’t seek any office), as ambition is assumed.

<sup>14</sup> While Rohde’s model is expressly a model of progressive ambition, I will presume that—were it empirically possible to test—the model would be applicable for the condition A<sub>0</sub>=running for initial office as well.

O<sub>2</sub>=actor is re-elected  
 O<sub>3</sub>=actor wins higher office

C is the cost of:

A<sub>1</sub>=running for re-election  
 A<sub>2</sub>=running for higher office

This model relies on Schlesinger (1966)'s opportunity structure to determine the risk involved in seeking higher political office. The conceptualization has four components: the value of the higher office, the probability of winning, the value of the existing office, and risk acceptance (Rohde, 1979). His measure of risk acceptance was operationalized by coding how risky the elected official's first successful foray into elective office was. This is a particularly salient variable, as Rohde found that "risk takers were more likely to seek higher office than members who were not risk takers (1979, p. 22)"—a prediction that was supported in nearly every case examined.

Brace (1984) was also concerned that too few factors had been considered in these previous cost-benefit analyses. He added to Rohde's model considerations such as age, electoral formidability/vulnerability, incumbency, and redistricting using multivariate analyses to predict political ambition. He focused much less on risk-taking. Instead, he suggested that, while Rohde (1979) had billed it as being the difference between static and progressive ambition, risk considerations were not really much more powerful than any of the other factors in his analysis.

These early applications of rational choice to office seeking (Black, 1972; Brace, 1984; Rohde, 1979), regardless of the variables that the authors ultimately considered in their analyses, had three relevant flaws. First, the empirical analyses considered only existing officeholders and such are designed to only be generalizable as theories of progressive ambition (of incumbents), which may or may not be also applicable to initial candidate emergence. Also, none of these analyses examined gender as a variable. Considering the paucity of women in elective office

during the timeframe of these studies, this is hardly an oversight; there were too few women to consider. Finally, despite inclusion of some individual-level factors (e.g. incumbency, size of district, margin of victory), possible variations in how individuals go about making their cost-benefit analyses were never considered.

Other studies have briefly scratched the surface of individual risk evaluations in considering a candidacy. One study of state legislators (Fulton et. al., 2006) has identified how women seeking higher office evaluate political opportunity differently and suggest that the “cost” calculation may also be different (i.e. childcare considerations). Another earlier study, of local officials, found both “retrospective assessments of electoral security”<sup>15</sup> and gender of the potential candidates as two of the factors that influenced progressive ambition (Bledsoe & herring, 1990, p. 217).

What no study does is incorporate how the more intangible variable, personal risk-taking considerations, play into these decisions—namely in the context of gender. Consider the candidate pool Lawless and Fox (2005, 2011) examined. When men and women of similar qualifications and facing similar opportunity structures were questioned about their likelihood of seeking political office, women who were already accustomed to balancing the costs of demanding lives as wives and mothers consistently demonstrated greater hesitation. Rhode (1979) attributed differences in these calculations to individual differences, namely: “some people are more likely to select risky alternatives than are others (Riker & Ordeshook, 1973, p. 75).

These examinations in political science have left the role of risk in candidate emergence significantly underexplored. Where risk is considered, it has almost always been in terms of the

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<sup>15</sup> Presumably a form of risk assessment.

structural opportunities (or lacks thereof) that play into (over-simplified) cost-benefit analyses. A significant factor rarely considered is potential candidates and psychological differences among them that relate to differences in the perception and management of risk in electoral environments. In fact, I have discovered no study in political science or psychology that looks at individual differences in risk perceptions in the context of running for political office.

### **Psychological Evaluations of Risk**

The field of psychology has a long history of looking at individual differences in decision-making, risk-taking, and risk-aversion from number of relevant angles: a general perspective, domain-specific perspectives, specific context perspectives, and gender-based differences. Nearly five decades of a diverse examination has yielded strong understanding and validation of the concept. While political science has treated risk as either an exogenous variable or a probabilistic cost-benefit analysis, the field of psychology has long-been deeply interested in the study of risk. These investigations have fallen into one of two categories. The first are often referred to as “risk-taking studies”—studies of how judgments about risk are made. The second, which are more relevant here, are “risk-perception studies”, or investigations into how individuals perceive or judge risks. This latter category has roughly three varieties, studies of: gambles, judgments or perceptions of risk (subjective risk), and dimensions of risk (objective risk) (Brehmer, 1987). This study is most concerned with “risk perception”. Risk perception is preferred for my purposes, but it is used interchangeably—it seems—in the literature with similar language such as: “risk assessment” or “risk evaluation” or “judgment of risk”.

*Operationalizing ‘Risk’.* Important activities in all scientific fields include the identification of theoretically significant concepts, reaching a consensus on the definitions of such concepts, and developing indicators of the concepts that are valid and reliable measures.



Unfortunately, in the field of psychology, there is no agreed upon definition of the term and thus the concept is defined and measured differently across any number of diverse studies (see variation in Cohnsen & Colvello, 1999; Drottz-Sjoberg, 1991; Fischhoff, Watson, & Hope, 1984; Krimsky & Golding, 1992; Short, 1984; Vlek, 1996; Yates & Stone, 1992). Rohrman and Renn (2000) suggest that there is general agreement on the operational definition of the term in that studying “risk” almost always means identifying the difference between what is possible and what is reality. These scholars note that in the realm of decision theory (which is predominantly a study of risk mitigation), risk is synonymous with the concept of uncertainty. They also clarify that the concept of risk is not merely a social construct because there is an empirical question of real consequences. Thus, the most basic definition of risk, used as a social construct, may be offered as such: “...*risk* can be understood as *the possibility that human actions, situations or events might lead to consequences that affect aspects of what humans value* (Rohrman & Renn, 2000, p. 14, emphasis original).”

*Major Findings in General Risk Research.* Rohrman and Renn (2000) argue specifically that risk perception research has yielded no main finding, but that there are a number of overarching themes that have been identified across a diverse set of risk studies from nuclear threat to gambling to sexual behaviors. These include findings that confirm entrenched conventional wisdom. For example, it is widely accepted that individuals have preferences for certain probabilities and that there is a distribution of these preferences among the population<sup>16</sup> (Lopes, 1987; Pollatsek & Tversky, 1970). From this foundational development of probabilistic reasoning

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<sup>16</sup> This is known as The Pollatsek-Tversky Theorem.

theory came the seeds of Prospect Theory, a seminal theory<sup>17</sup> which holds that individuals will be risk prone when the stakes are high for loss, but risk averse when the potential for gains are high

These foundational understandings about individual processing of probabilities suggested that individuals use heuristics to make decisions about risk; shortcuts allow individuals to develop optimal risk strategies that may, in fact, avoid payoff maximization (Rohrman & Renn, 2000). These heuristics (and the resultant judgments) inherently, however, can be biased by a number of factors such as the availability (in memory) of related events or information, individual experience, and the avoidance of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962; Kahnemann & Tversky, 1979; Renn, 1990; Ross, 1977). In this context, individual considerations have been found to be relevant to how an individual assesses risk. Individual considerations of benefit and control are critical (Rohrmann & Renn, 2000). Although debated on a number of points, some findings show cultural group (e.g. regional, national, ethnic, racial) differences in risk perception as well (Rayner, 1987; Thompson, 1980). Finally, different professions, worldviews, and political ideologies (Choma, 2013) appear to be correlated with different risk propensities as well (Bordherding, Rohrmann, & Eppel, 1986; Rohrmann, 1994, 2000).

These overarching findings point to the subjective nature of interpreting any particular risk; the nature of subjectivity, of course, is that it is, well, subjective. Brehmer (1987) points to the centrality of this issue in the study of individual differences in risk perception:

This does not mean that there are no differences in risk-taking, or in attitudes to risk, but if there are such differences they are not likely to be specific to certain contests. That is, a daring mountain climber or sky diver does not have to be an avid gambler as well (26).

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<sup>17</sup> Originally conceived of in Behavioral Economics.

Indeed findings about risk perception vary from one study to another based on, among other things, the types of hazards (sources of risk), the risk criteria (however those may be defined), and the characteristics (e.g. demographics) of the participants (Rohrmann & Renn, 2000). In other words, the overall context of the study can have dramatic effect on the results.

Accordingly, the context of the risk becomes very important when studying risk. Yates and Stone (1992) list a number of individual-level factors why judgments of risk may vary including: deficiencies in judgment (or methods of making judgments), value biases, personal role considerations, perception biases (e.g. physical observation variations), mood (Johnson & Tversky, 1983), phrasing of questions/comments requiring response (Fischhoff & MacGregor, 1983), and knowledge or expertise of a subject or situation (Fischhoff, et al., 1978). All of these individual considerations emphasize the importance of context (i.e. environment) and of the individual making the assessment (Winterfeldt & Edwards, 1984). Vlek and Stallen (1980) divide these contextual factors into three categories that cause perception variation: cultural, situational, and individual (often meaning personality-based) differences. Risk-taking among teens may provide an arena that might illuminate all three of these categories. Certain teenage boys are more prone to risk-taking (whether it be with alcohol or drugs, sexual behaviors, etc.) because of social pressures and expectations inherent to their peer group and social environment. Conversely, teenage girls are risk-averse for similar reasons. At the same time, individual teens of both genders may have personalities that lead them to buck these types of pressures. Trimpop (1994) summarizes the importance of individual variations: “In other words, although the major components of risk perception seem to be cross culturally consistent, but their degree, direction and interpretation is very much dependent upon individual, subgroup and societal differences (p. 25).”

As such, the way a risk is framed can drastically affect the way the risk is perceived by an individual (Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; McNeil, et al. . For example, in an electoral environment, an 80 percent chance of losing a particular race sounds much more ominous than a two in ten chance of winning; the odds, of course, are precisely the same in either wording while the perception of the risk is much greater in the former than in the latter framing of the odds.

Considering the importance of context, more recent studies have attempted to mitigate this concern to some degree by grouping types of risk into distinct domains. Using existing meta-analyses (e.g. Byrnes et al., 1999) of existing risk-taking research and extensive factor analyses, Weber, Blais, and Betz (2002) divided risk-type into five domains. The domains are: financial decisions, health/safety, recreational, ethical, and social decisions. As hypothesized, research participants who were asked to evaluate risks in each of these domains demonstrated inconsistent propensities for risk across the five domains (Weber, Blais, and Betz, 2002).

### **Gender Differences**

Another significant area of research in risk studies has been the examination of gender differences in risk-taking propensity and related topics. These studies follow a vast body of, at times, controversial literature about general psychological differences between men and women.<sup>18</sup> Most researchers avoided direct study of gender differences until Maccoby and Jacklin (1974)'s seminal work *Psychology of Sex Differences* weeded through decades of relevant research in psychology and reported on the status of science at that point in time. The authors' conclusion on

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<sup>18</sup>Early research focused on these differences as being "sex-based" as in the biological assignment of sex, rather than the social construct of gender. More recent work has acknowledged that these distinctions are not always (though they can be) one in the same. For the purposes of this work, I will employ use of the term "gender differences" except for when referring explicitly to the biological distinction.

a broad array of psychological considerations was that there were no significant differences between men and women or that there was little evidence to confirm one way or another whether differences do, in fact, exist. On other issues, they reported, men and women appear to be very different psychologically.

Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) concluded that there were significant differences between the sexes at different points in the life cycle (i.e. newborn boys vs. newborn girls, etc.) and in a number of substantive areas of human psychology. Notably, while girls were found to have some increased sensory sensitivity, this didn't seem to contribute to other cognitive differences in perception, learning, and remembering. The authors did report, however, that there were differences in intellectual development because girls were much more sensitive to personality and environmental factors that did not affect boys' development. As a result, they identified differences in verbal, quantitative, and spatial abilities. They also found that while self-esteem seemed to be comparable among children, young adults diverged—with college-aged men sustaining greater confidence than their female counterparts—and in a number of social behaviors such as timidity and aggression.

The sheer number of studies that Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) reviewed made this work (and its findings) stand out, but psychologists have spent ample time since its publication contradicting, adding to, and confirming the findings.<sup>19</sup> Most important to the continued understanding of sex differences was the advent of meta-analysis, a new method that allowed researchers to systematically aggregate and generalize from the findings of previous studies.

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<sup>19</sup> Google Scholar records that *Psychology of Sex Differences* has nearly 7500 cites. Not to diminish its importance, but by way of comparison, the seminal work in political science *The American Voter* has more than 2000 fewer. Clearly Maccoby and Jacklin inspired a deluge of related work in psychology.

Psychologists began speaking not in absolutist terms of statistical significance ( $p$ ) (i.e. yes, there is a difference, or, no, there is no difference), but rather in terms of the degree of difference ( $d$ ). With large samples, even small differences between the sexes in means and proportions can be statistically significant. Focusing on the size of the differences allowed for researchers to make qualitative judgments about whether the differences were large enough to be important or not.

Maccoby and Jacklin (1974)'s conclusions have since been re-evaluated. Contemporary researchers have contested, for instance, that differences in aggression are unfounded (Bjorkqvist, 1994; Frodi, Macaulay, & Thome, 1977) and that there is not as much variation in spatial ability (Caplan, MacPherson, & Tobin, 1985). However, much later research documented the existence of sex-based differences in evaluations of personality (Costa et al., 2001; Feingold, 1994; Kling et al., 1999), cognitive abilities (Halpern, 2000, 2004; Hyde, 1981; Hyde et al., 1990), verbal skills (Hyde & Linn, 1988; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1972), and spatial aptitudes (Kail et al, 1979; Lawton, 1994; Linn & Petersen, 1985; Newcombe et al., 1983; Voyer et al., 1995), as well as other areas of human psychology (Grove & Tudor, 1973; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987; Rosenfield, 1989; Wood & Eagly, 2002.).

The rise of feminist approaches to research in the 1970s and beyond, however, had the important benefit of encouraging scholars to take a critical view of published research on sex differences. Some psychologists applied new meta-analysis techniques directly to the same massive collection of studies that Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) employed and declared that differences were actually “negligible in magnitude” (Hyde, 1981; Hyde et al., 1990; Hyde & Plant, 1995). Others found important differences in “favor” of men, in some cases, and in “favor” of women in others (Halpern, 2000). Despite the establishment of some fairly-well accepted differences, feminist researchers continued to insist that findings were small or non-existent (Hare-

Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Kahn & Yoder, 1989; Matlin, 2011; Mednick, 1991) for a number of reasons. Some questioned whether the differences found in psychological studies were relatively large enough to be considered relevant (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Kahn & Yoder, 1989; Matlin, 2011; Mednick, 1991), while others questioned—as is typical in the field of psychology—whether the rate of inconsistency across psychological studies offered enough validity to find difference between men and women.

Others questioned whether there were artifacts—which are defined “in terms of features of research methods (e.g. stimulus materials and test items) that would bias study outcomes (Eagly, 1995, p. 153)” —that are involved in psychological difference research that made differences appear more significant than they actually were. Some researchers rightly pointed out that there was (and likely remains) a publication bias favoring findings of significant difference, but not of null or indifferent findings between men and women (Crawford, & Unger, 2004; Hyde, 1991). Others pointed to concerns about study quality, specifically the relationship between the sex of the researcher and the subjects (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983; Harris, 1994) and the sex of the researcher and the outcome of the studies (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly & Karau, 1991; Thomas & French, 1985; Wood, 1987).

Studies were also disputed in terms of whether or not they upheld or conflicted with commonly-held sex-based stereotypes. The idea, here, being that researchers faced an upward battle in disputing differences that are conventionally held in mainstream stereotypes. If research supported conventional wisdom about differences between men and women, it was more easily accepted. Thus, the final test of sex-based differences in psychological research was whether it stood up to public expectations. In fact, Swim (1994) a study by found that the views of the general population was remarkably good as a predictor of scientific predictors of sex-based differences.

It should be highlighted, however, that researchers who confirm sex-based stereotypes rarely find that men and women are polar opposites. Rather, people generally position the sexes on a spectrum—in shades of grey—that are consistent with the overlapping distributions found in sex-based difference research (Deaux, 1984; Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Eagly, 1987; Swim, 1994).

In many cases these arguments have been disputed. Renowned psychologist, Alice Eagly has rightfully pointed out that much of the variation observed in evaluations of sex-based psychological differences is similarly fallible to other types of psychological inquiry. She and her numerous co-authors note that the rates of variation are not dissimilar to other research (Eagly, 1995; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly & Karau, 1991) and are likely attributable to normal variations in psychological study such as methodological, measurement, environmental, or other contextual considerations (Eagly, 1995). These findings are particularly important to feminist researchers whose concerns revolve around the premise that establishing “differences” between men and women often equates to marking a disadvantage for women . However, the overall findings in difference research do not necessarily support this concern. In fact, no generalizable aspect of the gender stereotypes supported by the body of literature to-date supports a negative perception for women (Crawford & Unger, 2004) and may actually support a more positive perception of women (Eagly & Mladinic, 1994; Eagly, Mladinic, & Otto, 1991) than of men: “At any rate, the sex differences that scientists have documented do not tell a simple tale of female inferiority Eagly, 1995, p. 155) .”

### **Gender Differences in Risk**

Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) also briefly noted that there were established differences between boys and girls (if only at certain ages) in the realm of risk in a number of the studies they



reviewed (see Kopfstein, 1973; Slovic, 1966). Risk, however, was not an area that had been well-explored at the time and as further study continued gender-based differences became well-accepted in a plethora of contexts. For example, men tend to take more risks as drivers (Byrnes et al., 1999; Konecni et al., 1976; Waldron et al., 2005), in financial decision-making (Eckel & Grossman, 2002; Powell & Ansic, 1997; Schubert et al., 1999; Sunden & Surette, 1998), sexual behavior (Clark & Hatfield, 1989; Oliver & Hyde, 1993), and alcohol abuse (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2004) —just to cite a very brief few findings.

Relatedly, there are also established differences in how men and women perceive risk. Again, being context dependent, studies have shown that women are more sensitive to risk than men. The literature describes, for instance, how men are less concerned about the risks involved in driving automobiles (DeJoy, 1992; Rhodes & Pivik, 2011), environmental threats (Bord & O'Connor, 1997; Greenberg & Schneider, 1995), and even online shopping (Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004). Gustafson (1998)'s review of the quantitative risk perception literature concluded that differences between men and women varied based on the particular risk scenario being offered by investigators and, although not very large, were impressively systematic. Interestingly, he also found that what men and women “worried” about in terms of risk was strikingly similar, though the degree to which men concerned themselves in each area was, across the board, less than that of women.

Psychologists are careful to note that there is, of course, a relationship between an individual's perception of a risk and their likelihood of acting in a particular risk scenario. Weber et al., (2002) evaluate the distinction between risk perception and risk taking and conclude, “For prediction purposes, it is immaterial whether observed behavior is the result of beliefs about the

riskiness of the choice situation or of attitudes towards (perceived) risk (p. 267).” The concepts are thus often treated, in the literature, as interchangeable.

The most comprehensive examination of gender-based differences in risk is a meta-analysis of 150 studies (Byrnes et al., 1999). Their findings indicate significant gender differences in nearly every area of risk study (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Gender Differences in Risk, Meta-Analytic Findings of Mean Effect Sizes, by Grouped Content and Study Type

Task	Mean Effect Size (d)	Confidence interval (95%)	N
<i>Hypothetical choice</i>			
Choice dilemma	.07*	.05 to .12	44
Framing	.05	-.02 to .12	27
Other	.35*	.29 to .41	25
<i>Self-reported behavior</i>			
Smoking	-.02	-.05 to .01	10
Drinking/drug use	.04*	.02 to .06	19
Sexual activities	.07*	.05 to .10	47
Driving	.29*	.26 to .32	21
Other	.38*	.35 to .41	35
<i>Observed behavior</i>			
Physical activity	.16*	.10 to .22	11
Driving	.17*	.12 to .22	14
Informed guessing	.18*	.13 to .23	11
Gambling	.21*	.14 to .28	33
Risky experiment	.41*	.21 to .61	4
Intellectual risk taking	.40*	.25 to .55	7
Physical skills	.43*	.28 to .58	7
Other	.15*	.04 to .26	7

\*the mean differs significantly from zero. Questions are scored on a 0-1 scale. From .

According to this analysis, virtually every content area, gender differences did not include zero, even when they were relatively small. The authors point out that nearly half of the effects (i.e. 48 percent) were large enough to be considered greater than “small” by traditional standards within psychology (i.e.  $>.20$ ). Again, these findings reinforce the apparent consensus of the field: some gender differences in risk considerations are larger than others, but they tend to exist in nearly all contexts that have been investigated.

## Electoral Risk

What no study to-date has explored from a gender perspective, is the role risk plays in making decisions about office seeking. It is also difficult to generalize from existing research to this area because none of it explores, anything that would be regarded, on the face of it, to be a risk in a political context. This particular context has not piqued the interest of psychologists. Indeed, none of the 150 studies included in the Byrnes et al. (1999) appear to be remotely political in nature and the five domain inventories formulated by Weber et al., (2002) include no items that could be interpreted as being political either. One could assume that “political” risk scenarios would likely be classified as social in nature and fall into the social domain. However, the questions typically used posed to test in the social domain are often inter-personal in nature. Standard measures in the social domain include:

- Admitting that your tastes are different from those of your friends.
- Arguing with a friend who has a very different opinion on an issue.
- Asking your boss for a raise.
- Dating someone that you are working with.
- Deciding to share an apartment with someone you don't know well.
- Disagreeing with your father on a major issue.
- Wearing unconventional clothes.
- Openly disagreeing with your boss in front of your coworkers.
- Speaking your mind about an unpopular issue at a social occasion.
- Moving to a new city (Weber et al., 2002, p. 287).

Clearly these standard measures do not tap into concepts that would reflect on political feelings or ambition. These standard measures of “social risk” predominantly tap into the types of risk individuals may face in their interpersonal relationships. Seeking a political office, however, may incorporate some elements of interpersonal risk (e.g. effects on a candidate’s family or friends), but it also incorporates a broader dynamic of interaction with society on a scale that is not captured in these social questions—such as the prestige associated with an office (or failing to win an

office). There are also other considerations that would not be considered social at all, such as the financial ramifications of leaving ones career and salary to risk the salary of public office. Thus, electoral environments would be a distinct examination to which existing understanding of risk perception would not be entirely applicable. Study focused specifically on this context is warranted using measures that are inherently appropriate to an electoral context.

A better understanding of electoral risk as a distinct form of risk is critical to understanding political ambition and candidate emergence. Because other measures of risk—particularly in the social domain—do not evaluate the type of zero-sum “game” that runs for political office typically are, they do not offer the same insight into the calculations that individuals considering a run for office may be making. Political campaigns are truly a one-of-a-kind undertaking with unique risk calculations.

## **Conclusion**

Political scientists have not effectively grappled with the role of risk in making decisions about office seeking, offering primarily overly-simplistic cost-benefit models that have no ability to incorporate individual differences (Black, 1972; Maestes et al., 2006; Rohde, 1979) and are predictive only in terms of progressive ambition. Furthermore, while the field has recently looked very critically at gender differences in political ambition (e.g. Fox & Lawless, 2005; Lawless & Fox, 2010), there is very little empirical attention paid to the role risk may play in the observed gender differences (Bledsoe & herring, 1990; Fulton et al., 2006 do consider risk to some extent in their analyses).

Psychology, on the other hand, has extensively examined a multitude of arenas where gender differences in risk are well-established. The field has concluded that, while the differences

vary in effect size based on the specific context of the risk, there are generally consistent gender-based differences in how men and women handle risk—with men tending to be more likely to take a risk than women (Burnes et al., 1999). Most contemporary work in psychology, significantly, emphasizes the importance of context of risk in evaluating these gender-based differences. Since no study (in political science or psychology) has examined gender-based differences in risk in the context of making decisions about office seeking, not much is yet known about the role risk may play in political ambition and candidate emergence.

I would hypothesize that these gender-based differences do exist in electoral risk. Furthermore, I would argue that evolutionary theory may offer a compelling explanation for why these differences do exist. Drawing on established theory and research in sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, Chapter Four offers a theoretical framework for why, on average, men would have evolved to be more politically ambitious than women. The argument, supported by evidence from a number of fields, is that if men have been subject to evolutionary pressures throughout our species' history (and likely males in ancestral species as well) that favored those men who had greater political ambition. Thus, it is not surprising that their greater presence in elected bodies would be a quite expected phenomenon. That we see pattern in virtually every elected body in the world and across cultural and social divides is evidence enough of a universal or near-universal cultural trait. For such a trait, it is important to take a closer look at the role that biologically-based sex differences may play in fostering the ambition of men and/or depressing it in women.

## Chapter Four: An Evolutionary Theoretical Framework for Gendered Candidate Emergence

*“With the growing acceptance of evolution as a metatheory for psychology, more and more personality psychologists are trying to conceptualize personality within an evolutionary framework (Penke, Denissen, & Miller, 2007, p. 553).”*

A growing body of both theoretical and empirical research uses evolutionary theory to help explain human psychology and behavior. While theories remain piecemeal so that none applies systematically to all aspects of human psychology and behavior, there have been many notable efforts to explain human psychology and behavior in terms of its evolutionary origins. Indeed, the last few years have seen forays into examining risk in political behavior (e.g. Alford & Hibbing, 2004; Eaves & Hatemi, 2008; Fowler, Baker, & Dawes, 2008; Hatemi, et al., 2009; Hatemi et al., 2007; Madsen, 1985, 1986; McDermott, 2004b).

Any person deciding whether or not to seek public office must consider the risks in doing so. What do such calculations of risk involve? I hypothesize that those individual calculations of risk are gendered in important ways that have, in part, an evolutionary origin. This chapter sets out a theoretical framework, based upon evolutionary psychology, for the existence of gendered calculations of electoral risk and their subsequent effects on candidate emergence. This framework is two-fold. The first frame considers external forces. It examines evolution’s impact on cultural environments, factors in economic, social, and political environments that shape and differentiate the risks for women and men of running for political office. The second frame considers internal forces that are inherent to individual biology and, to some extent, lead women to calculate risk in different ways than men. It considers the evolutionary history in which the human psyche evolved. Although this history includes selective forces that would have had a similar impact both women

and men with respect to considerations of risk, there were also selective forces that would have had a different impact on women and men.

This chapter briefly examines the different ways that researchers have used evolutionary theory to explain political behavior and some of the more important findings that have resulted from this emerging field of research. It then provides a brief description of the evolutionary argument for sex-based differences in risk perception—an important aspect of human sexual dimorphism. I will then offer a theoretical discussion of both the external and internal components of evolutionary influence, some of which I argue result in differential risk assessment of political environments by women and men. These two components should be added to contemporary explanations of the gender gap in both political ambition and candidate emergence.

### *Genes, Hormones, and Political Behavior*

While few political scientists have used evolutionary theory to obtain insight into the nature of political ambition, it has been increasingly used as a framework for explaining other elements of human political attitudes and behavior. Indeed, one of the most high-profile publications in the discipline in recent years (Sigelman, 2006) is Alford, Funk, and Hibbing (2005)'s foray into examining genetic influences upon political orientations. Using twin study data,<sup>20</sup> they found sizable heritability for a host of political attitudes, with genetic influence greatly exceeding that of the “shared” family environment. Further work has examined the nuances of genetic influences upon political attitudes, concluding that there are both direct and indirect genetic influences on political attitudes. Hatemi et al. (2007) used twin studies in Australia to examine vote preference.

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<sup>20</sup> Twin studies, while not without their critics, are a methodological tool often used by genetics researchers across disciplines to isolate the effects of environment and genes since identical twins share exactly the same genetic structure. For brief, but concise explanation of twin study methodology, see Hatemi et al (2007, 440) or Medlind and Hatemi (2009) for a more extensive examination.



While the study did not identify a specific gene or genes that influenced vote preference, it did suggest the presence of indirect influences that could be identified through direct effects on related political attitudes.

Much research along this vein followed, with Hatemi et al. (2009) suggesting that while there was increasing evidence that genes did not have much to dictate about an individual's political affiliation, the strength of that identification may be heritable. In fact, it has been demonstrated that as much as half of the variability in strength of party identification may be attributable to a genetic component (Settle, Dawes, & Fowler, 2009). Researchers also have identified a genetic variant of dopamine, DRD4-7R, that when present interacts with an individual's tendency to have a lot of friends and result in a tendency to hold a politically liberal orientation—an effect that is not present in those without the genetic variant (Settle, Dawes, Christakis, & Fowler, 2010) .

Other researchers focused on to the influence of genes on political participation; Fowler et al. (2008) identified a genetic component to the likelihood an individual would vote. They even went as far as to exactly identify the specific genes that seemed to be influencing turnout—MAOA and 5HTT. Particularly interesting and important is the recent finding that genes appear to be more critical than environment in determining an individual's level of social trust (Sturgis et al., 2010).

Perhaps the only attempts within political science to offer a direct link between genetics and power-seeking<sup>21</sup> are a series of studies done in the 1980s by Madsen. Madsen identified the neurotransmitter whole blood serotonin (WBS) as being connected to power-seeking in men; those

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<sup>21</sup> Which would, by definition, include, but not be limited to political ambition. Madsen defines power-seeking as “the pursuit of social dominance” Douglas Madsen, "Power Seekers Are Different: Further Biochemical Evidence," *The American Political Science Review*, (1986)..

with power-seeking dispositions, on average, had higher levels of WBS (Madsen, 1985). This finding mirrored those from studies of other primates with propensities for socially-dominating behaviors (Raleigh et al., 1980; Raleigh et al., 1991; Raleigh et al., 1984; Steklis et al., 1986). Madsen later also revealed that men with these higher levels of WBS were apt to have different physiological responses than those with normal or low levels of WBS when faced with competitive situations (Madsen, 1986).<sup>22</sup> These findings suggest that there are men who are biologically inclined to seek power and, for those that are, they are better equipped biologically to function in stressful and/or competitive environments. While this finding is critical to evaluating the biological connection to behavior in politically competitive environments, it is also worth noting the most significant limitation of Madsen's research: it was limited to the study of men and thus offers no insight into whether these same processes affect women with orientations towards social dominance or in competitive environments.

A common critique of evolutionary theory as applied in the social sciences is that it is easy to invent explanations for social behaviors that, while seemingly plausible, could be tailor-made or elaborate coincidences. For example, the field of evolutionary psychology argues that much of the human psyche was shaped by natural selection that occurred in the environments of history. Of particular importance in this regard was the lengthy period of time when humans everywhere lived as hunter-gatherers and developed "the stone age mind" (Cosmides & Tooby, 1987). Tribalism, for example, is a relic attributable to the intense competition among small communities that were common throughout human evolutionary history. In these environments, scholars have

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<sup>22</sup> This included the measurement of other endocrine system functions that equip humans to deal with stress.

theorized (Broom, 2003; Shaw & Wong, 1989; Wilber, 1981) loyalty to a political community comprised mainly of close and distant kin was a trait that would have been strongly favored.

A common critique of evolutionary psychology and other evolutionary approaches to understanding behavior is that it is very easy to furnish narratives to explain the adaptive significance of behaviors. However, what evidence is there that a particular behavior was adaptive in an ancestral environment? How can we be sure about the selective forces involved? What is the evidence for such forces? Another critique is that all behaviors depend for their expression on environmental influences. Modern environments are so much different than ancestral ones were, so that it is difficult to tell the relevance, if any, of the Stone Age mind to social behavior today.

Returning to the example of tribalism, the evolutionary explanations discussed above certainly provide an interesting (and perhaps compelling) hypothesis, but it is difficult to discern whether this evolutionary explanation for tribalism is 1) still a relevant explanation for contemporary ethnic conflict or 2) would be all that helpful in answering the kinds of questions that modern social scientists looking at ethnic conflict are asking. A political scientist, for example, may be apt to dismiss the neurological process that promote tribalism in favor of knowledge about how tribalism plays out in the domestic politics of a modern nation state (see for a very-recent, high-profile example of criticism, in part, along these lines Schlozman, 2013). Evolutionary psychologists, thus, increasingly are trying to identify proximate biological structures and processes (i.e. cognitive processes, endocrine responses, etc.) that are direct influences in shaping particular behaviors. Saying that ethnic conflict has evolutionary origins is not enough for most political scientists: what they really want to know more about is the specific biological structures involved. This would imply a role for biology in coping with, rather than merely designing a biological theory to fit those behaviors.

*Evolution and Political Behavior.* With respect to political behavior, the topic of risk assessment has recently become an important focus. McDermott et al. (2008) provide an important commentary on how prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) has evolutionary roots. Prospect theory, one of the most powerful and oft-employed tools in the social sciences, has been widely applied by political psychologists (though not in the context of political ambition) to offer insight into such topics as the effects of framing (Druckman, 2001), political decision making (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; McDermott, 2004a; Mercer, 2005; Patty, 2006; Quattrone & Tversky, 1988), public policy (McDaniel & Sistrunk, 1991), comparative politics (Weyland, 1996), and particularly as applied to state actors in studies of international relations (Berejikian, 2002; Faber, Proops, & Manstetten, 1990; Jervis, 1994, 2004; Levy, 1994, 1997; McDermott, 1998; Mercer, 2005).

McDermott and her co-authors (2008) offer an evolutionary explanation for the risk-taking and risk-aversion patterns explained by prospect theory. They argue that cognitive mechanisms that evolved to help our ancestors to make life and death decisions are still in place and help people today to make decisions. Models of politics, they argue, need:

...greater sensitivity to *ecological rationality*<sup>23</sup>...How a person thinks, and what constitutes rational behavior, depends on the situational and environmental context in which that individual operates. An ecologically valid model of political behavior, or any other behavior, involves the interaction between both individual characteristics and specific situational aspects of the environment (336).

These authors also make note that in decision making in general and prospect theory specifically, gender-based differences exist (Booth & Nolen, 2012). Fagley and Miller (1990), for instance, note that women are affected by positive and negative framing of a threat while men are not. These

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<sup>23</sup> Emphasis original.

gender related differences in framing effects were also found in a later study that looked at the of risk domain—again the frames affected women more significantly than men (Fagley & Miller, 1997). Smarter people tend to take greater risks, as well, but even controlling for intelligence, women are more risk averse (Frederick, 2005).

### *Evolutionary Theory and Risk Taking*

There are strong evolutionary arguments for general differences between the sexes in risk assessment. At the root of sex differences in risk assessment are differences in life history strategies. Life history strategies refer to the timing of various forms of reproductive effort over a lifetime, including phenotypic effort, mating effort, reproduction, and nepotism. The allocation of these various forms over a lifetime is shaped by natural selection to maximize inclusive fitness, a measure of the success an individual has in transmitting genetic materials to the next generation. There are two components to inclusive fitness—one component due to individuals' own reproduction, and another component due to aid given by the individual to relatives that enhances their reproduction, since the individual shares a fraction of genes with those relatives that are identical by descent. Life history strategies can vary somewhat between the sexes due to sexual selection is a special type of natural selection that occurs due to competition among males for mates (e.g. males defeat, drive off, or threaten rival males: males guard or isolate females) and because of female choice (e.g. female prefer and chose to mate with males who possess particular traits). Sexual selection has results in sexual dimorphism—differences in traits between females and males. Presumably since they are also cognitive processes, sexual selection is relevant to observed differences in risk perception and risk taking between the sexes.

In humans, sexual dimorphism is considered moderate and less than it was in our ancestral species and related species, especially the chimpanzee and gorilla. Studies of Hunter-Gatherer (HG) societies find an ecological monogamy mating pattern. Most men had only a single wife; the headman, and perhaps a few more successful hunters, may have had two or a few wives. Thus, men in HG societies must have provided important resources (protection, animal protein) to their mates and their offspring.

For human females, life history strategies differ from male strategies. Women mature at a younger age and their mating effort is considerably less than for men. Most importantly, women must invest far more in reproduction (sex cells and gestation) than men and nearly always far more in parental care. Men, on the other hand, mature at a later age and their mating effort can be considerable, especially competition with other men in efforts to attract more and better quality mates. Men also invest considerably in parental care (compared to other species), but doing so can involve tradeoffs that reduce mating effort.

As such, being a human male suggests a riskier strategy than being a female. This is primarily due to male-male competition for mates. Men tend to be taller, heavier, and possess greater muscle mass, perhaps because of a history of direct competition (e.g. fighting) with other males for mates. With polygyny, a few males may be very successful in attracting mates and fathering offspring, while other males are less successful, or fail entirely to attract a mate and father children. There are great benefits in reproductive fitness to men who are successful in competing with other men, on the other hand, men who do not compete successfully may fail entirely in attracting a mate and fathering children. Competition among males for mates may be responsible for the observations of prospect theory that individuals tend to engage in very risky behavior when threatened with losses (McDermott, Fowler, & Smirnov, 2008). Males with few resources and

who find it difficult to attract and hold onto a mate will go to extreme risks to guard what few resources they do have (e.g., reputation). Human males, then, would likely have evolved to be greater risk takers, since the pay-off in terms of reproductive fitness when making riskier choices would be much greater for them than for women.

Men tend to live shorter lives than women, itself an indicator of the riskier male strategy. Noteworthy, also, is the primary sex ratio. About 105 males are born for every 100 females. Parents “start” more males, but more of them die before reaching reproductive maturity, so that the average investment of parents is about the same in each sex. The sex ratio is approximately balanced when each sex reaches the age of reproductive maturity, so that the average investment of parents is about the same in each sex. In summary, being a male is a riskier strategy. Males, compared to females, invest more in mating effort, less in reproduction, and less in nepotism (or parental effort).

I hypothesize, along these lines, that there is an evolutionary origin for the decision making process (i.e. risk assessment) that influences candidate emergence. Since women and men have been subject to somewhat different evolutionary pressures, they have evolved different cognitive mechanisms of risk assessment. Political environments in the ancestral past and the risks associated with those environments looked very different for women and men, and thus supported sexual selection for differences in traits between the sexes for dealing with these different environments. Furthermore, cultural responses to environmental pressures, associated with all sorts of gender-based differences in politics, continue to reflect this history of sexual selection. Some gender based differences still prevail today, despite the fact that they may be wholly irrelevant in the modern environment and despite the fact that some societies have undertaken great effort to diminish gender based political differences. I thus outline the evolutionary origins of differential risk propensity in political ambition from both the external perspective, the tendency

for societies to create political institutions and processes that reinforce prevailing gender-related differences, and the internal perspective the—differences in the evolved traits and individual behaviors of women and men.

*Internal Influences: Evolved Traits and Individual Behavior*

All behaviors are subject to genetic influences. The causal pathways may be lengthy and complicated, and difficult to ascertain, but they are certainly there, and ready to be discovered. Without genes, there is no development, no nervous system or brain, and, as a result, no behavior. Genes are sections of DNA that get translated leading eventually to the production of distinct enzymes (proteins), some 20,000+ in humans. Proteins are the building blocks of cells and bodies. A fundamental assumption of behavioral genetics is that there are genetic influences underlying all behaviors (Buss, 1991) and that behavior, like all other traits, including morphology and physiology, has been shaped by evolutionary processes throughout our ancestral history. Through these behaviors, human culture has also evolved (Cosmides & Tooby, 1987).

Modern evolutionary theory argues that the traits of all organisms are the product of the action and interaction of five processes: mutation, inheritance, drift, isolation, and natural selection. Among these processes, the process of natural selection—first identified by Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace, is extraordinarily important because it is the process responsible for adaptations—traits that better enabled their bearers to survive and reproduce in the environments of history. Following Malthus (1959), Darwin argued that far more organisms were born in any generation than could be supported by the resources available in the environment. It was inevitable that individuals would compete for those resources. Individuals with traits best-adapted to the particular competitive environment would thrive, and because of inheritance, give birth to



offspring who were likely also to carry the traits that had made them successful (Darwin, 2004). Later generations of evolutionary biologists, beginning with Hamilton (1966) , argued that natural selection actually is effective at the level of the gene. From this perspective, individuals are vehicles of replication of genetic materials. Dawkins (2006) used the “selfish gene” metaphor and likened individuals to blind robots programmed in various ways to propagate the replication and spread of those genes.

Discussions surrounding whether a trait will be favored or not settle on two critical questions: Does the trait favor the acquisition of resources used for survival and reproduction? Does the trait favor the acquisition of one particularly important resource, more and higher quality mates? Genes will be transferred to the next generation only if those initially carrying them possess both the resources to survive and can reproduce because of access to mating opportunities. A gene will increase in frequency, generation after generation, only if it is found in bodies that compete successfully for reproductive resources, including mates. There are thus two sets of intertwined selective pressures at work: shortages of resources that encourages competition for them (Darwin, 2004), and shortage of mates and higher quality mates that favors competition for access to them. Both of these pressures favor risk-taking, and some of these risks are political. Risk is inherent to many calculations individuals must make in both managing resources and reproduction. Trimpop (1994) argues that mate selection is inherently a form of social risk-taking. It involves competition both for resources (used to attract mates) and for the mates themselves (Buss, 1988).

Broadly consider the adaptive traits that modern humans have and the selective pressures that would have favored them. Evolutionary theorists make a strong case that the Pleistocene Era is the most convincing place to look for the origins of more-recently evolved human behaviors that distinguish modern *H. sapiens* from its ancestors (e.g. *H. erectus*) as well as from other closely-

related primate species. The theoretical justification for this focus is simple: 99 percent of human history occurred within hunter-gatherer (HG) societies so most traits distinctive to modern humans would be traits that favored survival and reproduction in environments typical to a HG society. These are almost certainly the traits that modern humans possess (Hatemi & McDermott, 2011). There just has not been enough generations or evolutionary time since the advent of the first settled villages (about 15,000 years ago) or the invention of agriculture (about 12,000 years ago), and especially the first appearance of states (about 5,000 years ago) to have exerted much evolutionary change in traits since the dawn of modern society.<sup>24</sup>

It is commonly understood that, in HG societies, men and women worked together to obtain resources needed for survival. This division of labor has been identified as the origination of traditional gender roles (Lerner, 1986). Women often focused on collecting localized vegetation that, in terms of calories and nutrients, made up the largest portion of the HG diet. For their part, men helped to provide the rich protein and fat nutrients found in meat obtained by fishing, hunting and scavenging. . While the nutrients obtained from vegetation were mainstays of the diet, the concentrated nutrients found in meat, along with the skill needed to obtain this often scarce and unpredictable resource, and along with the credit gained from sharing this resource with others in the community, resulted in significant reputational benefits to the men who provided it (Kelly, 1995).

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<sup>24</sup> Some argue that if we date the agricultural revolution to 12,000 B.P. (and divide by the 25 year-per-generation rule of thumb), there have been 480 generations: plenty of time for further evolution. Further, the rate of evolution is proportional to the amount of genetic variation, and that undoubtedly is higher in modern populations. The more significant point to be made here is that even if the brain has had the opportunity to evolve, the likelihood is that much of the neurological framework used in modern humans today did form during the set of environmental conditions (HG) that were prevalent in the Pleistocene Era.

As a result of this esteem, successful hunters were likely to wield significant influence within their social group and, as a result, male authority was the norm (Boehm, 1999). Mankind's earliest politicians—usually labeled headmen-- were thus predominantly men. Since HG societies had little variation in wealth, they tended to be predominantly egalitarian with leaders emerging to solve conflicts when authority and leadership was required . Apart from the headman, then, and perhaps a very few very skilled and successful hunters, very few men were able to attract and support more than one wife and their children. These societies were predominantly ecologically monogamous (a condition that would offer its own set of evolutionary pressures). There were a few men, however, likely more ambitious than other men, who would succeed in becoming a headman, and be able to attract and support additional wives, father more children, and achieve greater personal reproduction. Their traits would increase in frequency in the population.

This is not to say, as Darwinian feminists would surely point out, that women did not have their own sets of ambitions. Low (2001), in her examination of traditional peoples around the world where women have a notable amount of power, identifies numerous ways women exert their ambition and strength as women. She notes that within the Creek Nation, for instance, that when women were cited for bravery, her son would receive a war title. The Saramacca of Guyana had a dual political structure where women held positions of authority in the realm of women's affairs, while men did the same in more general communal affairs. Certainly, while women have famously been described as being more cooperative—particularly in their gathering duties—there would have been private sphere opportunities for them to compete. However, the fabric of egalitarian HG society was secured in part by a delicate balance between men's limited political authority and women's general aversion to power-seeking, but with women, nonetheless, playing the “counter-dominance” role in society (Boehm, 1999; Hannagan, 2008; Knauft, 1994). Counter-dominant

behaviors including, perhaps, their approval or disapproval of leaders and their actions, economic efforts, and the absolute dependency of men on women's childbearing and rearing efforts.

As applied to humans, evolutionary theory supports the argument that men are able to derive significant reproductive benefits from being politically ambitious, while women are able to derive far fewer benefits. It is a very basic argument. Women carry the reproductive burden of pregnancy and, in most cases, much of the early burden of caretaking (Hrdy, 1999). That is the main focus of their reproductive effort. While the balance of this burden has shifted over time in developed societies, humans continue to retain distinct gender roles in child rearing (Blau, 1984; Coverman & Sheley, 1986).

In theory, men can make a virtually unlimited contribution to the future gene pool, through polygamous marriages, serial monogamy, taking concubines, and philandering, while women are limited by the number of children they are able to successfully gestate, bear, nurse, and raise. Men will be more inclined to participate in activities that gain them reproductive opportunities. Namely, competing successfully for power will gain them access to additional resources and these can be used to attract mates and also help support these mates and any additional children. Indeed, history is full of accounts of wealthy and powerful men with harems full of concubines or, at least, multiple wives and higher than average numbers of children (e.g. Ghengis Khan, the Ottoman sultans, Tiwi elders of Northern Australia).

Conversely, women will be primarily predisposed to behaviors that gain them access to resources that will help them raise healthy children (Low, 2001). Unlike men, however, there is little value to them from using such resources to attract additional mates. Women are much more burdened by their parental duties than men (Tivers, 1972). The significant benefits to women from

using resources to invest in their own children (and the smaller benefits to men) stand in stark contradiction to using resources to seek additional mates. This condition favors the emergence of traditional gender roles, and thus the dominance of women in the private sphere and men in the public one. Women are more preoccupied with bearing and raising healthy and successful children, because natural selection has favored women who do so. These are women who possess traits that enhance success in the private sphere—attracting a high quality mate, high fertility, abilities at feeding, nurturing, instructing, and protecting children, effectiveness in promoting the interests of family members, and attracting garnering, and using resources effectively for parental care, Women are less-politically ambitious than men simply because, in the environments of history, there were fewer benefits for them from being politically ambitious. Men, on the other hand, were favored who succeeded in attracting more mates, higher quality mates, and the resources necessary to attract and to help support such mates and any jointly produced children Natural selection would favor men who were power-seekers. Success in achieving and holding on to power meant more resources available for attracting new mates and supporting existing mates and children. Geary (1998) summarizes this point:

Men in all cultures are highly-motivated to attain social status and control of culturally significant resources. The resources are those needed to support survival and attract a mate or mates and can vary from land to herds of cows to a large paycheck. Whatever the form of resource, the outcome is the same. Women prefer culturally successful men as mates, and thus these men have more reproductive options. (9).

To this end, evolutionary theory suggests that individuals will be inclined to pursue political power to the extent that it can contribute to their reproductive success or more specifically their inclusive fitness (Hamilton, 1964). Chagnon and Irons (1979) offer empirical support of this argument by documenting the importance of “cultural success” for men. Cultural success is the fulfillment of conscious aspirations. These authors argue that this is a cultural universal. Humans

in evolutionary history, traditional societies, and modern cultural environments, would all strive towards proximate goals (e.g. wealth) that would improve their inclusive fitness. For men, cultural success would often be defined in terms of access to and control over resources and the conscious drive associated with this control could be defined as ambition. Although ambitious men throughout history struggling to achieve cultural success were surely ignorant of the concept of inclusive fitness, most were likely aware of their own culture's definition of success and that there were ample rewards to be had from achieving it. There is typically, although not necessarily, a close correspondence between cultural definitions of success and things that are associated with reproductive success. For example, women in the United States who are born into wealthy families and marry at a young age give birth to more children than women who are not (Essock-Vitale, 1984).

By this logic, the political environment associated with HG societies would have influenced how modern humans cope with their own political environments. Indeed, cultural anthropologists have argued that not only has the political nature of HG societies affected human nature, but human nature has affected modern politics (Boehm, 1997a; 1997b). This argument provides the foundation for the politically ambitious modern man.

*External Influences: Social and Cultural Environmental Expression of Evolutionary Factors.*

Genetic dispositions are merely dispositions, however, and must be activated by the social environment. Depending upon the characteristics of specific social environments (or lack of), such dispositions may be expressed fully, expressed in attenuated form, or not expressed at all. For example, the political ambition of men in HG societies, if successful, was often rewarded by the ability to attract and keep several wives: however, the political ambition of men in modern

societies, if successful, is not rewarded the same way because polygamy is widely prohibited by law. It is thus equally important, if not more so, to consider the environment in which individuals are considering the risks in running for political office.

Perhaps the most important consideration is the longstanding cultural norm in most human societies that politics (public sphere) is men's business (Saprio, 1982). This is the norm of public man, private woman. Women's place is in the home with her children and husband. The prevalence of public man—called patriarchy—in human society is reflected in its institutions, structured so as to hinder women's ability to gain access to them and to exercise influence within them. As Hannagan (2008) states:

Patriarchy is the structural and ideological system that perpetuates the privileging of masculinity...legislatures, political parties, museums, newspapers, theater companies, television networks, religious organizations, corporations, and courts...derive from the presumption that what is masculine is most deserving of reward, promotion, admiration, [and] emulation (4-5).

The world and its primary institutions have long been male-dominated, which holds implications from a socialization perspective as well. Patriarchy and the institutions that have evolved from it—such as legislatures, political parties, newspapers, religious organizations, courts (Enloe, 2004)—serve to create what Fox & Lawless (2005) refer to as a “masculinized ethos”. Where a masculinized ethos exists, so does an inherent bias, whether real or imagined, against women and their issues.

This bias creates a “gendered psyche” (Fox & Lawless, 2005; Lawless & Fox, 2010) which serves to make traditionally male realms such as politics feel like a man's world, rather than a woman's or a gender-neutral environment. Women may be deterred from participation and, when they do, may wind up sensing that they don't belong, are less effective than men, and cannot exercise any influence. It is easy to presume that the differential burden of parenting that persists

in human societies would be associated with women's diminished ambition in general and political ambition in particular. In reality, the effect of the differential burden of parenting on ambition is not clear cut. As many evolutionary theorists have (see Low, 2001) , gender related traits can almost always be placed on a spectrum full of shades of grey, rather than black and white. In the context of political ambition, this means that while men on average tend to be more politically ambitious than women, there will always be exceptions to this tendency and the overlap on the spectrum may be significant.

Take, for example, the prevalence of gender-dominated careers other than politics. In the United States, men dominate architecture and engineering careers; where they outnumber women two to one. At the same time, women dominate personal care and service occupations by an even greater margin (U.S. Census, 2010). There are, of course, reasons why biological differences between the sexes would support such culturally based career preferences . For example, as the primary caregivers of children, the professions of nursing or early childhood education may be marginally more attractive to women than men b simply because, throughout our species' history, they are by disposition more nurturing. Why would the field of electoral politics be any different?

Simple evolutionary explanations of the disproportionate representation of women and men in different careers does not account for the near-global phenomenon of advancement towards gender parity in many careers. In most developed societies, women have experienced increased participation in the public sphere. These advancements are often attributed in large part to women's diminished fertility and lower burden of child care due to modern birth control methods and how they have given women great control over their own fertility (UNFPA, n.d.). While this is certainly true, advanced methods of birth control have not been around long enough to have had much if any impact on women's ambition that would be due to natural selection. There has not been enough



time for human behavior to adapt, as a result of natural selection, to birth control (Buss & Schmitt, 2011; Schmitt, Shackelford, & Buss, 2001).

Ultimately, the risk involved in pursuing political office is distinct from these other pursuits and, as such, may activate different adaptive responses to determining whether to exercise political ambition. Consider the plethora of risk considerations in choosing to seek political office, not to mention any number of risks that may be unique to the particular office being considered. For the potential candidate, all of the following are potential risks considerations:<sup>25</sup>

- a better candidate(s) will run for the same office
- the party will back a different candidate
- they will be unable to securing financial (and other supports) to run an effective campaign
- the campaign or position will prompt them to neglect other important obligations (family, job, etc.)
- they will not get on the ballot
- they will lack influence (or be otherwise ineffective) in elected public office
- they may not be able to get reelected.
- they won't like elected public office; and, of course,
- they will lose.

According to the logic presented here, a component of the gender gap in candidate emergence may be attributable to the differential ways men and women evaluate the risks associated with running for political office—quite possibly, different ways that reflect evolved differences in psychology between the sexes.

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<sup>25</sup> This is not, by any means, a comprehensive list of potential risk considerations in evaluating whether or not to seek political office, but rather examples of the multitude of potential. For the purposes of this study, electoral risk—the risk associated with pursuing political office—is operationalized predominantly in concert with David W Rohde, "Risk-Bearing and Progressive Ambition: The Case of Members of the United States House of Representatives," *American Journal of Political Science*, (1979).’s seminal examination of progressive ambition which included probability of winning, cost of running, and level of office as the major variables in play in decisions to run for (higher) office.

In summary, there are compelling reasons to believe that the cognitive mechanisms that evolved in our ancestors to handle risk assessment scenarios would be used today to evaluate modern scenarios. Throughout human evolutionary history, women and men have been subject to somewhat different selective pressures. Differences in selective pressures during the lengthy period that humans lived in HG societies were almost certainly those that have had the largest influence in shaping the mental modules responsible for risk assessment and gender-related differences in risk assessment. In HG society, women and men pursued different distinctively different strategies to achieve “success.” These strategies involved different components of risk, and presumably somewhat different mental modules to assess those risks. Since the agricultural revolution, societies at different levels of socio-cultural development have tended to reinforce evolved gender-based differences with their origins in HG society. The most basic gender based difference is that men’s ambitions are directed toward achieving success in the “public” sphere; women’s ambitions are directed toward achieving success in the “private” sphere, especially through establishing personally and often mutually-beneficial bonds and interactions with close family and friends. Over history, and across societies, men have created institutions in the public sphere that have reflected their ambitions, and their definitions of cultural success, and not women’s.

Throughout most of evolutionary history, men who enjoyed political success—who took the risk and succeeded in the public sphere—would have benefitted in ways that enhanced their reproductive fitness. There would have been little or no incentive for women to take such risks to gain and hold on to power in the public sphere. Since mental modules involved in risk assessment are likely to vary between women and men, it’s likely that they will even today assess the risks of

running for political office in different ways and reach different decisions, based on different reasons, about whether to run or not.

## Chapter Five: *Stage One*: Evaluating Gender Differences in Psychological Evaluations of Electoral Risk

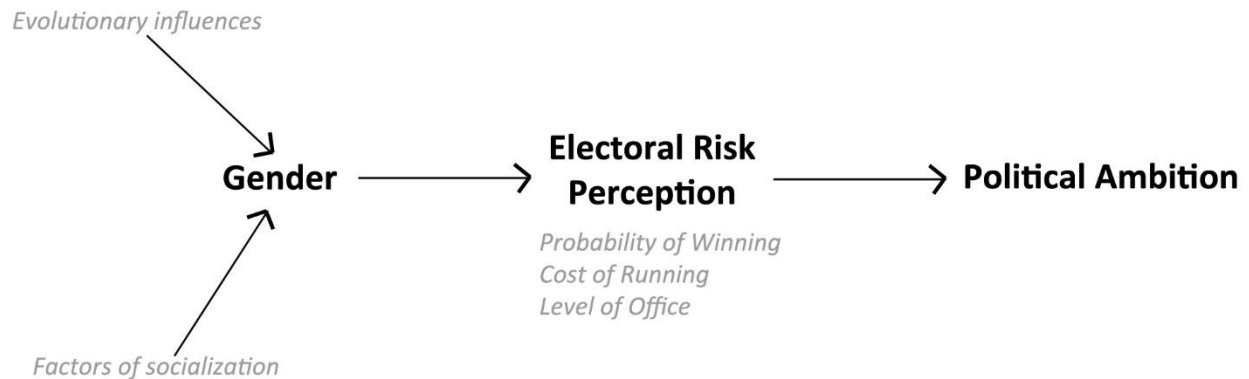
The preceding three chapters outline the theoretical basis for research that aims to identify gender differences in electoral risk perception and the effect they have on an individual's political ambition—an underexplored consideration in the observed gender gap in political ambition. This provides the foundation for investigation into the following empirical questions:

1. Do differences exist between men and women in electoral risk perception? In other words, will men and women view the same electoral environment as differentially risky?
2. Do men and women perceive specific elements of risk in the political opportunity structure in different ways? In other words, are there certain risk elements that are more influential in determining risk depending on one's gender?
3. Does the risk level in the electoral environment influence whether men/women actually pursue electoral office?

This, and the following chapter, uses two methodological approaches to quantitatively answer these same questions. The goal is to provide greater insight into why the gender gap persists in candidate emergence. In this chapter, I will describe the findings of an experiment designed to test the relationships between gender, electoral risk, and political ambition.

In order to examine how gender and components of electoral risk interact in decisions about running for political office, this study employed an experimental design. Recall the model first introduced in Chapter 1:

Fig. 5.1 Theoretical Model of the Interaction of Gender and Electoral Risk Perception on Political Ambition



Prior research on political ambition has relied exclusively on survey research. There are limitations, however, to survey data. Surveys pose concerns about internal validity as well as the potential for social desirability bias and the inability to control for many other factors other than the study's established independent variables that may affect the dependent variable.<sup>26</sup> This experimental manipulation, however, built into a survey allowed me to isolate only the separate effects of several components of electoral risk and gender on political ambition. This seemed preferable to the more traditional survey questions about political ambition because it allowed me to measure it under numerous conditions. The experiment allowed me to evaluate how an individual's gender: 1) affects their perception of electoral risk (*level of electoral risk*) and 2) how this perception ultimately affects their decision to run for political office.

Regardless of the particular circumstance, risk is a complex consideration. There is likely any number of elements in an electoral environment that could be considered when evaluating the

<sup>26</sup> The inherent trade-off with experimental methods is external validity. The controlled conditions allow the researcher to claim greater causal leverage on the independent variable, but the results may not be comparable to conditions outside of the laboratory. As such, this project employs methodological triangulation by examining the suggested relationships in more than one way. Stage Two (see Chapter 6) looks for evidence of the relationships hypothesized in Stage One in data of actual candidacies.

level of risk. The factors to be considered when weighing a run for political office are also likely to vary significantly based on the office, the location, the electoral climate, and many other factors. To avoid this complexity, this study incorporates only three components of risk that are likely to be both significant elements of risk and apply universally to most electoral conditions.<sup>27</sup> These variables—probability of winning, cost of running, and level of office—must also be inherently quantifiable in order to identify them clearly. Thus, I employ the same risk variables used by Rhode (1979) in his analysis of progressive ambition of U.S. House members.<sup>28</sup> Most empirical evaluations of risk also incorporate the same three elements, though they vary considerably across type of study. These components are: hazards (sources of risk), judgmental aspects, and characteristics of the respondents (Rohrman, 2000).

The experiment will, as indicated in the theoretical model in Fig. 5.1, examine how a subject's gender interacts with each of three variables—probability of winning, cost of running, and level of office—all relevant to electoral risks with potential effects upon their political ambition. This creates the following between-subjects factorial design:

**probability of winning (high v. low) x cost of running (high v. low) x  
level of office (high v. low) x gender**

A *control condition* will be used as well; a control group of respondents will evaluate a neutrally-described candidacy without electoral risk considerations (Factor summary tables are displayed in Table 5.1).

<sup>27</sup> Just as Schlesinger (1966) does not proclaim to include in his political opportunity structure all things relevant to the opportunities potential candidates have (11), I am likewise including only clear and significant forces of electoral risk that have been validated by use in other academic research (see Black 1970; Rhode 1979).

<sup>28</sup> While the conceptualization of the risk variables incorporated into this project parallel those used by Rhode (1979), they are not identical in their operationalization. This is done primarily for methodological purposes, in part to allow for parallelism with and ease of data collection in the second phase of the project (see Chapter 6).

## *Hypotheses*

As I have discussed in previous chapters, there is compelling evidence that there are gender-based differences in how individuals perceive risk, namely that men are less likely to perceive high-risk scenarios as risky and that women are more likely to sense risk in lower-risk scenarios. This experiment aims to extend these findings to the realm of risk in electoral politics where women are less likely to seek political office than men. Thus, I hypothesize that this experiment will reveal several types of effects on political ambition: 1) main effects of the independent variables, *gender* and *electoral risk perception* and 2) interactions between and among *gender* and the risk components (probability of winning, cost of running, and level of office).

### H1: Main Effects Hypotheses

These hypotheses regard the main effect of gender on the two dependent variables: electoral risk perception and political ambition. Much scholarship has shown evidence of gender-based differences in risk perception in a vast number of areas and nearly universally across domains, particularly when faced with high risk scenarios. A major exception being in some social scenarios—where women may actually be more inclined to take a risk than a man. But, being as electoral risk is not compatible with other social domain risk measures it is thus reasonable to hypothesize that, with respect to electoral risk, women are more risk averse than men. To the extent that this type of risk, in turn, influences decisions about whether or not to seek political office, this type of risk perception would influence the political ambition of men and women in different ways. Thus, I suggest the following hypotheses for the direct effects of gender and electoral risk perception:

H1a: Women respondents will be less likely to exhibit political ambition than will men respondents.

H1b: Women respondents will perceive high-risk electoral environments as riskier than will men.

H1c: The more risky the perception of an electoral environment is perceived to be, the more political ambition will be depressed.

## H2: Interaction Effects Hypotheses

Within the realm of risk studies, namely in the realm of prospect theory, there are general arguments that high-risk scenarios are given very different consideration than are low-risk scenarios. Specifically, it is argued that when the pay-off is relatively high (high-risk), individuals are more likely to take a risk than when pay-off is relatively low (low-risk) (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Recall, however from Chapter 4, that there are evolutionary reasons to believe that context is crucial to gender differences in how these risk assessments play out. Women have demonstrated—across risk domains—a greater overall risk aversion (Byrnes et al, 1999), suggesting that there would be only a significant difference between men and women when they are evaluating electoral risk scenarios that are high-risk. Namely:

H2a: Women respondents will perceive high-risk electoral scenarios as more risky than will men respondents, but not low-risk scenarios.

I would then anticipate that these differences would translate into differences in political ambition between men and women. More specifically, that the greater risk aversion at higher levels



of electoral risk, there would be lower ambition among women than there would be among men. These hypotheses therefore suggest the mediating effect of electoral risk perception.

H2b: Men respondents will be more likely to run for political office under high risk electoral conditions than will women respondents, yet there will be no difference between men and women respondents running for political office under low-risk electoral conditions.

Finally, electoral risk is not a monolithic concept. The risk associated with any particular electoral environment—and thus the calculation of risk involved—is a factor of any number of factors that exists for that particular decision to run for office. In this study, I have examined three such factors—probability of winning, cost of running, and level of office. It is likely, therefore, that gender-based differences in risk calculations could extend to each of these individual components. For example, with respect to the cost of running, supporters of women in political office have often cited concerns over their fundraising prowess. Empirical support on this front is mixed (Bonneau, 2007; Burrell, 1995; Chase, 2012; Gaddie & Bullock, 1995; Herrick, 1996; Thompson, Moncreif, & Hamm, 1998) Regardless, it is well-established that incumbents nearly always have greater fundraising potential than do challengers (Bardwell, 2002; Biersack, Herrnson, & Wilcox, 1993; Bond, Covington, & Fleisher, 1985; Krasno, Green, & Cowden, 1994). With around 75 percent of currently serving elected officials being men (CAWP, 2013), men disproportionately benefit from this advantage. It would be expected, then, that women could be more intimidated by higher costs of running associated with seeking a political office.

H2c: At low costs of running (CoR), men and women respondents will be equally likely to run for political office. At high CoR, men respondents will be more likely to run for political office than will women respondents.

The same type of argument, relying on prospect theory, can be made regarding another common component of risk: probability of winning. Gender differences in risk perceptions are likely to be emphasized when a race is high risk because the odds of winning are low. However, there is also some discussion, both anecdotally in the political world and in women in politics literature, about women being more likely to be recruited to run as “sacrificial lambs” for offices when the probability of winning is clearly low (Carroll, 1994) that would also support a greater likelihood to see less of an effect from the probability of winning as these two motivations affect ambition differently.<sup>29</sup> Women are more averse to running in an election they are nearly certain to lose, but often are recruited to run in such elections anyway.

H2d: At both low and high probability of winning (PoW), men and women respondents will be equally likely to run for political office.

The higher level of risk associated with running for higher levels of political office would, according to gender-based differences in prospect theory (McDermott et al., 2008), should reduce the political ambition of women seeking higher levels of office, but not at lower levels where the pay-off is relatively smaller (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Furthermore, women tend to be more common at lower levels of office (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993) than at higher levels. This suggests that they are less averse to the risk involved at lower levels of office. There may also be role model and/or stereotype effect prompting women to believe local or lower-level office is more

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<sup>29</sup> This conclusion would prompt additional hypotheses that are beyond the immediate scope of this research.

appropriate for their ambitions. This prompts the following hypothesis regarding the component of risk at different levels of office:

H2e: At low levels of office (LoO), women respondents will be more likely to run for political office than will men respondents. At high LoO, men respondents will be more likely to run for political office than will women respondents.

Finally, it is possible that these three components of electoral risk interact with one another to affect men and women differently. There is no research to suggest what specific outcomes one might expect by these interactions. It is possible that, in some cases, they work in concert to strengthen or depress ambition beyond main effects. In others they may serve to dilute the effects of one another. I test the interaction effects here as well to provide some initial exploratory analysis of how these components, all prevalent in standard electoral environments, may be affecting the ambition of potential men and women candidates differently. This analysis is designed to identify where men and women may have different responses to particular combinations of electoral risk, considering both main and interaction effects

### *Methods*

The above hypotheses were tested using a between-subjects nine-cell experimental design (see Table 5.1). Critical measures and the manipulations (components of the manipulations) were pre-tested. Pre-testing was conducted with a convenience sample of 106 respondents from several of Wayne State University's Introduction to American Government (PS-1010) courses in Fall 2012. Each class was randomly assigned to one of four treatment conditions that varied the electoral risk scenario to be evaluated. The students were invited, via email, to voluntarily and anonymously complete an online survey. Pre-testing was specifically be geared at evaluating the

usefulness of measures of personal risk aversion, validating the values placed on “high” and “low” risk variables, and gauging the effectiveness of the candidate narratives to be used in the various experimental conditions.

ANOVA results of pretest measures indicated both statistically-significant evaluations of the low and high risk manipulations and of gender-based differences in evaluating them. While there was a small, but statistically significant ( $p > .001$ ) difference between the mean evaluations of the high and low risk electoral scenarios. There was also a statistically significant difference ( $p > .05$ ) between how risky the male and female students rated the high risk electoral scenario—with the men rating the scenario as less risky than the women did.

*Full Study.* The text of the nine manipulations can be found in Appendix A. The questionnaire also asked respondents a series of general and demographic questions, as well as a series of questions designed to assess general risk perception—items that have interdisciplinary validation from other studies of risk. The full questionnaire is found in Appendix B. Respondents were administered an experimental portion of the questionnaire which presented them with candidates in different electoral risk scenarios (i.e. the manipulations). The experimental conditions are indicated in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Stage One: *Factor Summary Tables*

		<i>Probability of Winning (PoW)</i>	
		<u>Low</u>	<u>High</u>
<i>Cost of running</i>	<u>Low</u>	1	2
( <i>CoR</i> )	<u>High</u>	3	4

		<i>Probability of Winning (PoW)</i>	
		Low	High
<i>Level of office (LoO)</i>	Low	5	6
	High	7	8
<i>Control</i>	n/a	9	

### *Measures.*

*Independent Variables.* The goal of this experiment was to demonstrate the effect of gender on political ambition in the context of varied levels of electoral risk, based on perceptions of risk. Thus, there are two independent variables: *gender* and *electoral risk perception* (electoral risk perception also serves as a dependent variable in the model, see below). *Gender* is a self-report measure of the respondent's gender. *Electoral risk perception* was measured based on how risky the respondent reported they found the *Level of electoral risk*, ranging from "not at all risky" to "very risky" on a 7-point scale. *Level of electoral risk* had three factors that each had an either "high" or "low" manipulation across the conditions. These factors of electoral risk, as described previously, are: the probability of winning, the cost, and the level of the office. Defined, these factors are:

- *Probability of winning (PoW)* is the average percentage of the vote the potential candidate's party received in the previous three elections in that particular race.
- *Value of the office* is the salary the particular office being sought would provide over the course of the entire term. I use *level of office (LoO)* as a proxy for this value, as it serves

to imply both what the salary associated with that office may be as well as distinguish between different levels of potential office-seeking. Existing scholarship has established gender differences within local, state, and federal office-seeking (CAWP, 2013; Foxe & Lawless, 2004; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993) and between legislative and executive positions (Fox & Oxley, 2003). This substitution thus serves to conceptualize both Rhode's (1979) intent and draws on related scholarship as well.

- *Cost of running* (CoR) as identified by the expenditures made by the previous successful candidate for that particular office.

Dependent Variables. Because the theoretical model (see Fig. 5.1) shows an interaction between *gender* and *electoral risk perception*, in that perception is influenced by gender, *electoral risk perception* also serves as a dependent variable in this analysis. The ultimate dependent variable here was an index of seven independent measures of political ambition that ask how likely an individual is to run for political office under certain circumstances. I conducted a factor analysis of these items to determine whether all seven measures sufficiently measured the same underlying concept well enough to combine into one indexed measure (see Appendix C). The items loaded on two factors, with all of the measures loading sufficiently high on the first factor—thus all seven were included in the indexed measure, *political ambition*. This created a 30-point scale. The component measures include the scenarios in Table 5.2 which ask the respondent to indicate how likely they are to seek political office (each on a five-point scale of “not at all likely” to “very likely”).

Table 5.2 Political Ambition Items Included in the Dependent Variable Index of Political Ambition

You believe running for office would be a good personal challenge.
You are displeased with the current officeholders.
You have significant concern over specific political issues.
You have significant concern over the direction of specific policy decisions.
You have a desire to serve your community.
You have a personal desire to run for political office.
You would serve in an unelected political position, but not run for one.

### *Experiment Execution & Sample*

Online questionnaires were created for each of the eight treatment conditions and the control condition using the online survey generator SurveyMonkey. The links generated by this service were, in turn, used in Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs) requests on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) service. MTurk was originally designed to accommodate businesses looking for individuals willing to complete small tasks without the need for hiring contractors, or part-time or temporary workers. The site has developed a substantial online market where Requestors (businesses or individuals looking for help with tasks) can post job assignments and Workers (individuals with the time and necessary skill) can complete those assignments for typically small, no-strings attached payments.

MTurk is increasingly used in academic research primarily for help with survey research, predominantly in social psychology, although other disciplines are starting to utilize the service as well because it provides near instant and low-cost access to subject pools. Validation studies have shown that results obtained using an MTurk sample for survey-based experiments can be more generalizable than the more traditional sample of college undergraduates (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2011; Mason & Suri, 2012; Sprouse, 2011).

This study employed a sample of 502 MTurk Workers. The nine conditions were posted as HITs to the site on July 11, 2013. There is no formal way of preventing a Worker from completing more than one survey,<sup>30</sup> so three separate measures were taken to try to identify and remove any duplicates from the dataset. In all, five cases were suspect as potential duplicates and were removed from the dataset, resulting in 498 usable cases. MTurk does not facilitate random assignment across conditions. Respondents, however, did de facto randomly choose a condition in that one HIT (representing a unique condition) was posted at a time and participants had no indication of which they were completing as they chose to participate in the survey. For a vast majority of the standard measures (e.g. income, education, political interest, standard risk measures) included on the questionnaire, there were no statistically significant differences among the treatment conditions. There were, however, a number of measures where there were differences among treatment conditions (i.e. political ideology, gender, age, and two of the standard risk measures). Additional analyses were run to control for these differences (i.e. OLS regression). Controlling for these differences did not have any impact on the overall results of the experiment.

The sample was comprised of 277 men and 195 women. The average age was 33 years<sup>31</sup>, but it ranged from age 18-69. Most respondents had at least some college education, with 35 percent indicating they had earned a bachelor's degree. Politically, while more respondents affiliated as liberals and as Democrats than they did conservatives and Republicans, the largest

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<sup>30</sup> One of the limitations of MTurk is that there is no way to list one HIT with multiple conditions, thus, it is not possible to officially prevent a Worker from completing more than one survey condition. I managed this in three ways so I could remove any duplicate responses. First, I requested Workers not respond to similar HITs (IRB requirements prevented me from refusing to compensate those who did). Second, I collected the respondent's unique Worker ID and checked for duplicates. Third, SurveyMonkey automatically captures the respondents' IP address, so I checked for duplicates among those as well.

<sup>31</sup> The 2010 U.S. Census reports the average age of the American population is 37.2. See [http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010\\_census/cb11-cn147.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb11-cn147.html).



percentage of the sample labeled themselves a moderate ideologically (22.6 percent) and politically (28.2 percent). Two-thirds (66.6 percent) indicated that they follow politics at least somewhat closely.

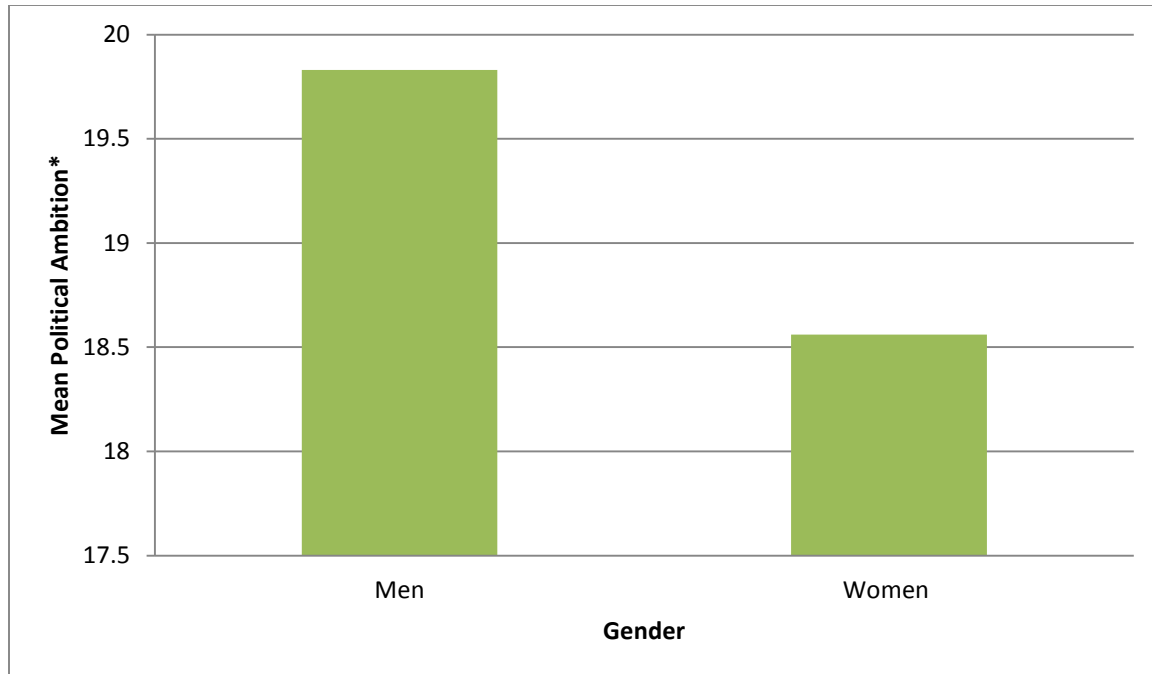
In terms of political ambition, only 2.4 percent indicated that they had ever run for political office—which is consistent with other studies of political participation (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). Because most members of the general population have not or are not currently holding or seeking political office, this study employs measures of nascent ambition (Fox & Lawless, 2005; Lawless & Fox, 2010). Nearly all of the respondents, regardless of treatment condition, indicated that they may seek office under certain conditions.

## Findings

Because the experiment allowed for random assignment that theoretically controls for other variations in the sample, results could be analyzed using difference in means testing and ANOVA. This analysis allowed me to identify whether there were differences in the means among and between the treatment condition groups. A statistically significant difference in a mean in ANOVA would indicate an effect of the factors being tested.

*Main Effects.* The results of Hypothesis 1a, the main effect of gender on political ambition are displayed in Fig. 5.2. As hypothesized, and consistent with much scholarship on the topic, the men were more likely to indicate a desire to seek political office than were women ( $p > .05$ ).

Fig. 5.2 *Difference in Means for Political Ambition, by Gender*



Difference between the mean levels of the political ambition (on an indexed scale of seven items) of men and women is statistically significant\* ( $p > .05$ ). Higher bars correspond to greater political ambition.

H1b hypothesized the main effect of gender on electoral risk perception, positing that high risk conditions would solicit higher risk perception from women than such conditions would for men. There is limited support for this hypothesis. Of the two overall high-risk manipulations (manipulations 3 and 7), manipulation 3 elicited marginally significant ( $p > .1$ ) difference in mean perception rankings between men and women (see Figure 5.3) with women ranking the risk a full point higher than the men.

*Fig. 5.3 Difference in Means for Electoral Risk Perception in High Risk Scenarios, by Gender*

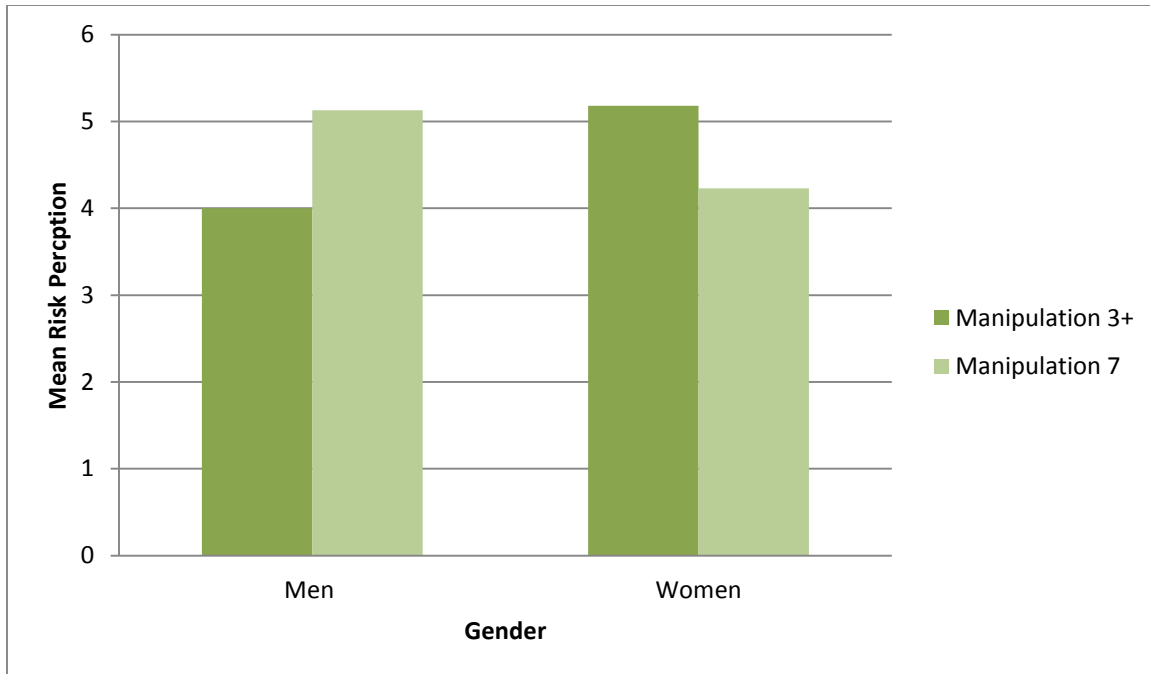


Fig. 5.3. Difference between the mean levels of the risk perception of men and women (in the overall-high risk manipulations). Manipulation 3 is marginally statistically significant+ ( $p>.1$ ); manipulation 7 was not significant. Higher bars correspond with higher levels of risk perception.

H1c hypothesized the direct effect of *electoral risk perception* on *political ambition*, suggesting that the higher the perceived risk, the lower the level of political ambition. There was no significantly significant difference between the means in each of the experimental conditions, and thus no evidence to support this hypothesis.

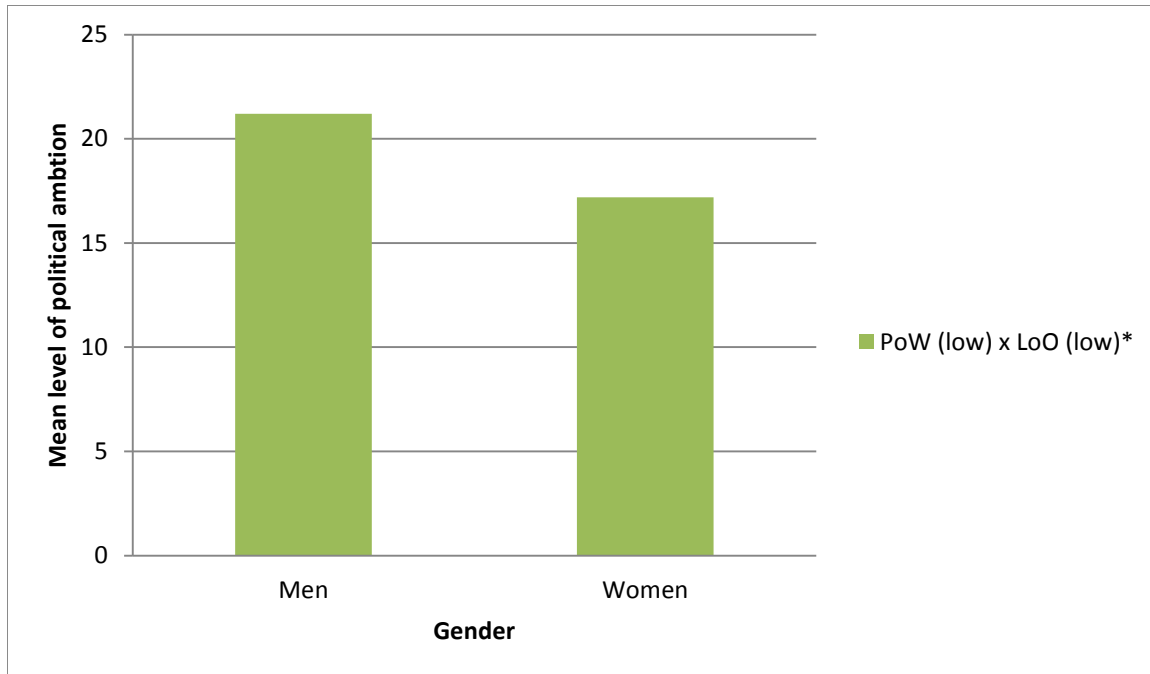
*Interactions.* The second set of hypotheses takes this analysis a step further to evaluate whether the level of risk in a particular electoral environment differentially affects the level of political ambition exhibited by men and women. H2a stated that men would be more likely than women to exhibit political ambition when overall risk was high and that there would be no difference when risk was low. Here again, I use the manipulations with overall high or low levels of risk (manipulations 3 and 6 and manipulations 2 and 7, respectively) to demonstrate these effects. There was, however, no evidence to support the theory that men and women's political ambition is differentially affected by high risk as there was no statistically significant difference in the ambition exhibited by the two genders in either of the two overall high-risk manipulations. There was also no statistically significant difference in the ambition exhibited by the genders in either of the two overall low-risk manipulations, which was consistent with the latter part of H2a which posited that low-risk electoral environments would not differentially affect the ambition of men and women.

The remaining hypotheses (H2b-d) deconstruct this study's conception of electoral risk to isolate the potential effect of the risk components that are included as either low or high into the risk scenarios in each of the manipulations—cost of running, probability of winning, and level of office. H2b stated that when a race had a high CoR, men would exhibit higher political ambition than would women, while at low CoR there would be no difference between the genders. H2c suggested that the probability of winning would not prompt gender-based differences in ambition; for both low and high PoW, men and women respondents will be equally likely to indicate they would run. There was, indeed, no statistically significant effect of PoW on the political ambitions of men and women. There

was also no support for a differential effect of the level of office, as was posited in H2c. Overall, these three components of risk showed no evidence of having interaction effects, that is, these three components of electoral risk did not interact with one another in a way that provoked a statistically significant effect on ambition.

Finally, the exploratory analysis that examined the effect of political ambition when different risk components were paired revealed some notable interactions between the components. *Cost of running* did not have any statistically significant effect when considered with either of the other two risk components. There is, however, some evidence that men are more politically ambitious than women when there is a low probability of winning at a low level of office. There is a statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) difference in the means of men and women's political ambition when the electoral environment contains an interaction of these two components. The means, by gender, specific to this interaction are displayed in Figure 5.4.

Fig. 5.4 Difference in Mean Level of Political Ambition (PoW=low, LoO=low), by Gender



Difference between the mean levels of the political ambition of men and women when both the probability of winning and the level of office are low. Statistically significant\* ( $p > .05$ ). A higher bar corresponds with a higher level of political ambition.

Specific to this finding, the mean level of political ambition for men was 21.2, while the mean for women was only 17.2 (see Fig. 5.4). This difference could represent, for example, the difference between being “likely” and “very likely” to seek political office under more than half of the conditions included in the *political ambition* index, arguably an important difference in terms of ambition level.

### Discussion

Despite lack of support for many of the hypotheses, there was some evidence for the interaction effect of the risk components *probability of winning* and *level of office* on political ambition. Specifically, there were significant differences between the political ambition exhibited by men and women when the level of risk is high in terms of the probability of winning, but low in terms of the risk at the level of office. This singular finding offers some important insight. For instance, it suggests a daunting local race is more likely to attract men as candidates than it is

women candidates. Considering local races are frequently where politicians cut their teeth in politics, this could be an important factor keeping women out of the candidate pipeline and, ultimately, serving to depress levels of representation at higher levels of office.

Knowing this type of environment presents a risk evaluation that discourages women from seeking local office can be important for numerous reasons. First of all, it could influence the types of races we recruit women to. Being pragmatic enough to realize women are concerned about their probability of women could mean focusing efforts on recruiting women to races that are competitive in other ways. It could also mean that there are strategic efforts that organizations that support women as candidates could do in order to make particular races more competitive for women (e.g. increased fundraising). Whether the effect of these additional efforts was real or imagined, they could encourage women to be more likely to emerge as candidates in these lower-probability-of-winning local races.

Finally, this knowledge may be useful to political parties and organizations that recruit and provide training to women who have an interest in running for public office. Recall that the electoral scenarios that men and women evaluated were identical; it was their perceptions that varied. If women were educated to better understand the actual (rather than perceived) risk involved in seeking the office, perhaps they would be more inclined to run. Knowledge, is, after all, power. The most promising aspect of this is that research has shown that, overall, women are much more likely to seek lower level office than they are higher-level office, so finding women to recruit, support, and educate should be less of a challenge and thus offers more potential to affect change.

This experiment did not reveal substantial evidence of gender-based differences in risk perception that, in turn, lead to long-established (and confirmed in this study) gender differences in political ambition. I would argue, however, based on well-established gender-based differences (see Chapter 3) in a multitude of psychological realms, which these lacking findings are not due to a problematic theory, but rather in experimental design and implementation. I propose three reasons that a majority of this study's hypotheses were not supported.

First, MTurk is still a new research tool. While some studies have offered validation in support of using MTurk workers as research subjects, this study was distinct and more complex than a simple survey. It is difficult to establish whether the subject pool was properly motivated by the meager reward offered (50 cents) to take the time and effort required to fully read, comprehend, and consider the electoral scenarios they were being asked to evaluate. According to SurveyMonkey metrics, the average time spent on each of the surveys was just over 6 minutes, which is perhaps very little time to appropriately reflect on the manipulations. Considering the somewhat nuanced differences in the risk components, attention to the detail contained in the vignettes was critical to the effectiveness of the manipulations.

Relatedly, it is also possible that for a survey participant pool that admittedly has only a moderate (or less) interest in politics,<sup>32</sup> the vignettes did not appropriately connect with respondents who were not familiar with the challenges candidates face when considering a run. The fact that pre-testing, with undergraduates in a political science course, revealed results more consistent with the hypothesized relationships could indicate that some exposure to political themes and concepts is helpful in evaluating campaigns and/or considering embarking on one. This

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<sup>32</sup> 71.8 percent of participants reported that they “followed politics” less than very closely (not at all, somewhat closely, or closely).



possibility would be consistent with other academic investigations of political ambition that, almost without exception, have exclusively used subjects who either run for office (Beldsoe & Herring, 1990; Burrell, 1996; Burt-Way & Kelly, 1992; Costantini, 1990; Palmer & Simon, 2003; Rohde, 1979) or who have very serious potential for doing so (Clark, Hadly, & Darcy, 1989; Fox & Lawless, 2005; Lawless & Fox, 2010; Sapiro, 1982 but see a very recent exception Lawless & Fox, 2013). The manipulations would have had to be more potent (and perhaps less complex) to be scenarios that the average “consumer” of politics would be able to not only comprehend, but also to accurately evaluate the risk involved.

It is also possible that, given that the average person never considers seeking political office, the vignettes did not provoke a relevant real consideration for the participants. It may be necessary that political ambition research that attempts to accurately evaluate such ambition must start with a population of individuals who have, through some form of participation in politics, displayed nascent ambition. I would suggest that this study might be more effectively completed using either a sample of individuals who indicate some level of nascent political ambition or, following the more traditional approach, those who have exhibited this ambition by running (successfully or not) for elective office.

It is, then, plausible to think that—based on the above weaknesses of the experimental design—that if the theory remains sound I would still see evidence of the effect of risk on political ambition in the natural electoral environment where we are dealing with political candidates who are ipso facto both interested in electoral politics enough to understand risk and politically ambitious enough to carefully consider it. This is exactly the type of evidence Stage Two looks to establish in Chapter 6.

I would also argue that there would be justification in replicating this experiment using a different sample. Certainly participants who were either identified as potential candidates or who were current officeholders would: 1) find the electoral scenarios relevant enough for careful consideration, 2) understand the various risk components being considered, and 3) have enough political ambition (whether nascent or not) for the risk evaluations to have appropriate realism.

## Chapter Six: *Stage Two*: Evidence of Gender-Based Differences in Electoral Risk Perception in the Electoral Environment: Candidacies in U.S. States

In the previous chapter, I used an experimental design in an effort to demonstrate gender-based differences in how men and women perceive electoral risk and that these differences affect the likelihood that individuals will seek political office. While the experimental results were not compelling, they do provide an empirical foundation for exploring evidence in existent electoral environments. In this chapter, I describe Stage Two of this study which offers methodological triangulation in order to bolster the external validity of the hypothesized experimental findings in Chapter 5. This stage of investigation examines a dataset of candidacies from 2010 in a sample of U.S. states for evidence that men and women who have considered candidacies (whether they be decisions of emergent, static, progressive, or--in a very few cases--regressive ambition)<sup>33</sup> were affected differently by the level of risk in the electoral environment they were considering.

In Stage Two, I collected data about emergent candidates, non-office holders seeking an office,<sup>34</sup> and office holders who chose to run in 2010. To create the dataset, I first identified states that have accessible online data regarding state elections and stratified them with the intent of

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<sup>33</sup> This study has employed the typology first introduced by Schlesinger Joseph Schlesinger, *Ambition and Politics : Political Careers in the United States* (Rand McNally, 1966). and employed widely throughout discussions of political ambition. Politicians who seek re-election are considered to have *static* ambition, while those that seek higher office are said to be exhibiting *progressive* ambition. Though it is considerably more rare<sup>33</sup>, officeholders who choose to seek a lower office have *regressive* ambition. To this typology, I add *emergent* ambition—political ambition that is exhibited by newcomers to the political scene. Candidate emergence is a relatively new area of study in political ambition research but is important to include in ambition discussions since new candidates enter the political scene in every election and, for the purposes of this study, are forced to evaluate the risk environment as well.

<sup>34</sup> In most cases emergent candidacies are a first run for elective office in that in the preceding year (2009-2010), the individual was not an incumbent office holder. It is possible, however, that the individual had either 1) held elective office previously, but had a gap in their term(s) of office so that they were not serving in 2009-2010 leading up to a 2010 candidacy or 2) had sought elective office in the past, but had not been successful. Do to the difficulty in tracking, neither of these conditions was tracked and any individual in the dataset that was not an incumbent of some kind in 2009-2010 is considered an emergent candidacy. The true definition of an emergent candidacy, however, would likely be considered an individual who is seeking their very first elective office.

selecting a sample of states by the percentage of women serving in the state legislature<sup>35</sup>—a proxy for the historical level of support for women in politics in the state. I excluded the fifteen states that observe term limits, because these limits institutionalize artificial constraints on static ambition and create an artificial increase in progressive ambition (NCSL, 2013). These criteria pointed to three states for data collection: Vermont (high in number of elected women), Georgia (moderate in number of elected women), and Wyoming (low in number of elected women). Selection of these cases also provides varied geographic and partisan representation. Vermont, a fairly liberal state, represents the more Democratic northeastern states. Wyoming, one of the country's most conservative states, is one of the more Republican western states. Finally, Georgia—while one of the consistently Republican-leaning southern states—has some balance between the two parties (Democrat and Republican) at the state level. Because states completed post-2010 Census redistricting that affected constituency characteristics for many of the offices included in the dataset in 2012, 2010 election data are used to avoid the influence of new constituency and district considerations in the candidates' decision-making processes.

From this sample of states, I first collected lists of serving elected officials prior to the 2010 election during the 2009-2010 calendar years. I then cross-referenced this list with Secretaries-of-State data that identified candidates who filed to seek elective office in the 2010 election cycle to identify whether the elected officials chose not to seek re-election, sought re-election to their current seat, or sought election to a higher office. To this list, I added emergent candidates in the 2010 primaries who were not current officeholders in the state at the time of the 2010 elections. In each of these states these candidacies included candidates for state house of representative and

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<sup>35</sup> Percentages of are as of 2012, but these percentages don't tend to fluctuate greatly. Each of the three states had similar percentages of women serving in 2010—the year from which the data remaining election data were collected.

senate (or assembly), statewide elective offices,<sup>36</sup> and federal offices that were up for consideration on the 2010 ballot. In Wyoming and Vermont, third parties tend to be more active and successful (thus the candidates were more apt to be making more traditional decisions whether or not to seek office because they had a semblance of viability not afforded to third party candidates elsewhere), so these candidates were included in the analysis when information was available on them.<sup>37</sup> In Georgia, where there were very few formal third party candidacies and they were not included. This resulted in a dataset comprised of 1184 primary and general election candidacies across the three states—both incumbent and emergent candidates.

I also collected data pertaining to the risk variables for each candidate. Arguably, there are any numbers of factors in an electoral environment that suggest a consideration of risk. However, to capture some of those with major significance, I incorporate measures for level of office, cost of running, and probability of winning. These three factors mirror those discussed in the few seminal studies of the role of risk in political ambition (Black, 1972; Prewitt, 1970) and, while they are operationalized in different ways, replicate those utilized by Rhode (1979). Candidacies were classified according to the political typology indicated in Table 6.1.

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<sup>36</sup> Georgia holds statewide popular elections for some obscure commission heads (e.g. commissioners of agriculture, securities, insurance, etc.). Because of the relatively unusual nature of these offices as elective positions, they were not included in the analysis.

<sup>37</sup> Vermont, for instance only required campaign finance disclosures be filed by political parties with major party status, which—in 2010—included only the Democrat, Republican, and Progressive Parties.

Table 6.1. Typology of Political Ambition

Type of Ambition	Description
Regressive	Elected official seeks a lower office
Discrete	Elected official does not seek re-election to any office
Static	Elected official seeks re-election to their existing office
Progressive	Elected official seeks re-election to a higher office
Emergent	Non-office holder seeks election to any office

Adapted from Schlesinger (1966).

*Descriptives.* The dataset consists of 1182 candidates. The number of candidates from each state is reflective of the differences in population and relative sizes of their state legislatures (and thus number of elected officials) among them. There are 225 from Wyoming, 403 from Vermont, and 554 from Georgia. The sample is roughly 74.7 percent male, which is consistent with the nationwide average across elected positions (CAWP, 2012). Of these candidates, 52.8 percent were Republicans, 40.2 percent were Democrats, and 5.8 percent were members of various other third parties.<sup>38</sup> More than half, 54.7 percent, were emergent candidates who did not hold any political office when they ran in 2010, while the remainder—45.3 percent—were incumbent officeholders. In 2010, 8.5 percent of the incumbents (n=100) did not seek re-election or another political office. A vast majority of the candidates were candidates for state legislative positions.

Table 6.2 provides a breakdown of the offices candidates were seeking:

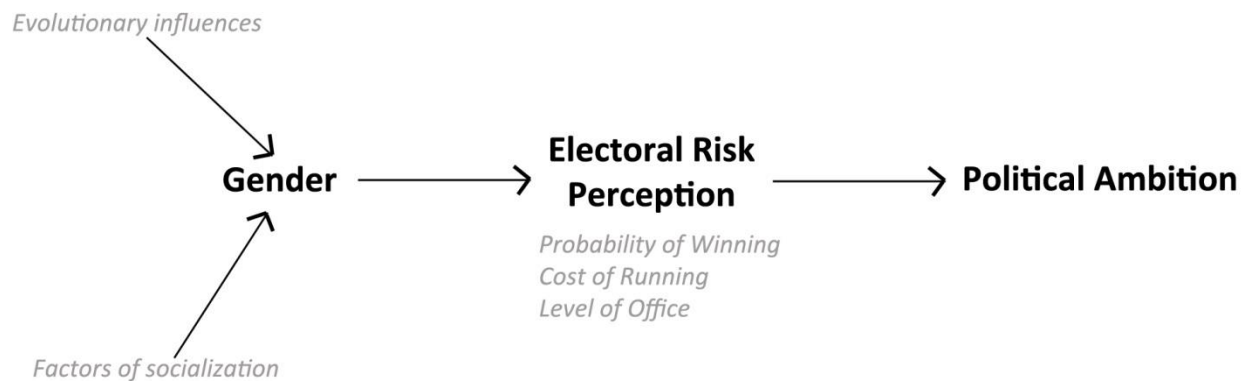
<sup>38</sup> Predominantly the Libertarian and Progressive parties.

Table 6.2 Number of Candidates and Gender Per Office Included in Sample

<b>Office Sought</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>% of Sample</b>	<b>% women</b>
State Representative	693	58.6%	29.4
State Senate	216	18.3%	22.7
State Superintendent of Schools	11	.9%	27.3
State Auditor	7	.6%	14.3
State Treasurer	4	.3%	0
Secretary of State	16	1.4%	31.3
Attorney General	10	.8%	30
Lt. Governor	10	.8%	30
Governor	39	3.3%	20.5
U.S. House of Representatives	66	5.6%	13.6
U.S. Senate	10	.8%	0

These data allow for a statistical analysis of the impact of risk on the decision to act or not act on types of ambition (see Table 6.1) in a way that demonstrates the applicability of the psychological measures identified in Stage One of this research and consistent with the overall theoretical model discussed throughout this study (see Fig. 6.1). Stage Two specifically examines the second relationship in the model: the effect of electoral risk on political ambition.

Figure 6.1 Theoretical Model of the Influences of Gender and Electoral Risk Perception on Political Ambition



In this theoretical context, I generally hypothesize that there will be gender differences in the political ambition exhibited by the candidates in this dataset in 2010. Furthermore, there will be gender-based differences in the three risk-based explanatory variables: probability of winning, cost of running, and level of office. Ultimately, I hypothesize that women candidates will exhibit lower levels of political ambition because they (ostensibly) have a greater perception of risk. As such, using this unique data set, I addressed the hypotheses described below.

Because there is much scholarship that points to the gender gap in political ambition and the paucity of women candidates and elected officials would indicate this gap exists, I naturally offer several hypotheses that suggest that women will not exhibit the same level of political ambition as their male counterparts. H1, then, attempts to confirm the existence of this same phenomenon within my dataset.

*H1: Ambition Hypothesis:* Male candidates will be more likely than female candidates to exhibit emergent ambition or pursue higher elective office than female elected officials regardless of the risk environment.



However, this dissertation is designed to particularly illuminate the interaction between a candidate's gender and their perception of risk. As Chapter Three describes, there exists an extensive body of literature that suggest that women are more risk averse than men and Chapter Four offers an evolutionary reason why these differences may exist in the realm of electoral politics. Therefore, H2 posits that when an electoral environment is considered higher-risk, there will be gender-based differences in the type of ambition displayed by the candidates in the dataset. Specifically, it reads:

*H2: High-Risk Ambition Hypothesis:* Male candidates will be more likely to pursue initial or higher elective office than female elected officials in high-electoral risk environments.

While the concept is tangential to this study, it seems relevant that a political environment that has been traditionally hospitable to women (as in states where they have had historically higher levels of representation) would offer a less-risky environment for a woman to seek elective office. I thus hypothesize in H3 that the “friendlier” a state is to women in politics, the more likely it is that women will seek elective and higher office in that state.<sup>39</sup>

*H3: Female-Friendly State Ambition Hypothesis:* Women candidates in states with relatively high numbers of women in elected office (Vermont) will be more likely to pursue re-election (static ambition) and higher elective office (progressive ambition) than women elected officials in states with historically low numbers of women in elected office (Wyoming). Men's ambition will be unaffected.

Finally, as I detailed in Chapter Five, electoral risk is not a uni-dimensional concept and

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<sup>39</sup> This hypothesis is an additional dimension of investigation added in Chapter Six since this is a structural consideration for candidates that would not lend itself well to experimental manipulation.

some factors that play into the overall risk assessment of a particular candidacy may affect men differently than they affect women. Here, I suggest that a low probability of winning a race, a higher level of office, and a relatively high cost of running will depress a female candidate's ambition more so than it will a man's ambition. These hypotheses suggest that these three factors—while all components of the risk within a decision to seek elective office—will have varying levels of effect on the political ambition of men and women.

*H4: Differential Influence of Risk Variables Hypotheses:*

*H4a: Probability of Winning Hypothesis:* the lower the chance of winning, the lower the female candidate's ambition will be relative to men's.

*H4b: Level of Office Hypothesis:* The higher the level of office, the lower the female candidate's ambition will be relative to men's.

*H4c: Cost of Running Hypothesis:* The higher the cost of running, the lower the female candidate's ambition will be relative to men's.

## Methods

*Model.* The following analysis tests the following model:

Gender+Historical Representation+CoR+LoO+PoW=risk aversion→political ambition

The following is a discussion of the explanatory and control variables that were included in the model for all hypotheses and how these variables were operationalized.

### *Explanatory Variables*

Gender. A dummy variable for gender is included. An entry for each candidate is coded 0=male, 1=female.

Historical Representation. This measure takes into consideration how many women are serving in the state legislature (as of 2012) as a proxy for the state's historical level of support for women candidates. Each candidate is labeled according to which state they came from. Wyoming, a state which has lower levels of women serving (16.7 percent), is coded as 0=low. Georgia, with moderate levels of women serving (23.7 percent), is coded as 1=moderate; and Vermont, which has relatively high levels of women serving (38.9 percent), is coded as 2=high (CAWP, 2012) .

Risk variables. *Cost of Running* is calculated as the campaign expenditures for each 2010 candidate reported to the state (for state-based candidacies) or Federal Election Commission (for federal candidates). For candidates who did not win their primary election (if applicable), this calculation is based on funds expended in their primary contest. If a candidate either had no primary contest or won the primary and proceeded to the general election, the calculation is based on funds expended in both the primary (if applicable) and general elections—as indicated on the total 2010 expenditures reported on the final report of the year.<sup>40</sup>

Since there is state-to-state variation in the commitment required and the professionalism of many state offices, *Level of Office*, is operationalized as the pay for the office being sought rather than the actual level of the office. This allows for a more objective measure across states.

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<sup>40</sup> Enforcement of state reporting requirements appears to be lacking. As such, many candidates either did not file reports at all or filed reports indicating they spent \$0 on their campaigns. While it is certainly possible that many of these candidates spent little on their candidacies, anyone who actively campaigned should have had some sum to report. A vast majority of these \$0 and missing reports came from candidates who did very poorly in predominantly the primary elections. Reports of \$0 and non-reports were excluded from the cost-of-running component of the analysis.

Each of the three states included in the dataset has a different structure for compensating state officeholders. In Wyoming, a part-time legislature that has very brief legislative sessions, lawmakers are compensated per diem. In 2010, the legislative session lasted only 25 consecutive days (February 8-March 5). Both members of the House of Representatives and The Senate were compensated a \$259 per day (NCSL, 2010),<sup>41</sup> for a total compensation of \$6475.<sup>42</sup> Georgia state legislators were paid a salary of \$35,853 per year (calculated from NCSL, 2010), which includes a \$173 per diem for each of the 107 days of the year's legislative session (January 11-April 29). Vermont has a similar structure. State Assembly Members are paid \$604.79/week during session and \$112/day for special sessions or interim committee meetings, as well as \$101/day for lodging and a \$61 per diem. The 2010 legislative session ran 20 weeks (January 5-May 12), creating an estimated salary of \$24,635. Other offices (Governor, Secretary of State, Members of Congress, etc.) were more straightforward and the reported 2010 salary of each office was used.

*Probability of Winning* is a measure of the actual percentage of the vote that the candidate received. Because of limitation in collecting pre-election data about the likelihood of a candidate winning, I use the actual percentage of the vote as a proxy. Presumably, candidates either have an idea of how well they are likely to do in a particular race, can base their judgments upon historical information, or—in some cases—have polling data that help inform their perceptions about how likely a win is in a given race. Here again, if a candidate had a primary and did not win, this measure is captured from their primary race—the percentage of the vote they received in the primary. If the candidate either: 1) had no primary, 2) was unopposed in the primary, 3) or was the

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<sup>41</sup> This is actually a reflection of two numbers combined. Wyoming pays a base pay of \$150 per day, per session in addition to a per diem of \$109 per day, per session.

<sup>42</sup> This makes Wyoming state legislators the third lowest paid in the nation, behind New Mexico (which are not paid) and New Hampshire which pays its legislators \$200/2 year term National Conferences of State Legislatures NCSL, "2010 Legislator Compensation Data" <http://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/2010-legislator-compensation-data.aspx>.

winner of the primary, the measure captures the percentage of the vote the candidate received in the general election.

*Overall Risk* is a subjective composite measure of the three risk variables that ranks the race's overall level of risk as low (0), moderate (1), or high (2). This variable was coded based on the interpretation of the overall risk posed by the risk measures. Because of the subjectivity, the variable was coded twice by separate coders—with 88 percent inter-coder reliability.

*Incumbency.* Incumbency is a dummy variable (0=non-incumbent; 1=incumbent) for whether a candidate was serving as an elected official immediately preceding the 2010 election (office held in 2009-2010). Much research has shown incumbency has distinct advantages (e.g. Erickson, 1971; Gelman & King, 1990; Levitt & Wolfram, 1997) and could thus skew how a candidate views the risk (or lack thereof) he or she faces in a particular electoral environment.

*Political party.* The Democratic Party has been historically more supportive of female candidates than the Republican Party has been. To compensate for this potential effect on the quality and strength of candidates, a variable for party is included. It is coded as 0=Republican, 1=Democratic, and 2=Other.<sup>43</sup>

*Open seat.* This variable is a dummy for whether the seat is an open seat with two non-incumbent candidates seeking the seat or if the seat is being contested by either the incumbent office holder or by one or more “heir-apparent”—an individual with progressive ambition. This

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<sup>43</sup> One of the states included in the sample, Vermont, famously has a good number of political independents. Despite the relative success of a few of these parties, none of them conduct primary elections (in any of the three states) and are thus lumped together into one “other” category.

distinction was made for each race based on comparison of primary election candidate rosters (2010) with current (2009-2010) officeholders.

### Dependent Variable

*Political ambition.* The dependent variable in this analysis is political ambition, specifically ambition that requires the additional risk of being an emergent candidate or exhibiting progressive ambition. This measure was coded based on the decision each individual made about pursuing political office in 2010—as interpreted by whether they were an incumbent that chose not to seek re-election or another office (discrete political ambition=-2), an incumbent that chose to seek a lower office (regressive ambition=1), an incumbent that sought re-election (static ambition=0), an incumbent who sought a higher office (progressive ambition=1), and a candidate who did not previously hold elective office seeking office (emergent ambition=2). Because risk measures would only be available for candidates who actually chose to seek office, only static, progressive, and emergent ambition were included in the analysis.<sup>44</sup> These codes were folded into a dichotomous dependent variable that distinguished between static (0) and emergent/progressive (1) ambition.<sup>45</sup>

The hypotheses were tested using a combination of ANOVA and OLS regression models.

### Results

H1 asked whether there were differences between the mean levels of ambition exhibited, overall, between men and women. Without considerations for other effects (i.e. explanatory and

<sup>44</sup> No candidate in the dataset exhibited regressive ambition.

<sup>45</sup> This seemed a natural grouping since static ambition is qualitatively distinct from emergent and progressive ambitions—both of which require a candidate to seek an office they never have before.

control variables), there is a marginally-significant<sup>46</sup> ( $p>.1$ ) difference and in the expected direction between the instance of men exhibiting emergent/progressive ambition and women (see Table 6.3)—with—as is commonly reported in political ambition literature—men more likely to be ambitious than women.

Table 6.3. Difference in Means Test of Political Ambition of Men and Women Candidates

Source	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	313.025	13334.957	.000
Candidate GENDER	.633	2.827	.093+
Error	.234		

a. R-squared=.003

+  $p>.1$

This small difference in mean levels of political ambition between men and women is, however, not unexpected. What this study ultimately aimed to demonstrate was the interaction between gender and risk, such as H2 implies. H2 posits that when levels of risk are high women will be less likely to exhibit emergent or progressive ambition than will men. While multiple regression analysis confirmed that political ambition is reduced when overall risk is high (see Table 6.4), H2 was not confirmed. High levels of risk are associated with reduced political ambition for both men and women ( $p>.001$ ;  $p>.05$ , respectively), however, this effect is unexpectantly slightly more potent on men than it is on women. An ANOVA indicated that this gender-based difference was marginally-significant ( $p>.1$ ).

<sup>46</sup> With alpha levels relaxed.

Table 6.4. OLS Regression Model Political Ambition of Men and Women Candidates, Overall Risk

		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>			
gender of candidate		Unstandardized	Standardized	t	Sig.
		Coefficients	Coefficients		
		B	Beta		
	(Constant)	-.984		-	.000
				59.353	
	% women	.024	.024	1.632	.104
Male	political party of candidate	.003	.004	.254	.800
	Incumbent	.878	.890	49.357	.000**
	OPEN seat?	.064	.065	3.862	.000**
	OVERALL_RISK	-.067	-.091	-5.928	.000**
	(Constant)	-.989		-	.000**
				30.140	
	% women	.074	.070	2.452	.016*
Female	political party of candidate	-.025	-.026	-.927	.356
	Incumbent	.936	.948	30.638	.000**
	OPEN seat?	-.008	-.008	-.270	.788
	OVERALL_RISK	-.053	-.070	-2.562	.012*

a. Dependent Variable: Ambition (static v. progressive/emergent)

\*\* p>.001, \* p>.05

As expected, incumbency is a powerful control variable in all of the analyses reported here. What is particularly interesting, however, is how when the number of women incumbents in a state, or, put another way, the percentage of women serving in the state legislature, is included as an overall predictor variable in the models, you see the type of relationship hypothesized in H3. Here, I hypothesized that the higher the percentage of women serving was in a state, the more emergent and progressive ambition you would see among women. As Table 6.4 indicates, not surprisingly, there is not a statistically significant effect of the percentage of women lawmakers in the state on men, but women candidates' ambition is encouraged by the existing level of women's representation in the state.



The fourth set of hypotheses examined the individual effects of the three risk variables included in this analysis. When cost of running, pay of office, and probability of winning are included as separate measures in the analysis, the role of risk on political ambition becomes less clear. As Table 6.5 indicates, there is mixed support for hypotheses H4a-c.

Table 6.5 OLS Regression Model Political Ambition of Men and Women Candidates, Risk Components

gender of candidate		Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Beta		
Male	(Constant)	-1.017		-69.134	.000
	% women	.036	.036	2.480	.014*
	political party of candidate	.003	.003	.227	.820
	Incumbent	.913	.925	56.905	.000**
	OPEN seat?	.058	.059	3.758	.000**
	Probability of Winning	4967E-007	.001	.109	.913
	Cost of Running	-.002	-.002	-.158	.874
	Pay of Office	-6.879E-007	-.075	-5.257	.000**
Female	(Constant)	-1.068		-29.658	.000**
	% women	.062	.058	2.193	.030*
	political party of candidate	-.018	-.020	-.769	.443
	Incumbent	.909	.918	25.611	.000**
	OPEN seat?	.013	.012	.411	.682
	Probability of Winning	.001	.071	2.230	.028*
	Cost of Running	-.011	-.016	-.618	.538
	Pay of Office	-3.879E-007	-.031	-1.208	.230

a. Dependent Variable: Ambition (static v. progressive/emergent)

\*\* p>.001, \* p>.05

*Probability of Winning* (H4a) did not have a statistically significant effect on men's political ambition. It was, however, associated with a significant ( $p>.05$ ) increase in women's ambition. *Level of Office* (H4b) was, recall, tested by using a proxy—pay of the office being sought.<sup>47</sup> The pay for the office being sought did not have a statistically significant impact on

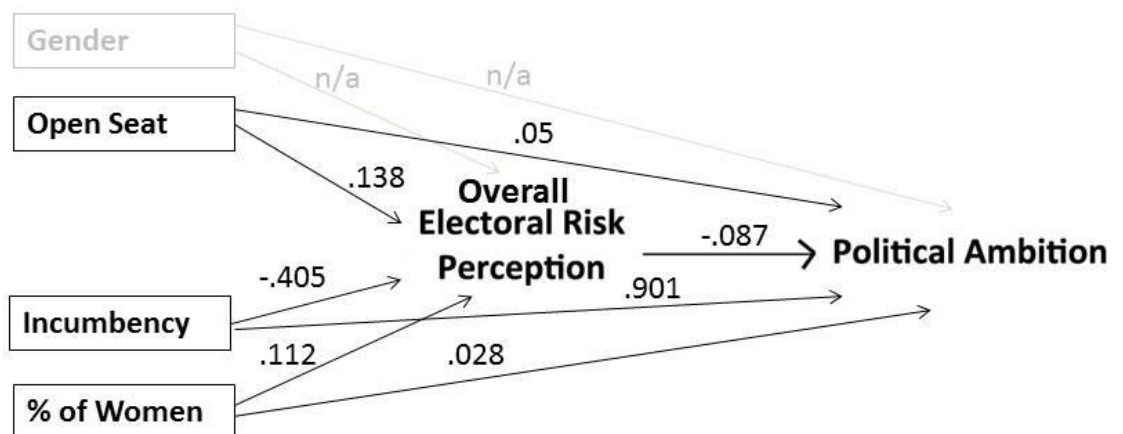
<sup>47</sup> Though a preliminary analysis using the level of office was also done and results were similar.

women's ambition, but was associated with a depression of men's ambition ( $p > .001$ ). In other words, when an office paid more, men were slightly less likely to run for them than when the office paid less. It is not clear from the data collected here why that may be the case, or why it would be something that affected men but not women. It was hypothesized that women would be deterred by a higher level of office while men would be unaffected.

Finally, it was hypothesized that the *Cost of Running* (H4c) would be associated with lower levels of ambition among women than it would be among men. There is no evidence supporting this hypothesis; the cost of the campaign did not have a statistically significant effect on the ambition of men or women candidates.

In the final estimation, we see that there is some evidence for the theoretical model of political ambition displayed in Fig. 6.1. Figure 6.2 represents a path analysis of the relationship (as identified in Fig. 6.1) between gender and overall risk and overall risk and political ambition. The OLS regressions used to identify this model can be found in Appendix D.

Fig. 6.2 Path Analysis of Effect of Gender and Overall Risk on Political Ambition



It should be noted here that when men and women candidates are aggregated, the overall level of risk, consistent with the theoretical model, does have a significant association with ambition ( $p > .001$ ). There is, however, no statistically significant relationship between gender and either overall risk or political ambition.

## Discussion

Following little evidence for the theoretical model in the experimental data revealed in Chapter 5, the evidence in this analysis, as described above, provide somewhat more support for the dissertation's theoretical perspective. There is evidence that men and women's ambition is affected differentially by the overall level of risk in the electoral environments. In the instance of this set of candidates from Wyoming, Vermont, and Georgia, women are somewhat less likely to seek higher office or emerge as a candidate when levels of risk are higher. The more nuanced examination of risk factors was less conclusive. While some of the factors examined (probability of winning and level of office) seemed to affect one gender group, they were not always consistent with the hypothesized effect.

Most promising, actually, was a factor—the level of women's representation in the electoral environment—that was not incorporated into the operationalization of electoral risk in this project, but could be considered a component of risk in other conceptualizations—particularly for women. This analysis indicated that where there were higher levels of women officeholders, women were more likely to exhibit both progressive and emergent ambition. It is likely that where there are more women, there are more women gatekeepers to encourage women in recruitment and other types of support, particularly within individual party organizations—making a woman's candidacy more supported (and thus less risky). More women in elective office may also be an indicator of

other types of support that would reduce the risk women candidates face. Perhaps there are more or more-powerful women's fundraising entities or more women activists ready to lend support to women's candidacies. Regardless, this finding warrants further study.

There are a host of reasons why this analysis may not have shown the strength of hypothesized effects or no effects whatsoever. These include:

- Most obviously, a limitation of this analysis is that using a dataset of candidates precludes any insight into the calculations made by individuals who may have considered a candidacy and chose not to. This is a common pitfall of studies of political ambition. We might well know much more about the effect of electoral risk if we were able to evaluate the decision making process of those it deterred from office seeking.
- It could also be that different elements of risk, or a different combination of risk elements, are more critical to the decision to run. The three included in this analysis were not intended to be a comprehensive examination of the nearly limitless variables that could play a role in risk calculations.
- There was a remarkable lack of progressive ambition in the sample (n=29). It was therefore combined with emergent ambition (n=646). While the rationale for combining the two forms of ambition is valid (e.g. they are both a form of a "new" candidacy), it is very possible that risk considerations for men and women considering new vs. higher offices are very different and the results were affected by these differences.
- These three states also represent states where state officials make relatively low pay; no "professional legislature" is represented (arguably because many of these states are also term limits states). This could have served to dull the effect the proxy for level of office, "pay of office", had on ambition.

- Finally, the most significant concern about the quality of the data utilized for this analysis is the quality of the data collected for the cost of running variable. Surprisingly, reporting requirements and enforcement in all three states appear to be very lax. Many candidates submitted no report (n=368) and another significant percentage of candidates did submit, but indicated they spent \$0 on their campaigns (n=163). These conditions are both very suspect considering it is unlikely that even a candidate that did no campaigning whatsoever for their race spent literally nothing or had no need in submitting a report. Of course, this sheds some suspicion on the other state-based candidates' report accuracy as well. I am reasonably convinced that, for these reasons, the cost of running variable is not an accurate reflection—both individually in a significant number of cases and on aggregate—of the amount of money that was spent in the races considered in this analysis. As such, it is no surprise that *cost of running*, in particular would have not performed well in the analysis. It would also have considerations for how the *overall risk* variable was coded and, in turn, how well that variable served the purpose of analysis.

In summary, this analysis did shed some light on how gender and risk interact in actual electoral environments. It also revealed ways that these questions could be better tested and other questions that could be considered.

This and the preceding chapter have attempted to provide empirical evidence of the theoretical arguments outlined in Chapters Two, Three, and Four. In forthcoming chapter, Chapter Seven, I will discuss how the empirical evidence revealed through both Stage One and Stage Two tie back to the theoretical framework I have suggested and offer some deliberation about whether the gender gap in political ambition (and thus candidate emergence) can be tied to gender-based differences in electoral risk perception.

## Chapter Seven: Concluding Thoughts: Data Shows Limited Support for Theory of Gendered Electoral Risk Aversion

This dissertation drew on scholarship from previous work done in political science, psychology, and sociobiology to construct a theoretical framework that suggested that a factor contributing to the persistent gender gap in political ambition is that women are more likely to be less politically ambitious in the face of greater electoral risk. I also argued that women are not only more risk averse, but more likely to perceive risk in an electoral environment. By attempting to reveal gender differences in how men and women interpret and respond to electoral risk, my intent was to make the understanding of why men are more likely to run for elective office more complete. However, the methods used in this investigation—both experimental and existing data—did not offer much convincing evidence that these types of differences are playing a role in the continued prevalence of male candidates relative to female in the United States.

There was good reason to believe that I would find support for a relationship between women's electoral risk perception and their depressed political ambition. The focus in political ambition research has only just recently turned to a gender gap, namely because there have been so few women elected officials that having subjects to study at all has been an obstacle. Researchers have pointed to a number of factors that tend to support the ambition of men and/or depress that of women. The obvious culprit is that women's role as wives and mothers often takes precedence or creates obstacles (Dodson, 1997; Kirkpatrick, 1974; Lee, 1976; Sapiro, 1982; Stoper, 1977). Others have argued that the persistence of few women at elite levels suppresses ambition because potential women candidates lack role models to prompt their aspirations (Burrell, 1996; Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2006; Mansbridge, 1999; Phillips, 2010).

Conventional wisdom has long held that women were somehow kept from greater participation in politics because of sexual discrimination. While some overt forms (e.g. voter bias) seem to have little evidence in contemporary electoral contexts (Black & Erickson, 2003; Burrell, 1996; Carroll, 1994; Cook, 1998; Darcy & Choike, 1986; Darcy & Schramm, 1977; Dolan, 1998; Fox & Lawless, 2011; Lawless & Pearson, 2009; Thompson & Steckenrider, 1997; Woods, 2001), less obvious discrimination still exists. Women still face stereotyping by voters (Fox & Smith, 2002; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Koch, 200; Lawless, 2004; McDermott, 1997; 1998), in the media's treatment of them (Devitt, 2002; Falk, 2008; Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2000; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Kahn, 1992; 1994; 1996; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991), and in political recruitment (Burrell, 1993; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Norris, 1997; Norris & Lovenduski, 1994).

Also noted for contributing to the relative lack of women candidates are a number of institutional factors. Incumbency, for instance, serves as a deterrent to all emergent candidates—man and woman (Duerst-Lahti, 1998)—and the fewer women elected officials there are and the fewer women there are in the other key positions (e.g. business, law) that tend to feed politics, the fewer are in the pipeline for other offices.

Fox & Lawless (2005) and Lawless & Fox (2010) have carefully outlined the most critical factors that depress women's political ambition in their so-far two-wave study of potential candidates. Critically, they point to the gender differences in self efficacy as a potential candidate/elected official that makes a big difference in whether a potential candidate ultimately seeks office. This component is where I take exception, in that I think a component of what might be interpreted from these subjects as a lack of confidence may actually be differences in risk perception and ultimately gender differences in risk aversion. If men, on average, are less likely to

perceive and/or be deterred by the risk in a particular electoral environment (electoral risk), they are more likely to emerge as candidates.

The field of psychology has much to offer in support of gender differences in risk assessment and aversion. While, as I point out in Chapter Three, no psychological study looks directly at electoral risk considerations, it has identified many areas where men and women exhibit significant differences in how they respond to risk scenarios. That neither political science nor psychology has spent much time on electoral risk is conspicuous given how inherently risky running for political office can be. A few seminal studies in political science suggested the importance of a cost-benefit analysis in progressive ambition (Black, 1972; Rohde, 1979) and a few scholars (tangentially) alluded to elements of risk when revealing gender differences in the decision to run (Bledsoe & herring, 1990; Fulton et al., 2006). Individual risk calculations, particularly in terms of nascent ambition, have not been incorporated into the literature on the ambition gender gap.

There is a solid basis for expecting gender differences in electoral risk assessment. Considering the emphasis psychologists put on the context of a particular risk (Brehmer, 1987; Rohrmann & Renn, 2000), my choice to examine electoral risk as a discrete form of risk is well justified. Researchers have tried to group many of these contexts into a number of domains, though electoral risk does not seem to clearly fit into any single domain. Gender-based differences in risk-taking vary across these domains (Byrnes et al., 1999; Weber, Blais, & Betz, 2002), suggesting that there is the potential for differences in other contexts as well.

More general evidence of psychological differences between the sexes is well-documented, if not controversial. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974)'s exhaustive meta-analysis of research on all



manner of sex differences led them to conclude that there were gender-based differences across the life cycle and in a number of areas of human psychology. This finding spurred studies that have since contested, diluted, or confirmed these findings. Significant differences remain documented in areas such as personality (Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001; Feingold, 1994; Kling et al., 1999), cognitive abilities (Halpern, 2004, 2000; Hyde, 1981; Hyde, Fennema, & Lamon, 1990; Mann, Sasanuma, Sakuma, & Masaki, 1990), verbal skills (Hyde & Linn, 1988), and spatial aptitudes (Kail, Carter, & Pellegrino, 1979; Lawton, 1994; Linn & Petersen, 1985; Newcombe, Bandura, & Taylor, 1983; Voyer, Voyer, & Bryden, 1995), and numerous other areas of human psychology.

Specific to risk, differences have been documented in a number of contexts, revealing men's propensity to be bigger risk takers than women (e.g. Oliver & Hyde, 1993; Sunden & Surette, 1998; Waldron, McCloskey, & Earle, 2005), as well as women's likelihood to perceive greater risk across threat types (e.g. Bord & O'Connor, 1997; Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004; Rhodes & Pivik, 2011). Across different risk types (or domains of risk), meta-analysis reveals that, while they are not always large, gender differences exist in virtually every area of risk study (Byrnes et al., 1999). The body of psychological literature on gender and risk thus offers two suggestions: 1) there are good justifications for looking at risk in the unexamined context of electoral risk and 2) there are foundations for believing that gender-based differences in this realm may exist.

I also suggest, in Chapter Four, that there may be evolutionary reasons for gender-based differences in electoral risk assessment because of the unique pressures that engaging in politics would have exerted throughout human evolutionary history. The theoretical framework I develop

is two-fold, incorporating external forces that impact human cultural environments and internal forces that act to shape individuals' psyche.

Evolutionary theory is increasingly being employed to add to existing explanations of political behavior and attitudes. The role of genes has been illuminated in explanations of political orientations (Alford, Funk, & Hibbing, 2005; Settle et al., 2010), vote preference (Hatemi, et al., 2007) or likelihood of voting (Fowler, Baker, & Dawes, 2008), and the strength of political identification (Hatemi, et al., 2009; Settle, Dawes, & Fowler, 2009).

While no academic study has looked specifically at political ambition, Madsen's study of power-seeking in the 1980s offers some insight into the role of biological factors (i.e. the neurotransmitter whole blood serotonin) that are associated with individuals with more dominant, power-seeking behaviors (Madsen, 1985, 1986). While these studies offer an important connection between biological processes and behavior in what could be a political realm, it did not offer insight into potential gender differences since only men were included.

More recently, McDermott, Fowler, and Smirnov (2008) have offered an explanation for how political behavior can be explained by understanding the evolutionary roots of prospect theory—a well-established theory on decision making under risk. Researchers have established gender differences within prospect theory (Booth & Nolen, 2012; Fagley & Miller, 1990, 1997; Frederick, 2005). Namely, that men would have had greater evolutionary pressures than women would to evolve tendencies to be risk takers in high-stakes environments.

Through an evolutionary lens, these differences would be attributable to the outcomes of differential life history strategies. On average, the male strategy would be more risky than a female because, in order to achieve reproductive fitness, a male must compete more starkly for both mates

and resources. Access to power, such as political office holding would enable, would certainly mean both greater access to mates and greater control over available resources. It is no surprise, then, that throughout human history men dominated their social and political environments (Boehm, 1999). Put in the context and consideration of both modern political environments and ancestral ones, it should be no surprise that men would have developed a greater propensity for risk in power-seeking as well—a factor that would contribute to greater political ambition and less deterrence in the face of electoral risk.

With this framework in mind, I first sought evidence of gender-based differences in political ambition as a function of gender-based differences in risk perception using an experiment that manipulated the level of electoral risk (as a function of three distinct risk components) to create a between-subjects nine-cell design. The 502 MTurk participants were randomly assigned to each of the conditions. As expected the men and women in this subject pool did indicate different levels of political ambition, with the men being more ambitious. Beyond this distinction, there was very little support for either differential risk perception or its effect on political ambition.

As Chapter Five describes, in one of the over-all high (the components in the scenario all pointed to a high-risk environment) electoral scenarios (manipulation 3), there was a marginally-significant difference between how the men and the women perceived the level of risk perceived, with women rating the environment as riskier than men did. My analysis of the interactions between risk components—cost of running, level of office, and probability of winning—indicated only one significant effect. When both the probability of winning and the level of office were low, women were much less likely to exhibit political ambition than men were. This finding could warrant future investigation.

Given that the experimental scenarios may have lacked realism for the participants, in Chapter Six, I also looked for evidence of these effects in a dataset of 1184 candidacies in Wyoming, Vermont, and Georgia in both the primary and general elections in 2010. By gathering data for similar risk components—cost of running, level of office, and probability of winning—as those utilized in Chapter 5, I was able to look for similarities in actual decision making by candidates in the face of electoral risk.

Again, these data did indicate that men were more likely to exhibit political ambition than women. These real-world data also provided somewhat more evidence for the theoretical framework this dissertation promotes. When levels of overall risk were high, women were somewhat less likely to seek higher elective office (progressive ambition) or attempt an initial candidacy (emergent ambition). The individual components of risk did not provide any conclusive evidence of their effects. Chapter Six did reveal a strong effect from another factor that could be considered a component of risk—especially to women candidates: the level of women’s representation in the electoral environment. The greater number of women serving in a particular state, the more emergent and progressive ambition existed among women candidates in that state. This may indicate a powerful moderator of other barriers in the political opportunity structure for women. It may be that women perceive there as being fewer barriers (and thus risk) when women are more commonplace in electoral matchups. This may also objectively be the case as fundraising and support networks likely exist to alleviate some of the traditional risks for women candidates in states or specific areas where women candidates are more prevalent.

In summation, this dissertation offered only limited support for the theoretical framework as it has been previously proposed. While the men and women in both stages of the study were demonstrated the same patterns of political ambition that would be expected, it does not appear

that I can conclusively assert that those differences are attributable to differences in either their perception of electoral risk (Stage One) or the objectively-assessed level of risk (Stage Two) in the electoral environment. There were some indications in Stage One that in certain scenarios, electoral risk may differentially influence men and women, and some indications in Stage Two that the electoral risk environment differentially affects men and women candidates. The results were, however, inconsistent.

The existing literature on gender and risk differences and the existence of some narrow findings lead me to conclude that there remains validity to a theoretical framework of gendered risk aversion in political ambition, but the methods of investigation need to be refined in order to better reveal the overall patterns. I believe two things are crucial to further study of this topic. First, being as the three components of electoral risk examined in this dissertation were just a selection of the potential risk factors considered by potential candidates, I believe it could be crucial to identify what candidates or potential candidates actually identify as the risk factors they consider in evaluating a candidacy. Anecdotally, Natalia Rudiak, a two-term city councilwoman in Pittsburgh suggested to me that men and women consider different risks in weighing a run for office. Accordingly, I am in the process of collecting some exploratory data from potential candidates in Pennsylvania to help me more accurately define risk components for further study. I hope to use a more qualitative research approach to inductively identify the factors women take into account when evaluating a candidacy.

Secondly, while my Stage One respondents did predominantly indicate that there was at least some circumstance that would provoke them to seek political office, I am now skeptical that this represented true political ambition. Did the respondents accurately depict their interest in running for political office? Were they knowledgeable (as predominantly political “laymen”) to

make judgment calls about whether they would or would not run? I am increasingly convinced that the experiment would have had more generalizable results were it to have been conducted using a candidate pool, self-identified potential candidates, candidates, or elected officials. Further investigation into this should examine the evaluations being made by individuals who legitimately have an interest nascent or otherwise in seeking elective office.

Electoral risk remains a consideration in political ambition that is not adequately considered in our explanations of who seeks political office and who never does. As former First Lady Rosalynn Carter remarked during her husband's turbulent presidency:

*You must accept that you might fail; then, if you do your best and still don't win, at least you can be satisfied that you've tried. If you don't accept failure as a possibility, you don't set high goals, you don't branch out, you don't try - you don't take the risk.*

If women are ever to make significant strides towards greater representation in our political system or achieve gender parity, the things holding them back—risk and otherwise—must be fully identified and mitigated.

## APPENDIX A: STAGE ONE: EXPERIMENTAL MANIPULATIONS

## Manipulation 1 (Low PoW, Low CoR)

A four-term incumbent Brown is seeking a fifth term. The campaign has been consistently ahead of the challenger Smith in the polls and has had positive media coverage in recent weeks. Even the local paper has endorsed the incumbent as its favorite. Both Brown and the challenger Smith have agreed to face off in a second debate before Election Day where tax reform is likely to be a hot topic. Races for this seat typically cost only around \$50,000.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all risky			neither			very risky

## Manipulation 2 (High PoW, Low CoR)

A four-term elected official, Brown, is seeking a fifth term, but has only a little money left over from a successful bid in the previous election and has failed to secure contribution commitments from many of the same donors and PACs in the current election. Brown also has an inexperienced campaign manager. The latest campaign finance reports indicate that challenger Smith's campaign has raised significantly more than incumbent Brown has on hand. Races for this seat typically cost only around \$50,000.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all risky			neither			very risky

## Manipulation 3 (Low PoW, High CoR)

A four-term incumbent Brown is seeking a fifth term. The campaign has been consistently ahead of the challenger Smith in the polls and has had positive media coverage in recent weeks. Even the local paper has endorsed the incumbent as its favorite. Both Brown and the challenger Smith have agreed to face off in a second debate before Election Day where tax reform is likely to be a hot topic. Races for this seat typically cost as much as \$1,000,000.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all risky			neither			very risky

## Manipulation 4 (High PoW, High CoR)

A four-term elected official, Brown, is seeking a fifth term, but has only a little money left over from a successful bid in the previous election and has failed to secure contribution commitments from many of the same donors and PACs in the current election. Brown also has an inexperienced campaign manager. The latest campaign finance reports indicate that challenger Smith's campaign has raised significantly more than incumbent Brown has on hand. Races for this seat typically cost only around \$50,000.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at			neither			very risky
all risky						

#### Manipulation 5 (Low PoW, Low LoO)

A four-term incumbent Brown is seeking a fifth term as mayor. The campaign has been consistently ahead of the challenger Smith in the polls and has had positive media coverage in recent weeks. Even the local paper has endorsed the incumbent as its favorite. Both Brown and the challenger Smith have agreed to face off in a second debate before Election Day where tax reform is likely to be a hot topic.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at			neither			very risky
all risky						

#### Manipulation 6 (High PoW, Low LoO)

Four-term Mayor Brown, is seeking a fifth term, but has only a little money left over from a successful bid in the previous election and has failed to secure contribution commitments from many of the same donors and PACs in the current election. Brown also has an inexperienced campaign manager. The latest campaign finance reports indicate that challenger Smith's campaign has raised significantly more than incumbent Brown has on hand.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at			neither			very risky
all risky						

#### Manipulation 7 (Low PoW, High LoO)

A four-term incumbent Brown is seeking a fifth term as U.S. Senator . The campaign has been consistently ahead of the challenger Smith in the polls and has had positive media coverage in recent weeks. Even the local paper has endorsed the incumbent as its favorite. Both Brown and



the challenger Smith have agreed to face off in a second debate before Election Day where tax reform is likely to be a hot topic.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all risky			neither			very risky

#### Manipulation 8 (High PoW, High LoO)

Four-term U.S. Senator Brown, is seeking a fifth term, but has only a little money left over from a successful bid in the previous election and has failed to secure contribution commitments from many of the same donors and PACs in the current election. Brown also has an inexperienced campaign manager. The latest campaign finance reports indicate that challenger Smith's campaign has raised significantly more than incumbent Brown has on hand.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all risky			neither			very risky

#### Manipulation 9 (Control)

Four-term elected official Brown is seeking a fifth term. Brown will face challenger Smith in the general election which is three weeks away. The local paper recently decided not to endorse either candidate, but will be sponsoring a second debate where the two candidates will face off before Election Day. Tax reform is likely to be a hot topic.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all risky			neither			very risky

## APPENDIX B: STAGE ONE: FULL INSTRUMENT

Please select your level of agreement with the following statements:

		Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree or Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
1.	Government pays attention to people when making decisions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.	It is just as easy for a woman to be elected to a political office as a man.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3.	Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. How closely do you follow politics?

- Very closely
- Closely
- Somewhat closely
- Not closely

Many people do not participate in political or community activities. In which, if any, of the following activities have you engaged in the past year?

	Yes	No	Don't Know/Unsure
5. Voted in the 2012 election?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Contacted an elected official? (phone, email, letter, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Contributed money to a campaign?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Volunteered for a political candidate?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Volunteered on a community project?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. Attended a city council or school board meeting?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Served on a public or non-profit board or committee?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Ran for office at any level of government?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. Whether you are interested in running or being appointed to public office or not, how qualified do you feel you would be to hold a political office?

- Very qualified
- Qualified
- Somewhat Qualified
- Not at All Qualified

14. Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Joe Biden?

15. Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not ... is it the president, the Congress, or the Supreme Court?

16. How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto?

Please select how likely you are to seek a political office at an appropriate level under the following conditions/beliefs:

	Not at all likely	Not Likely	Unsure	Likely	Highly Likely
17. You believe running for office would be a good personal challenge.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. You are displeased with the current officeholders.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19. You have significant concern over specific political issues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. You have significant concern over the direction of specific policy decisions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21. You have a desire to serve your community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22. You have a personal desire to run for political office.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23. You would serve in an unelected political position, but not run for one.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*For each scenario below, please indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 your likelihood of engaging in this activity or behavior now or at some time in the future (with 1 being very unlikely and 5 being very likely).*

24. Betting a day's income at a high stake poker game

1	2	3	4	5
Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neither	Likely	Very Likely

25. Exposing yourself to the sun without using sunscreen

1	2	3	4	5
Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neither	Likely	Very Likely

26. Periodically engaging in a dangerous sport (e.g. mountain climbing or sky diving).

1	2	3	4	5
Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neither	Likely	Very Likely

27. Defending an unpopular issue that you believe in at a social occasion.

1	2	3	4	5
Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neither	Likely	Very Likely

28. *Below is a description of an election scenario. The scenario features an incumbent—the individual running for the office they currently hold—and a challenger—the individual running for the office who does not already hold the seat being sought. Please rate on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being not at all risky and 7 being very risky, how you would rate the chances that **the candidate by the name of Smith** in the following election scenario can win the race they face*

Manipulation 1 (for additional 8 manipulations, please see appendix A)

A four-term incumbent Brown is seeking a fifth term. The campaign has been consistently ahead of the challenger Smith in the polls and has had positive media coverage in recent weeks. Even the local paper has endorsed the incumbent as its favorite. Both Brown and the challenger Smith have agreed to face off in a second debate before Election Day where tax reform is likely to be a hot topic. Races for this seat typically cost only around \$50,000.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all risky			neither			very risky

Part VI.

Please indicate your age: \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate your gender:

- Male
- Female

What is the highest level of education you have received?

- less than a high school diploma
- high school
- some college, no degree
- associates degree
- bachelor's degree
- master's degree
- professional or doctoral degree

Please indicate your race(s).

- White, Non-Hispanic
- Black, Non-Hispanic
- Other, Non-Hispanic
- Hispanic
- 2+ races, Non-Hispanic

Please indicate your household income:

- Less than \$5,000
- \$5,000 to \$7,499
- \$7,500 to \$9,999
- \$10,000 to \$12,499
- \$12,500 to \$14,999
- \$15,000 to \$19,999
- \$20,000 to \$24,999
- \$25,000 to \$29,999
- \$30,000 to \$34,999
- \$35,000 to \$39,999
- \$40,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$59,999
- \$60,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 to \$84,999
- \$85,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$124,999
- \$125,000 to \$149,999
- \$150,000 to \$174,999

Please indicate your marital status:

- Married
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated
- Never married
- Living with partner

Please indicate your political party affiliation:

- Strong Republican
- Not Strong Republican
- Leans Republican

- Undecided/Independent/Other
- Leans Democrat
- Not Strong Democrat
- Strong Democrat

Please which political ideology best describes you:

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate, middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

19. How would you describe your religious affiliation?

- Baptist—any denomination
- Protestant (e.g., Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopal)
- Catholic
- Mormon
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Hindu
- Buddhist
- Pentecostal
- Eastern Orthodox
- Other Christian
- None
- Other (please specify)

20. How frequently do you, on average, attend religious services?

- More than once a week



- Once a week
- Once or twice a month
- A few times a year
- Never

21. Please provide your Worker ID to validate your participation for compensation:

**APPENDIX C: FACTOR ANALYSIS OF DEPENDENT VARIABLE  
(POLITICAL AMBITION) INDEX ITEMS**

**Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>**

	Component	
	1	2
You believe running for office would be a good personal challenge	.691	.283
You are displeased with the current officeholders	.777	-.435
You have significant concern over specific political issues	.862	-.389
You have significant concern over the direction of specific policy decisions	.857	-.402
You have a desire to serve your community	.773	.290
You have a personal desire to run for political office	.502	.700
You would like to serve in a unelected political position, but not run for one	.504	.488

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 2 components extracted.

**APPENDIX D: OLS REGRESSION MODELS USED TO SPECIFY PATH  
MODEL OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT INFLUENCES OF GENDER AND  
OVERALL RISK**

Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.727	.059		12.279	.000**
% women	.155	.059	.112	2.638	.009*
political party of candidate	-.035	.055	-.028	-.646	.519
incumbency	-.540	.065	-.405	-8.295	.000**
OPEN seat?	.183	.066	.138	2.793	.005*
gender of candidate	-.010	.066	-.006	-.148	.882

a. Dependent Variable: OVERALL\_RISK

\*\*p>.001

\*p>.05

Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	-.984	.015		-66.006	.000**
% women	.029	.013	.028	2.205	.028*
political party of candidate	.000	.012	.000	.024	.981
years of service in office held 2009-2010	.889	.015	.901	58.135	.000**
office sought in 2010 OPEN seat?	.050	.015	.050	3.421	.001**
gender of candidate	-.003	.014	-.003	-.222	.824
OVERALL_RISK	-.064	.010	-.087	-6.492	.000**

a. Dependent Variable: Ambition 2010

\*\*p>.001

\*p>.05

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**ABSTRACT****INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATIONS IN  
ELECTORAL RISK: FURTHERING THE EXPLANATION OF THE  
GENDER GAP IN CANDIDATE EMERGENCE**

by

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Despite decades of movement towards gender parity in other aspects of American society (e.g. education, business), women remain significantly underrepresented in the political realm. Electoral bias against women cannot be blamed; when women run, women win. However, women don't seek political office in high numbers. This project builds on previous examinations of the gender gap in political ambition by proposing that a contributing factor to the likelihood someone will seek political office is their perception of electoral risk. While there have been no studies of gender-based differences in psychological response to electoral risk, differences in risk assessment have been documented between the genders in a host of other domains. The theoretical framework developed in this study suggests that these differences are rooted, in part, in biological differences between men and women that have evolved to make men more risk prone and women more risk averse in political power seeking.

Specifically, it is hypothesized that women, as in other realms, are more apt to perceive an electoral environment as being risky. Three components of electoral risk are considered: the level of office, the cost of running, and the probability of winning. This research examines the

relationship between electoral risk and political ambition (in the context of gender) in two stages. Stage One tests it experimentally using Amazon's MTurk service and, in order to provide external validity and methodological triangulation, Stage Two looks for evidence of these risk-based differences in a unique data set of actual candidacies in a sample of three U.S. states. Some limited support for a gendered theory of electoral risk aversion is found.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Jennie Sweet-Cushman has a bachelor's degree in political science from Lake Superior State University and a master's degree in organizational management from Spring Arbor University. She is currently the Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science at Chatham University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where she has a dual appointment as a professor in the Chatham College for Women and as research fellow for The Pennsylvania Center for Women and Politics. Her research focuses on gender differences in political participation at both the mass and elite levels in both the United States and West Africa and has appeared in the *International Journal of Public Administration* and as a chapter in the upcoming edited volume *Generations: Rethinking Age and Citizenship*. Prior to entering academia, she ran a successful communications business, Sweet Communications. Sweet-Cushman was a fellow of the Michigan Political Leadership Fellowship Program at Michigan State University and managed a successful U.S. congressional campaign. She lives in Plymouth, Michigan with her husband, Ray. They have four children.