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SHAME ON YOU:
THE 2018 SENATE RACE AND GENDERED LANGUAGE ON FACEBOOK AND
TWITTER

by

HEATHER MIR

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2022

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Heather Mir

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Shame On You:

The 2018 Senate Race and Gendered Language on Twitter and Facebook

by

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Advisor: Keena Lipsitz

This is a study that determines whether or not new media amplifies gender stereotyping during campaigns. Numerous studies about women and the media, which have been conducted by scholars using traditional media, show that women endure more gender stereotyping than men. More recent studies show that women have made some ground and gender stereotyping is not as prevalent. These studies, however, were conducted using traditional newspapers. This is a study that compares traditional media and online news sources to determine if gender stereotyping is more prevalent in the latter. Another feature of this study is that it contains interviews of women and men examining their concerns about new media scrutiny. These interviews will be used as a gauge to determine if their concerns are legitimate during a content analysis of four 2018 Senate races which control for gender. New media invites interaction from viewers and can create a hostile environment which can possibly deter women from running for elective office. This study will also include a content analysis of candidate Twitter feeds in the four races followed. Overall, the goal of the study is to assess whether gender stereotypes are more prevalent in new media.

CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	iv
CHAPTER 1.....	1
CHAPTER 2.....	13
CHAPTER 3.....	27
CHAPTER 4.....	50
CHAPTER 5.....	75
CHAPTER 6.....	116
REFERENCES.....	139

TABLES

	Page
Table 4.2 Top Ten Words Used on Facebook and Twitter.....	57
Table 4.3 Top Ten Anxiety Words on Facebook and Twitter.....	64
Table 5.3 Top Ten Anxiety Words Used on Facebook and Twitter.....	84
Table 5.4 Top Ten Anger Words Used on Twitter and Facebook.....	85
Table 5.5 Top Disgust Words Used on Twitter and Facebook.....	86

FIGURES

	Page
Fig. 3.1 McSally Receives More Negativity.....	37
Fig. 3.2 Scott Receives More Negativity.....	39
Fig. 3.3 Hawley Generates More Negativity.....	41
Fig. 3.4 Blackburn Generates More Negativity.....	44
Fig. 4.1 Dem. and Rep. Posters Have Similar Amounts of Negativity.....	55
Fig. 5.1 Female Candidates Generate More Anger, Anxiety and Disgust on Facebook.....	80
Fig. 5.2 Female Candidates Generate More Anger, Anxiety and Disgust on Twitter.....	81
Fig. 5.6 Female Users Show More Anger and Disgust.....	87
Fig. 5.7 Male Users Show More Anger.....	88
Fig 5.8 Female Users Show More Anger Against Male Candidates.....	89

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: AN EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND GENDER

Introduction:

Women considering running for office can point to countless examples of female political candidates enduring gendered hostility on social media. For example, in 2008 when Sarah Palin was the vice presidential candidate, social media users criticized her for a lack of political knowledge, and being a bad mother because she was prioritizing her career (McGregor & Mourao 2016). During the 2008 Democratic primaries, many questioned Hillary Clinton's character, asking whether her personality was "too abrasive" for politics (McGregor & Mourao 2016). During the midterms in 2014, there were numerous accounts of this gendered negativity. For example, Wendy Davis, a Democratic gubernatorial candidate in Texas, faced considerable hostility from Twitter users. Davis, an outspoken proponent of abortion rights discovered that her opponents had labeled her "#Abortion Barbie" (McGregor & Mourao 2016). These three women had one thing in common: they were women who had put themselves in the public eye. Thus, the strengths that made them viable candidates also made them vulnerable to criticism because of the very personal qualities that made them outstanding candidates for public office.

It was no coincidence that Hillary Clinton was deemed too emotional when sharing her acceptance speech to the public in 2021. After she shared her speech, she was trolled on social media for her show of emotion (Sen 2021). Twitter posters told her to "quit crying," and "grow up and quit crying like a baby." Candidate Krysten Sinema generated similar criticism from social media posters for something she wore. When Sinema wore a pink tutu as part of her campaign strategy for the Senate in Arizona she most likely never thought that she would ignite a media firestorm about her clothing. And this is not just a problem for Democratic women.

Sinema's competitor for the Senate, Martha McSally, was severely criticized for running an attack campaign against her. Her critics suggested such tactics were unseemly for a woman.

It is understandable why potential female candidates might be discouraged from running for office by such stories. Yet, it is unclear whether women are treated worse by social media users than men. This study examines two aspects of how women are treated. First, it asks if female candidates are subject to more gender stereotyping than their male counterparts. In addition, it asks if social media users are more hostile to female than male candidates.

Furthermore, I examine the role that political party affiliation plays in how male and female candidates are treated by Twitter and Facebook users. Numerous studies of women and the media show that women endure more gender stereotyping and negative treatment than men.

More recent studies, however, indicate that women have made some ground and gender stereotyping is not as prevalent. These studies, however, were conducted by examining newspaper coverage of candidates. This study asks how candidates are treated on social media.

While content providers in traditional media are paid professionals who are accountable for what they write, social media content is often provided by angry individuals who hide behind pseudonyms. Thus, there is reason to believe that the optimistic findings resulting from the study of traditional media may not hold for the brave new world of social media.

The results: Facebook and Twitter users are more critical of Republican women. Overall, Democrats are meaner when it comes to politics. Not to say that men did not bear criticism from hoards of social media followers. Criticism of Republican Rick Scott, who ran for the Senate in Florida, was one of the most vitriolic by Facebook and Twitter participants. Scott's negative Twitter feed, however, would be trumped by Republican candidate, Marsha Blackburn.

Blackburn, who ran against Phil Bredesen for the Senate seat in Tennessee, would garner the most negativity by users as well as the most gendered out of all the candidates in this study.

Another feature of this study is that it contains interviews of women and men who either ran for public office or are currently holding office while examining their concerns about social media scrutiny. These interviews will be used as a gauge to determine if their concerns are legitimate during a content analysis of four 2018 Senate races which control for gender. Social media invites interaction from viewers and can create a hostile environment which can possibly deter women from running for elective office.

Social media has become an important source of campaign information for voters. Candidates know this, and use campaign websites, Facebook, and Twitter accounts to communicate with their supporters (Bystrom 2007). However, these new channels of communication between candidates and voters have created new challenges for female candidates in particular. Trolling, which involves intentionally making an offensive or derogatory remark to upset or anger a target, is common and is disproportionately directed towards women and minorities (Mantilla 2013). If trolls disproportionately target women and minorities in general, it is possible they are more likely to target women and minority candidates as well (Ryall 2017).

I argue social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, are portals where conversation that takes place becomes more critical of women and can often include gender stereotypes—which are generalized beliefs or ideas that women are delegated by the public to characterize particular qualities socially, emotionally, and physically. Although, studies of traditional media have shown that there has been a disparity between women and men who run for office, the treatment of women in social media has not been widely studied. The goal of this project is twofold: first, I

will explore the negative emotions of anger anxiety and disgust. I will determine if there is more negative emotion against women and conduct a content analysis using Wordstat to see how language is used by social media posters during 2018 Senate races. I will also examine whether party identification effects the type of negative emotion generated by posters. Second, in a final chapter, I will use interviews to confirm these findings. Through the interviews, I will determine if women have concerns about media. The interviews will act as a gage during the to determine if women's concerns are legitimate.

Studies have also not addressed the negative effect that internet outlets such as Facebook and Twitter have on female candidates for office. Some of the differences between traditional print media and online news sources including social media is that online news offers immediate interaction with the public. One feature of online media that sets new media apart from traditional media is the inclination of participants to make provocative statements about political leaders (Davis & Owen 1998). Viewers can instantly “add and share comments about stories which can amplify ideas about stereotypes in the news” (Davis &Owen 1998, 32).

The significance of this project is that it examines social media coverage from a new perspective than most studies on campaigns involving women. Studies on how the media affects campaigns and public opinion examine coverage of women largely from newspaper sources only (Kahn and Goldenburg 1991; Kahn 1993; Lawless and Hays 2016; Bystrom, Robertson and Banwart 2001). One study by Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox (2016) found that in volume and content no significant difference between men and women existed concerning the coverage of campaigns in print newspaper. Yet, in the twenty-first century television broadcast and digital media are the sources that most Americans use for access to news coverage. A Pew Research Study in 2016 showed that 57% of Americans get their news from television, 38% get their news

online, 25% on the radio and only 20% from print newspapers (Pew Research Center, www. Journalism.org). One study showed that television sources such as CNN, MSNBC and FOX were just as “guilty of gendered coverage” as print media (Shoaf & Parsons 2016, web). Ultimately, this project will assess how social media generates negative emotion and gender stereotypes against women.

Overview of Argument:

The goal of this project is to establish whether social media users treat women differently than their male counterparts. This study looks at female candidates for public office who are involved in politics—including those who decided to run despite the risk of negative media coverage and those who were discouraged or refrained from running because of media scrutiny.

In sum, I will explore three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Conversations by users of social media are more negative in nature against women who run for political office. In short, the primary hypothesis is that women are treated worse than men by social media users.

Hypothesis 2: In addition, negative emotion or negative language against female candidates is more likely to be gendered than it is for men.

Hypothesis 3: Political party is often a determinant that influences negative comments generated by social media posters against male and female candidates.

There are very few studies that test the climate of social media conversations surrounding women. Prior to these studies like those by Lawless and Hayes and McGregor and Mourao, women candidates were studied in traditional media. Earlier studies using newspapers found that women were at a disadvantage regarding media coverage, particularly those women who are running for the Senate (Kahn & Goldenberg 1991; Kahn 1991; Kahn 1992; Kahn 1993; Banwart,

Bystrom & Robertson 2003; Dunaway, Lawrence, Rose, & Weber 2013). Recent studies using traditional media such as newspaper articles argue that women are equally as likely as men to be elected to office if they run (Brooks 2013; Lawless & Hayes 2016). The studies also find that traditional media coverage of men and women running for office does not show substantial differences in gender. Lawless and Hayes (2016) focus their study on the 2010 and 2014 midterm elections for the House of Representatives by examining newspaper coverage during the thirty days leading up to the election. Each article was coded for every reference that would draw a reader's attention to a candidate's sex or gender. While Lawless and Hayes expected to find similar coverage for men and women candidates, I found that a content analysis of Facebook and Twitter shows that women bear more criticism by social media users and a higher portion of negative comments invoke gendered stereotypes.

Researchers have begun to examine the difference between traditional media and new media such as social media; however, few studies have explored negative sentiment and how language is used on Facebook and Twitter by social media users to interact with male and female candidates. Furthermore, few studies have examined gendered comments against women on social media. I argue that social media increases the use criticism and gender stereotypes, particularly with respect to women. Stereotypes can be defined as the characteristics that a person relates to a social group (Banwart 2010; Eagley & Mladinic 1989). Scholars have determined that voters' stereotype on the basis of both traits and issues. Typically, masculine traits such as "toughness, strength, and decisiveness" are commensurate to men and favored in the political landscape (Banwart 2010; Rosenwasser & Dean 1989; Huddy & Terkildsen 1993b). Lawless (2004) argues that masculine traits are preferred in political leaders in the "post-September 11th era." Masculine traits associated with men become more significant by the public

the higher the political office (Banwart 2010; Rosenwasser & Dean 1989; Huddy & Terkildsen 1993a). This means the higher the political office the more masculine traits are associated with that leadership position.

The trolling culture is rampant on the internet and specifically targets women in the form of gender-trolling (Mantilla 2013). Another effect of social media on campaigns is the level of interaction it affords between candidates and the public that is generated in the political arena. First, social media can create a more divisive campaign environment. The United States is more polarized than it has ever been between the two parties concerning many issues of public policy. Similarly, Lawless and Hayes found that participants were more likely to identify with partisan politics rather than gender (Lawless & Hayes 2016). Public interaction can become more intense because of the trolling that infiltrates social media. Trolling is the act of being provocative and reactionary not to achieve some kind of constructive political end, but to create a confrontation. The term trolling, according to internet studies scholar Whitney Phillips, arose in the 1990's and can be defined as "provoking a conversation or whole community by posting inflammatory statements for the troll's own enjoyment" (Mantilla 2013, 563; Phillips 2012). Trolling can occur in two ways. First, there are unpaid trolls or average public users who use social media to instigate a public reaction from the public and politicians. There are also paid trolls by the government, political parties and organizations that hold multiple accounts who are tweeting similar messages under different names. Trolling is a relatively new trend, but it amplifies the negative features of a candidate from many different sources. Of particular significance, is gendertrolling identified by Mantilla (2013) which is different than the generic brand of trolling and specifically targets women. Oftentimes, gendertrolling intimidates women more than men because they develop concerns for their family. Women are often the targets of trolling which

can silence them (Mantilla 2013). However, the record number of women who are running in 2018 may indicate that there is a pushback against Trump who is called a “natural-born troll” in *Politico* magazine (Carr 2016).

The use of social media is a relatively new phenomenon and a few scholarly studies have only started to distinguish traditional media from the world of social media. But studies on the effects of social media and gender stereotypes and women’s political campaigns are very few. Social media requires that candidates have a substantial online presence during campaigning. The atmosphere in social media can create a chaotic and unpredictable environment for campaigns to manage. The extent of this environment on women candidates has never been studied. The combination of increased competition and Internet gendertrolling can have a derogatory effect on women so that they decide not to run. Even with the increased number of women who have decided to run in 2018, I argue that there is a percentage of women who decided not to campaign for these reasons. Male candidates face similar challenges with managing the unpredictability of the Internet during campaigns; however, I posit gender increased criticism and gender stereotypes are amplified by social media. And this is a burden that men do not share with women during campaigns.

Why This Study is Important:

In a world where there is expected to be more social parity between men and women, it is important to highlight pockets of society where there are inequalities. In the political realm, where more women are running for office than ever it is important to uncover instances of inequity between men and women. My study is a departure point from a 2014 study by Jennifer Lawless and Jennifer Hayes, *Women on the Run: Gender, Media and Political Campaigns in a Polarized Era* (2016). The conclusion of the study by Lawless and Hayes was that female

candidates do not face as much gender bias as traditionally expected on the campaign trail. Furthermore, the reception of female candidates by the public was guided by partisan loyalty rather than gender. In short, the more divided the public the more party determined public sentiment of female candidates. On the other hand, my study shows that although, the use of gendered comments is not overwhelming—they were used more often for women than men. Furthermore, there was more negative sentiment in the Twitter and Facebook feeds of the women candidate. This study is one of the first of its kind—that examines social media comments. Despite studies that show the contrary, like Hayes and Lawless, the public still needs to be held accountable for its discrimination against women on social media during campaigns. Furthermore, women are under-represented from the local to national levels of office. Lawless and Hayes argue that when women do run, they are just as successful as men. They raise the same amount of money, win as many votes and have similar chances as men to win (Lawless & Hayes 2016). However, social media users tell a different story of parity between men and women. The main feature of this study—Facebook and Twitter conversation—has not been sufficiently examined by scholars carving significant space for a study of this nature. Also, this study endeavors to determine the implications of a more negative and hostile environment for women on the campaign trail. Does the rat race which defines the social media environment deter women from running for office? Initial interviews show that social media criticism is a deterrent for against women who wish to run for office. Because more women have been successful at winning increased political positions there is a growing myth that women have achieved equality social and political equality. I think it is important to debunk this myth. Women already have one strike against them. One study revealed that women are less likely than men to consider themselves qualified to run for office (Lawless & Fox 2012: 2010). My study

shows that women still have to navigate through more criticism and a hostile environment more than men. And one of the possible consequences is that not only are women less likely to run, but a harsh environment could further deter women from running for office. In short, this study is about accountability. Social discrimination in social media against women who run for office should still be a conversation even in the twenty-first century.

A Chapter Review: Pathways for the Examination of Social Media and Negative Emotion:

This examination unfolds in four distinct chapters: The first chapter examines the amount and type of negative emotion that male and female candidates receive during campaigns. The next chapter factors in party identification into the analysis. The third chapter, examines how social media users' gender affects what they post about male and female candidates. The final chapter takes the interviews with candidates and public office holders into consideration to see if theory manifests in real-world situations about gender and social media.

This section will outline the overall framework of each chapter. In “A Look at Sentiment in Twitter and Facebook Posts,” a comparison of negative feedback from social media users was conducted. Based on a content analysis of social media posts in eight 2018 Senate races, I show that messages directed at female candidates are more likely to be negative than messages directed at male candidates. I collected data from three months of Twitter feed—two weeks in September—two weeks in October—and the final two weeks before the November 8, election date in 2018. Here, I made a comparison that determined that, in fact, Twitter users were more negative and generated a higher number of comments as the election date became closer. Thus, social media users generated more negative sentiment in the final two weeks of the election. Furthermore, I determined that female candidates, especially Republican female candidates, received more negative comments than male candidates.

In the chapter entitled, “Partisanship and Negative Emotion: Looking at Anger, Anxiety and Disgust,” I move from an examination of negativity overall to an examination of partisanship which involve specific emotions generated by users such as anger, anxiety and disgust. In this chapter, I determined that party makes a difference. While referencing Lawless’ and Hayes’ work on partisanship (2016), I determined that Democrats are more critical of Republican candidates. To execute this part of my project, I employed Wordstat to conduct a content analysis, Here, I found that there were specific word patterns used by social media users that was influenced by party affiliation. As part of the experiment, I compared language used by Facebook users and Twitter users. In the Facebook examination, I found that although Republicans had less instances of criticism, they were more likely to deliver a personal attack against the candidates—more so than Democrats. The criticism found in Twitter as used by Democrats was a mixture of personal attacks and overall context, particularly when it came to words related to lying and hatred.

In the most substantive chapter on gender—“Anger, Anxiety and Disgust: Sentiment Against Female Candidates and Gender,” I focused on user sentiment and gendered language. In this chapter, I concluded that language related to anger, anxiety and disgust was directed at female candidates—to a remarkable degree. Particularly, users emoted more negative sentiment against Republican female candidates such as Martha McSally and Marsha Blackburn. While using charts and tables, I showed that women receive a higher amount of negative sentiment. The examination also features charts on the “top ten words” utilized by Facebook and Twitter users. The charts and tables were reinforced by a content analysis on Wordstat to see *how* gendered language is used. A comparison of gendered language by social media users on Facebook and Twitter follows the content analysis. Another centerpiece of this chapter develops an exploration

of how user gender effects the reception of female candidates on Facebook. This portion of the study shows that male posters generate more occurrences of negative emotion against female candidates. To reinforce these findings, I also conducted a content analysis of language used by male and female posters. The conclusions in this chapter are then confirmed by the final chapter in this project.

“Social Media in Real Life: The Interviews,” is a chapter that challenges my findings in previous chapters. Throughout the early chapters, my examination generates a series of questions. For example—is there fear of running for office by both male and female candidates because of social media? Is there stereotyping of women and men during campaigns on social media? How was the experience of running for office influenced by social media? This chapter endeavors to answer these questions in real-life situations. In short, this chapter determines if women’s fear of negative public reception on social media is legitimate. The conclusions in this chapter have some interesting twists and turns. Overall, the results of my interviews with male and female office holders showed that it was the Democratic candidates that generated the most negative sentiment from social media posters. In particular, women who were members of minority groups received the most criticism and gendered language by posters. On the flip side, the Republican candidates-both male and female-reported the most positive experience with social media during their campaigns. The findings in this chapter were very different from the conclusions in the earlier chapters on partisanship and gender. In these chapters, Republicans were the target of critical Democrats. Finally, my chapter on the interviews highlights responses from the candidates.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND SUBSTANTIVE FOCUS

Introduction:

Social media intensifies gender stereotypes during campaigns where women are involved. It is also possible that fear of new media deters women from running for office either because they are afraid of media scrutiny or because new media creates more interactive elections. Little research has been done to study the extent of this phenomenon. This literature review locates this project within scholarly studies on women and gender stereotypes, the existence of gender stereotypes during campaigns and the distinction between new and traditional media. In short, there have been some studies that distinguish new media from traditional media, but there is not a substantial body of work that examines social media and the types of negative emotion that is generated against male and female candidates during campaigns on Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, this project examines how gendered language is used against male and female candidates in the 2018 Senate race. This study also examines negative emotion used by social media users during the campaigns—particularly those emotions of anger, anxiety and disgust.

The Changing Media Landscape:

New media can be defined as media that originates on the Internet for public consumption and involves public interaction through comments and posts that drive the public conversation. It takes many forms such as websites and blogs, but it also includes many interactive portals such as those found on Facebook and Twitter. This study will utilize social media as the driving force that dictates conversation by posters surrounding male and female candidates. The media landscape has changed over time. Voters are withdrawing from traditional television and print sources and moving to the Internet for political campaign news (Owen &

Davis 1998). I will be investigating Facebook and Twitter feed. In addition, I will do a content analysis on Twitter and Facebook feed on the candidates that I will be following. There are clear distinctions between traditional media and what we now call new media in the twenty first century. New media has the “distinctive feature of being accessible online and also has the additional factor of inviting public interaction” (Owen & Davis. 1998, 32). One of the key differences between new media and traditional media is the amount of public participation that occurs during elections. Fifty-five percent of voters during the 2010 midterm elections used new Internet media to learn more about the candidates (Smith 2011). As a result of the environment that new media fosters, campaigns can have a more negative and volatile environment for the candidates. Candidates are subject to “constant scrutiny because their words and actions can be easily dispersed” (Owen 2017, web). One of the key differences is how political information is disseminated. As a result, reporters and average citizens can accumulate political information and post it on the Internet using cost effective low-priced technologies that “link easily to networks where rumors can spread rapidly” (Owen 2017, web). Furthermore, new social media and social media outlets can sustain rumors well after an election has been decided (Owen, 2017). The type of journalism has changed. Where once news was reported by professional journalists, “there is now an explosion of citizen journalists commenting on the latest election news” (Owen 2017, web). Average citizens have become “prolific providers” of election related content on Twitter feeds, blogs, and videos. As a consequence, “messages originating in new media increasingly set the campaign agenda” (Owen 2017, web). Furthermore, online newspapers have become less formal and more entertainment focused making it easier for reader participation and interactive engagement. According to Mary Kate Cary from *U.S. News*, most Americans have a cellphone and access to a computer during this era of the Internet and have

moved towards a digital reality. The media today are “more diffuse and chaotic as ever” (Cary 2010, web).

Social media developed as a bi-product of new media. This type of media such as Facebook and Twitter invite public interaction and conversation. A very powerful medium, “social media may have the power to affect behaviors, preferences and value systems of individuals and groups according to the intentions of those wielding it,” and furthermore, “the special appeal of social media resides in their ability to not only host, but also facilitate and enhance social interactions” (Nahon 2015). Social media has not only become a familiar outlet for public consumption in general terms, but it also has a major influence on politics—especially campaigns. In today’s political environment, having a social media presence is a prerequisite when running for office. The highly interactive nature of politics revolutionized “the ways in which political campaigns are organized” (Sahly et al. 2019). Furthermore, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter “allow candidates to strategically communicate with potential voters” (Sahly et al. 2019). Barack Obama demonstrated his mastery of social media during his campaign and throughout his presidency. During his campaign in 2008, Obama distinguished himself during his campaigns because of his use of social media. Obama, bolstered by social media, became very popular on outlet such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. Not only did he talk about politics, but he shared some of his personal preferences including taste for music and television shows. Furthermore, “he shared photos of himself in everyday settings. This made him popular with younger generations” (Hannon 2018). Because of Obama’s success in 2008 and 2012 with his use of social media, “social media strategy has become the new norm for United States presidential elections” (Sahly et al. 2012). Today the use of social media has become the model for candidates running at any level of office. Oftentimes,

candidates will forgo traditional media and announce that they are running for public office on Facebook or YouTube (Vonderschmitt 2012).

Why Social Media May Be Worse than Traditional Media for Female Candidates

Social media can be used as a tool by politicians to denigrate their opponents. One of the more recent trends on the Internet is trolling. A recent story on *Politico* called Donald Trump a “natural-born troll” citing that the “best way to control the online discussion is not to inform but to provoke” (Carr 2016, web). A troll is a person who posts negative comments and false information in an online community, such as Facebook and Twitter, with the motivation to provoke and manipulate an emotional response amongst social media participants. The article states that Trump’s ability to control the political conversation says a lot about the changing dynamics of political races. According to Carr, “authority and respect do not accumulate on social media; they have to be earned again at each moment” (Car 2016, web). Candidates are only “as relevant as their last tweet” (Carr 2016, web). The web also privileges “emotionalism over reason.” (Carr 2016, web) The more intuitive the message, the more quickly it spreads and the longer it grasps the public’s reaction (Carr 2016). Trump used social media—especially Twitter—to attack his opponents. He utilized Twitter to release a barrage of name-calling and insults to delegitimize the credentials of anyone who criticized him. Furthermore, he used Twitter to attack Hillary Clinton during and after the 2016 election. During the first year of his presidency, Trump tweeted about Clinton 77 times (Schonfeld 2018). He called her the “worst and biggest loser of all time” (Schonfeld 2018). He downplayed Clinton’s best-selling autobiography and protested that her emails were not thoroughly investigated by the FBI. Furthermore, he wanted authorities to investigate Clinton’s political misdeeds rather than criticize Trump’s campaign tactics (Schonfeld 2018).

“Gendertrolling” has become one of the latest trends in trolling and is distinct from other types of generic online trolling (Mantilla 2013). Mantilla distinguishes gendertrolling from other forms of trolling because it is distinctively misogynistic in character notes that most trolls in the English-speaking sphere are “white, male and privileged” (Mantilla 2013, 564). Mantilla argues that there are certain features that make gender trolling distinct, and as a result, are more threatening to female victims. First, participation is often organized by numerous people. Second, gendertrolling uses “gender-based insults” that directly target women. For example, the use of the words “cunt,” “whore,” “slut” are used in gendertrolling. (Mantilla 2013, 564) Third, gendertrolling uses hate language that includes descriptions of violent acts against women. Fourth, gendertrolling tends to last over a “long period of time against targeted victims.” (Mantilla 2013, 564) Rather than remaining limited to a finite number of websites and social media sites, gendertrolls pursue women from a number of online sources and follow them even into their personal lives. Furthermore, gendertrolls even target a victim’s supporters. Finally, gendertrolling is a reaction to women going public. This characteristic makes women in politics particularly vulnerable because of their public presence online and physically during campaigning (Mantilla 2013). Importantly, Mantilla argues that gendertrolling systematically targets women to discourage them from occupying “public spaces.” Gendertrolls intimidate women into withdrawing “from social media as a reaction to these attacks against them” (Mantilla 2013, 564).

Another article for the BBC (2017) states that the issue of trolling has become an epidemic because of social media. The article reports that people write anonymously on social media threads on topics that they would not normally address to someone in person. The constant barrage of abuse can discourage women from running for office, “particularly those with

children” (Ryall 2017, web). The article claims that many women who have thought about going into politics have decided not to because they do not want to deal with the “limitless bombardment of trolling” (Ryall 2017, web). The effect of new media creates a more hostile environment largely because it generates a more divisive political context. New media amplifies polarization that the public already experiences (Brichacek 2016). Furthermore, what the public views on social media is heavily filtered depending on what people like and dislike. The end result is, “rather than getting a variety of perspectives that contribute to the political dialog about elections, viewers get what is called an echo chamber” (Brichacek 2016, web).

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campaigning (Mantilla 2013). Importantly, Mantilla argues that gendertrolling systematically targets women to discourage them from occupying “public spaces.” Gendertrolls intimidate women into withdrawing “from social media as a reaction to these attacks against them” (Mantilla 2013).

What Studies of Traditional Media Have Missed:

Although some studies argue that media during campaigns treat women as equally as men, I argue that these studies are incomplete without an examination of how gender stereotypes proliferate in new media. In *Women on the Run: Gender, Media, and Political Campaigns in a Polarized Era* (2016), Lawless and Hayes focus their study on the 2010 and 2014 midterm elections for the House of Representatives. They include two types of candidate communication—television advertisements during the 2010 U.S. House election, and Twitter feeds of the U.S. House candidates during the 2014 election. All of the advertisements and Twitter feed made by the candidates were measured during the last month of the election. Also, like many earlier studies Lawless and Hayes analyzed newspaper coverage during the thirty days leading up to the election. Each article was coded for every reference that would draw a reader’s attention to a candidate’s sex or gender. Interestingly, Lawless and Hayes found that the volume of advertising by both male and female candidates was “virtually identical.” I argue, however, that these findings can be expanded upon as they do not take into account social media *used by the public* such as Twitter feeds, blogs, websites and other social media. This study will serve as an extension of Lawless and Hayes by coding Facebook online news sources and Twitter feeds for negative emotion and gender stereotypes by using content analysis.

Despite studies that show that women have an equal chance of being elected once they decide to run, there is a substantial body of work that shows women are treated unequally by

media. Historically, one barrier faced by female candidates has been gaining equal news exposure similar to male candidates. Erika Falk (2008) incorporates a substantial study about eight women who ran for the presidency showing that despite important changes over the last century in women's social and political rights and in attitudes about women in politics, the press has not changed how it covers women candidates. Furthermore, women are rarely and almost never portrayed as leaders by the press, whose coverage of them is "usually light in content and volume" (Falk 2008, 9). Most of the time leaders are picked from a small, elite male pool, such as members of Congress, leaders in industry and presidential candidates. When women do get mentioned in the headlines, their "authority tends to be scrutinized more thoroughly than men" (Wilson 2007, 58). Women candidates were much more likely to be discussed in terms of their roles as mothers and "their marital status, which can affect their reputation with voters" (Banwart, Bystrom & Roberston 2003).

There have been numerous studies about news coverage and women who run for the Senate (Kahn & Goldenberg 1991; Kahn 1991; Kahn 1992; Kahn 1993; Banwart, Bystrom & Robertson 2003; Dunaway, Lawrence, Rose, & Weber 2013). These studies were conducted through the use of newspaper articles only. The results were conclusive. Several differences in the coverage of female candidates and male candidates are evident. Stereotypes did emerge in the coverage of female candidates with women being described significantly more often than men in terms of their sex, marital status and children. The attention paid by the print media to women candidate's marital status and children reflects the double standards still in place in society when evaluating the ability of women to balance their professional and personal roles (Bystrom, Robertson & Banwart 2001; Banwart, Bystrom & Robertson 2003). Kahn did a

significant amount of research of women, media coverage and stereotyping. Kahn's methodology employs the use of content analysis of newspaper articles. Kahn finds significantly more paragraphs per day in newspaper coverage of Senate races about male candidates' issue positions than those of female candidates (Kahn & Goldenberg 1991; Kahn 1996). Kahn conducted a study of U.S. Senate and gubernatorial races finding similar results. The results of the study suggest that the news media differentiate between male and female candidates in their coverage of statewide campaigns. The differences are more significant in the U.S. Senate races, but differences are still evident in gubernatorial races (Kahn 1994). Fowler and Lawless (2009) ran a more recent study concerning gubernatorial campaigns and determined similar conclusions: that women still face an uneven playing field. They conducted a content analysis of more than 1,300 newspapers articles for 27 gubernatorial races between 1900 and 1997 in which a female candidate held a major party nomination. The results determined that political context is important to the environment in which men and women compete. Women tend to emphasize position taking while men highlight actions they have taken. In addition, male candidates appear to pay more attention than their female opponents to "women's" issues of health, education and child welfare (Fowler & Lawless 2009).

Overall, this literature review shows that there is a significant distinction between traditional and new media—and there are studies about these differences and the effects they have on campaigns. However, no expansive studies have been conducted about how social new media effects on campaigns where women are involved. I hypothesize that social media affects women in two ways. First, social media amplifies gendered stereotypes, and second, it creates a more interactive and hostile environment for women. Both of these consequences may have an effect on the decision that women make to enter political elections particularly because the

nature of campaigns have changed due to the dynamic exchange of information on the Internet. This study aims to not only determine the effects of social media on gender, but also delves into the types of negative emotion that is generated against male and female candidates during campaigns. Furthermore, the final chapter examines the extent to the extent at which social media deters women from running for office.

Data Collection:

Data collection for the completion of the project was a two-step process. The first part was to collect the Tweets and Facebook posts from these social media websites. The second step was to code all of the posts. Before I could harvest the responses, I needed to determine the collection dates. Collection dates were determined based on the progression and proximity to the actual election date in November. I wanted to discern if posts closer to Election Day contained content that was more critical of the candidates. To accomplish this task, I spread out my data collection of Twitter responses over the course of three months before election day. I decided to collect the data from Twitter from the beginning, middle and end of the election period between September 6, 2018, to November 6, 2018. In September I collected posts and responses from Twitter and Facebook from September 6 through September 20. In October, I collected posts and responses from October 2 through October 16. Finally, I collected posts two weeks before Election Day which would be October 23 through November 6. I decided on these dates to determine the general sentiment of social media users as the election period progressed. I wanted to determine if users were more critical during the onset of the election period or more critical towards Election Day. My Twitter examination was my primary study, and I collected all three months before the election.

I conducted an examination of Facebook as a comparison against the Twitter feed. For Facebook, I did the entire month of September. By harvesting responses for one month the project was more manageable when I went about the task of coding data. Also, I thought it would be interesting to look at one complete month of poster responses as a comparison against Twitter. For this examination, I coded all of the posts for the month of September taking the first ten responses of each post. The variable categories were the same for Facebook as it was for Twitter. In addition, I also coded the sentiment of each user response, for example, happy or sad. However, I added two interesting variables in Facebook that I did not have in Twitter. For Facebook, I had the additional categories of user-name and gender. I wanted to determine if male or female users are more critical of the candidates than others, or perhaps show that there is no difference at all. Also, key issues such as the Kavanaugh trial and the immigrant “caravan” were indicators of user sentiment because the candidates had to convey their stance on these issues and user conversation would ensue depending on the candidate’s response. Furthermore, the Kavanaugh trial sparked a greater number of comments because the candidate posted their stance on whether they intended to support the nomination or not. Because the issue was so polarizing, the posts about the Kavanaugh trial encouraged more posts sentiment party and gender.

Also, of importance was the selection of the candidates for each case study. I completed four case studies on high profile competitive general elections of Senate races during the 2018 midterms. Meaning, the candidates were well known by the public and often controversial. For example, Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona was known for being the first bisexual candidate for the Senate. Also, Rick Scott was known for his controversial policies on the environment in Florida. Furthermore, Scott was taking on long-time incumbent Bill Nelson. I selected Senate races because they are more likely to receive local and national coverage in online media. The

determining factor was party in this project. By choosing the four case studies, I will be controlling for gender and partisanship. It is important to control for partisanship because, for example, I will want to determine if social media users treat a Democratic woman differently than a Republican woman. Specifically, I expect trolls to harass Democratic women more because it is reasonable to assume that people who employ gender stereotypes are more likely to be conservative. As a result, I needed to find Senate races with two women (Republican and Democrat), two men (Republican and Democrat), one woman and one man (female Democrat and male Republican), one woman and one man (female Republican and male Democrat). The outcome was Martha McSally (R) and Kirsten Sinema (D) from Arizona, Bill Nelson (D) and Rick Scott (R) from Florida, Claire McCaskill (D) and Josh Hawley (R) from Missouri, and Marsha Blackburn (R) from Tennessee. It was important to control for partisanship because, for example, I will want to determine if social media users treat a Democratic woman differently than a Republican woman. Furthermore, partisanship was important because I wanted to discern if and when the public treated the candidates differently depending on the different party combinations. For example, is the public more critical of women during an all-female race such as the one between McSally and Sinema? Or is the public more critical of a female versus male Senate race where the female candidate is a Republican and the male candidate is a Democrat? The reason I was concerned about party bias was Hayes and Lawless study that determined that the public is more driven by party loyalty than by gender. As it turns out, the results of my study showed that participants did have a party bias. In short, Democrats were meaner, particularly against Republican women.

As part of the collection process, I needed to determine what Twitter and Facebook accounts I would use for each candidate. Some of the candidates had more than one account for

each type of social media. I decided to use the accounts with the most followers for Twitter and Facebook which was the account each candidate used more frequently. An “official” account by the candidates was determined by the account that had the most followers. Furthermore, the candidate of an “official” account used the outlet to post about frequent campaign activities. My decision to choose which candidate’s account was determined by higher member number which resulted in more user comments. To collect the Facebook and Twitter, I copied the first 100 tweets or responses from the corresponding day of each post. The posts that I collected were direct interactions with followers and not shared posts—meaning the candidate and/or staff was the author of each post. The final product was that each candidate had individual files containing posts and responses ready for coding.

The second part of the project was data coding. I completed data coding for both Twitter and Facebook. For Twitter, I used a random number generator to determine which post I would use. The random number generator was numbered from one to five. In choosing the posts, I coded the responses from every five posts taking the first ten tweets from each post. I completed this process for posts and tweets in Twitter for September, October and November. The variables that I used to code the data was direction of original post, agreement of response, profanity, exclamation, insult, threat, gendered woman and gendered man. I also recorded the number of likes, retweets and comments. The total number of Twitter coded posts and responses was 3,800. The total Facebook posts was 3,322. My Twitter examination was my primary study, and I collected all three months before the election. I conducted an examination of Facebook as a comparison against the Twitter feed. For Facebook, I did the entire month of September. I decided to do the entire month of September so I would have enough posts for a comparison against all three months of Twitter. For this examination, I coded all of the posts for the month of

September taking the first ten responses of each post. The variable categories were the same for Facebook as it was for Twitter. In addition, I also coded the sentiment of each response, for example, happy or sad. However, I added two interesting variables in Facebook that I did not have in Twitter. For Facebook, I had the additional categories of user-name and gender. I wanted to determine if male or female users are more critical of the candidates than others, or perhaps show that there is no difference at all. The total Facebook responses and posts was 3,322. For the project, the total number of coded posts between Facebook and Twitter responses is 7,122.

CHAPTER THREE

A LOOK AT SENTIMENT IN TWITTER AND FACEBOOK POSTS

Introduction:

This chapter looks at user sentiment in a comparison between Twitter and Facebook posts. Specifically, I will examine negative agreement of social media users against male and female candidate social media negativity and how it relates to candidate gender. The structure of this chapter will be two-fold. First, I will conduct an analysis of the statistical comparisons between candidates. Secondly, I will determine if negativity of social media posters changes overtime as Election Day gets closer. My primary hypothesis is based on the premise that Democratic posters are more critical of the Republican candidates. Furthermore, my findings show that Republican women received the most negative feedback from the Facebook and Twitter posters. It challenges scholarly works, including Hayes and Lawless that argues that men and women are treated the same during political campaigns. For Lawless and Hayes—it was about partisanship. Meaning, users were largely influenced by political parties when it came to sentiment about the candidates. Lawless and Hayes argue that, “voter’s view of candidates are shaped almost entirely by long standing party attachments, leaving little room for sex to matter. At a moment in which divisions between the parties are as large as they have been since Reconstruction, partisanship and ideology dominate the way the public evaluates candidates” (Lawless & Hayes 2016). And to some degree this is true—many social media users expressed their views commensurate with their views according to their political party. Partisanship and party loyalty will be discussed in an upcoming chapter. This theory reinforces Lawless and Hayes findings that party loyalty determines how social media posters respond to political candidates. Party loyalty has its place in this discussion. As outlined in the previous chapter

during the literature review, studies show that female candidates traditionally have been treated differently than men who are also candidates. But is this still true in the most recent 2018 midterm election? This study finds that the answer is, “yes.” This project shows that the public posting on social media was more critical of female candidates than they were of for men. They were particularly hard on Republican women. I expected Republicans to be more critical of candidates from the opposing party than Democrats due to Donald Trump’s influence on his party. Trump is often a bully on Twitter and encourages criticism of the Democratic party he disliked. In short, I expected his supporters will follow suit because of Trump’s actions against Democrats Interestingly, it appears that Democrats are nastier on Facebook and Twitter than Republicans. I expected Republicans to be more critical than Democrats.

This is because of the leadership of Donald Trump and the Republican party. This chapter will examine the sentiment of Facebook and Twitter posts including trends in language that are used. I will examine how sentiment changed over time as the Election Day became closer. The question is: were social media users more critical at the end of the election season as the election got closer? For example, did they post more frequently and how did they characterize what were their perceptions of the candidates? Although candidate gender will be examined in a later chapter all its own, the sex of the candidate will play a role in how social media posters viewed the candidates in this chapter. I expect to find that female candidates generated more negative agreement than male candidates male posters. This is not to say that men did not face any criticism by the public. In particular, Republican men like Rick Scott during the Senate race against Bill Nelson (D) in Florida received considerable negative agreement over his opponent.

There are two methods from which I gathered data on sentiment in the races in 2018. The first was coding on Excel spreadsheets and the second was from Wordstat. Both were very useful in harvesting the nuances in public sentiment during the midterm elections. This chapter will proceed as follows. First, an outline of my methodology will be discussed. Then there will be a presentation of the percentage of criticism by each candidate for each race in Twitter about how often the posts for each candidate on Twitter were critical as opposed to positive. This was categorized as “agreement of post” during my coding process. Negative agreement originates from a coding strategy that I used to categorize user posts. For example, if a post expressed negative sentiment against the candidate, and critical of a candidate, the post was assigned a “1.” If the post was in supported of a candidate, the post was assigned a “0.” In this way, I could easily determine the amount and type of negative sentiment that social media users expressed. Results will show that users were more critical of women than men candidates. This will be followed by a sentiment analysis of the language used by users. After analyzing critique of Twitter posts, I turn to a comparison of Facebook will follow. One might expect initial conclusions might conclude that users are meaner on Twitter than they would be on Facebook because Twitter users are anonymous. However, results showed that this was untrue. Social media users were actually more critical on Facebook despite using their given names on Facebook. (There were some that used an alias on Facebook but the majority of Facebook users used their real names). Furthermore, I found that there are more trolls on Facebook than there was on Twitter. Facebook showed that there were more trolls than there was on Twitter. In this chapter I will examine the overall percentages of negative sentiment for each candidate. In the following chapter, I will examine the nature of insults and negativity from Facebook and Twitter users.

Methodology:

There are two methods in which I used to analyze these data. The first method was coding on Excel spreadsheets and the second was an analysis generated from Wordstat. Both were very useful in harvesting the nuances of Facebook and Twitter posts during the midterm elections. Data collection for the completion of the project was a two-step process. The first step in collecting my data was to collect the Tweets and Facebook posts from these social media websites. Before I could harvest the responses, I needed to determine the exact dates from which I would collect the social media posts. My intention was to collect data from two months out from the election date of November 8. September would indicate the beginning of the campaign with emphasis on the last two weeks of the campaign. I decided on this methodology because I wanted to determine if social media users posted more frequently and were more critical as Election Day became closer. To accomplish this goal, I decided to collect the data from Twitter at the beginning, middle, and end of the election period between September 6, 2018, to November 6, 2018. In September, I collected posts and responses from Twitter and Facebook from September 6 through September 20. In October, I collected posts and responses from October 2 through October 16. Finally, I collected posts two weeks before Election Day which would be October 23 through November 6. I decided on these dates to determine the general sentiment of social media users as the election period progressed. I wanted to determine if users were more critical during the onset of the election period or more critical towards Election Day. I found that people posted more frequently as the election drew closer—but this could have been because the candidates themselves also posted more on their Facebook and Twitter accounts as November 8 got closer. Also, I also found that posters were more critical depending on the issues

that were prevalent during the two months before the election. For example, the Brett Kavanaugh trial was highly publicized and generated much more discussion depending on the position of the candidate on Twitter and Facebook. Also, key issues were immigration such as the Kavanaugh trial and the immigrant “caravan,” which functioned as indicators of user sentiment. These issues were important because the candidates had to convey their stance on these issues and user conversation would ensue depending on the candidate’s response. Furthermore, the Kavanaugh trial sparked a greater number of comments because the candidate posted their stance on whether they intended to support the nomination or not. Because the issue was so polarizing, the posts about the Kavanaugh trial encouraged more posts about party and gender which will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Also, of importance, was the selection of the candidates for each case study. I completed four case studies on highly publicized cases that most of the public would hear about in the four competitive races to study. All of the candidates were high profile office holders that generated a significant amount of press as well as user comments. My method utilizes campaigns that occurred in larger Southern states and Arizona. I might have improved my data collection if I could have used a case from one of the Northern states. However, I was looking for candidates that fit a specific requirement related to party affiliation and gender. I selected Senate races because they are more likely to receive local and national coverage in online media. I chose cases based on party and gender. The determining factor was party in this project. By choosing the four case studies, I could examine each while controlling the other will be controlling for gender and partisanship. It is important to control for partisanship because, for example, I will want to determine if the media treats a Democratic woman differently than a Republican woman. As a result, I needed to find Senate races with two women (Republican and Democrat), two men

(Republican and Democrat), one woman and one man (female Democrat and male Republican), one woman and one man (female Republican and male Democrat). The outcome was Martha McSally (R) and Kirsten Sinema (D) from Arizona, Bill Nelson (D) and Rick Scott (R) from Florida, Claire McCaskill (D) and Josh Hawley (R) from Missouri, and Marsha Blackburn (R) from Tennessee. It was important to control for partisanship because, for example, I will want to determine if social media users treat a Democratic woman differently than a Republican woman. I think it was important to incorporate cases that included party combinations because there needed to be a comparison of the parties that not only included party affiliation but addressed the issue of gender. For example, what kind of criticism would a female candidate receive if she was a Democrat, and her opponent was a Republican man? All of these cases were specifically selected based on party and gender so that all possible combinations of candidates were considered. The reason I was concerned about party bias was Hayes and Lawless determined that the public is more driven by party loyalty than by gender. As it turns out, the results of my study showed that participants did have a party bias. In short, Democrats were meaner, particularly against Republican women.

As part of the collection process, I needed to determine what Twitter and Facebook accounts I would use for each candidate. Some of the candidates had more than one account for each type of social media. I decided to use the accounts with the most followers for Twitter and Facebook which was the account each candidate used more frequently. The accounts that I used were considered “official” because they were specifically run by the candidate or closely monitored by the candidate’s staff. I had to be careful not to use accounts that were established by random social media users. My decision to choose which candidate’s account was determined by higher member number which resulted in more user comments. To collect the Facebook and

Twitter data, I copied the first 100 tweets or responses to from the corresponding day of each candidate post. The posts that I collected were direct interactions with followers and not shared posts—meaning the candidate and/or their staff as the author of each post. I did not collect responses to shares or retweets. The final product was that each candidate had individual files containing posts and responses ready for coding.

The second part of the project was data coding. I completed data coding for both Twitter and Facebook. Once the data was collected, I hand-coded all social media posts. For Twitter, I used a random number generator to determine which post I would use. The random number generator was numbered from one to five. In choosing the posts, I coded the responses from to every five candidate posts taking the first ten tweets replies to from each post. I completed this process for posts and tweets in Twitter for September, October and November. I coded the following characteristics of each post: The variables that I used to code the data was “direction of original post,” “agreement of response,” “profanity,” “exclamation,” “insult,” “threat,” “gendered woman” and “gendered man.” I also recorded the number of likes, retweets and comments. In total, I hand-coded 3,800 Twitter posts. My Twitter examination was my primary study and I collected data from all three months before the election. I conducted an examination of Facebook as a comparison against the Twitter feed. For Facebook, I did collected data from the entire month of September. For Facebook, I just needed a sample for comparison against Twitter. I decided to do the entire month of September so I would have enough posts for a comparison against all three months of Twitter. For this examination, I coded all of the posts for the month of September taking the first ten responses of each post. The variable categories were the same for Facebook as it was for Twitter. In addition, I also coded the sentiment of each response, for example, “happy” or “sad.” However, I added two interesting variables in

Facebook that I did not have in Twitter. For Facebook, I had the additional categories of username and gender. I wanted to determine if male or female users are more critical of the candidates than others, or perhaps show that there is no difference at all.

Agreement of Post—The Candidates and Initial Statistics:

The first race that I will examine was between Republican Martha McSally and Democrat Kyrsten Sinema in Arizona. Sinema won by a small margin and was the first woman ever and openly bisexual candidate to be elected to the Senate in Arizona. Sinema was highly criticized by users for wearing a pink tutu to one of her campaign rallies and it became a divisive topic that played out on both Twitter and Facebook. McSally ran a campaign that was highly criticized because of her consistent attacks against Sinema on Facebook and Twitter. Although McSally lost the election, she was still awarded a seat in the Senate for Arizona. After John McCain's death there was a vacant seat and was given to Senator Jon Kyle. When Kyle resigned, and left an empty seat, Governor Doug Ducey announced that he was going to appoint McSally as his choice to fill the position as a junior Senator. Consequently, McSally was sworn in after Sinema. I chose this race because I wanted to determine if women were more highly criticized than men. I looked at each candidate individually and then combined their statistics as a whole to determine positive or negative sentiment against the candidates. Coding was as follows—each user response was coded for agreement. There were three options in the coding—negative, positive or neutral sentiment. Negative sentiment was equal to a derogatory critical statement against the candidate. Positive sentiment was determined if the response was supportive of the candidate. A response was given a neutral code if the sentiment could neither be determined as positive or negative. A percentage was appointed to each category based on the total number of responses and the number of negative, positive or negative responses. The statistics were determined for each

month, the statistic overall, and total number for each race. The calculations were determined for each month in Twitter to determine if user sentiment changed over time depending on the dominant issues (for example, the judicial appointment trial of justice Brett Kavanaugh). Also, I wanted to calculate if users were more critical of the candidates as the race became closer to the election date of November 8, 2018. This process was completed for all eight candidates in this study and each race as a whole. Not only was agreement of post coded, but there were other categories as well. The categories were determined as follows: profanity, exclamation, insult, threat, gendered women and gendered man. I will look at all of the categories in this chapter except gendered women and gendered man which will have a chapter of its own. In addition, I coded the direction of the original tweet for each candidate to determine how each candidate communicated to users on Facebook and Twitter and that will also receive a chapter on its own.

Before I identify the individual negativity scores involving agreement and sentiment, I will disclose the overall results. In one aspect, Hayes and Lawless were correct—it did come down to partisanship—overall, Republicans received more criticism, particularly Rick Scott of Florida, Josh Hawley of Missouri, Martha McSally of Arizona and Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee. In short, Democrats are meaner and more critical of the candidates. However, Republican Marsha Blackburn received the highest amount of negative sentiment in her race against Democrat Phil Bredesen. Also, as a trend—criticism against women was more gendered than men. Also, Republican Martha McSally received, on average, a higher amount of negative sentiment. The overall finding in this study involving negative sentiment shows that Republican female candidates are criticized by social media users more than Democratic female candidates. Also, the way that women were criticized was more negative than that of men, and that will be examined during a sentiment analysis on WordStat in an upcoming chapter. Republicans Rick

Scott was highly criticized by users as was Josh Hawley. Even more interesting, was that the amount of negative sentiment did not affect the outcome of the elections. For example, Rick Scott, Josh Hawley and Marsha Blackburn were Republicans receiving a high amount of criticism (more than their Democratic counterparts), and still won the Senate seat in their respective states. Martha McSally was the only Republican candidate who lost to a Democrat.

This chapter will also compare Facebook and Twitter. Overall, people were meaner on Facebook, which is an interesting finding and was unexpected because people, for the most part, use their real names on Facebook. One would think because of the possible anonymity on Twitter that users would be meaner on Twitter. Also, there were more trolls on Facebook. I identified trolls as those users who were most critical, and furthermore, the most frequent presence in the candidates Facebook feed. Interestingly, Facebook users often called out the trolls and criticized them for their negative posts. In short, people do not like trolls, and often identified them as “bots.”

Now for the results—the first is Martha McSally(R) and Kirsten Sinema(D). I will first examine Twitter for each month and then combine all results for a final score. The following results come from the category, “agreement of posts.” The following chart shows the trend of negative responses by month between McSally and Sinema.

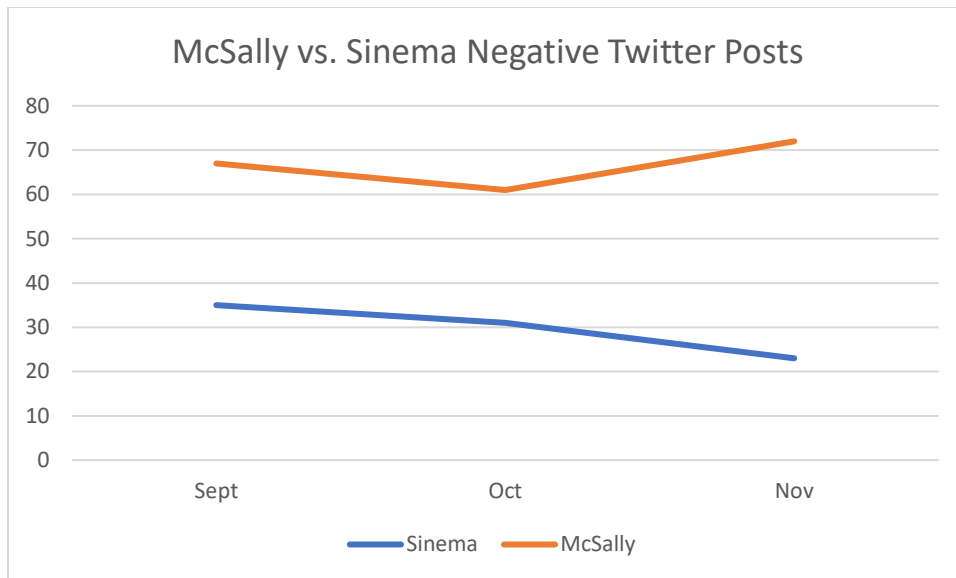


Figure 3.1 McSally Receives More Negativity on Twitter

In September, 67% of the all the replies to McSally’s Tweets were negative and 26% were positive, and 6% were neutral responses. For October, McSally those numbers received 61%, 32%, and 7% respectively. In November, McSally received 1% negative, 32% positive and 7% neutral responses. In this case, it appears that as the election got closer—the meaner users were against McSally. McSally’s overall score with the three months combined was 67% negative, 29% positive and 5% neutral sentiment. Kyrsten Sinema’s scores showed a clear difference in sentiment than McSally’s. Overall, Sinema’s scores were more positive. In September on Twitter, Sinema received 35% negative, 58% positive and 7% neutral scores. For October, Sinema received 31% negative, 67% positive and 1% neutral. Finally, in November, Sinema received 23% negative, 75% positive and 1% neutral responses. Overall, for all three months combined Sinema received scores of 28% negative, 69% neutral and 3% neutral. Compared to McSally it appears that negativity did not increase as the November election was closer and might have even declined slightly. As will be discussed later in this chapter, many of those criticizing McSally, were displeased with her received much of her criticism because of her

attack posts attacks against Sinema. In contrast, which is an interesting trend because Bill Nelson (D) in Florida who regularly attacked Rick Scott in his Tweets, received far fewer negative comments but did not receive the same negative response from users as McSally received. Altogether, Taking the race as a whole with two female candidates McSally and Sinema received scores of 50% of the replies posted to McSally and Sinema's Tweets were negative, 46% were 50% negative, 46% positive and 3% were neutral.

I also analyzed Facebook users' responses to McSally and Sinema's posts for the month of September. Agreement of user was also examined for each candidate. Overall, users were meaner because there was a degree more of insults. I will examine the nature of these insults in an upcoming chapter. For McSally, the negative sentiment was 42% of users' responses were negative while just 26% of the replies to Sinema's posts were. While these numbers suggest comments on Facebook were less negative for both candidates, however, the number and type of the insults—particularly those directed at McSally—were more derogatory on Facebook. Sinema received a score of 26% negative sentiment on Facebook. Overall, the posts on Facebook were longer and more critical of the candidates.

The next Senate race that I will examine is the race between Democrat Bill Nelson and Republican Rick Scott. The former governor of Florida took on long- time incumbent Bill Nelson and garnered some of the highest criticism in this study. While calling Nelson a “socialist,” Scott kept his distance from Donald Trump—although he received an endorsement from the president. Bill Nelson, an experienced long time occupant in politics, held the Senate position from 2001 to 2019. Nelson also served in the Florida House of Representatives from 1972-1978 and served in the House of Representatives in 1979-1991. Considered a moderate Democrat, Nelson ran for same sex marriage, lowering taxes on the middle and lower class,

expanding environmental programs and protecting the Affordable Care Act. The race was so close that both parties filed a lawsuit for a recount and after the recount it was shown that Scott won by 10,033 votes. Scott received 50% of the vote while Nelson received 49% of the votes.

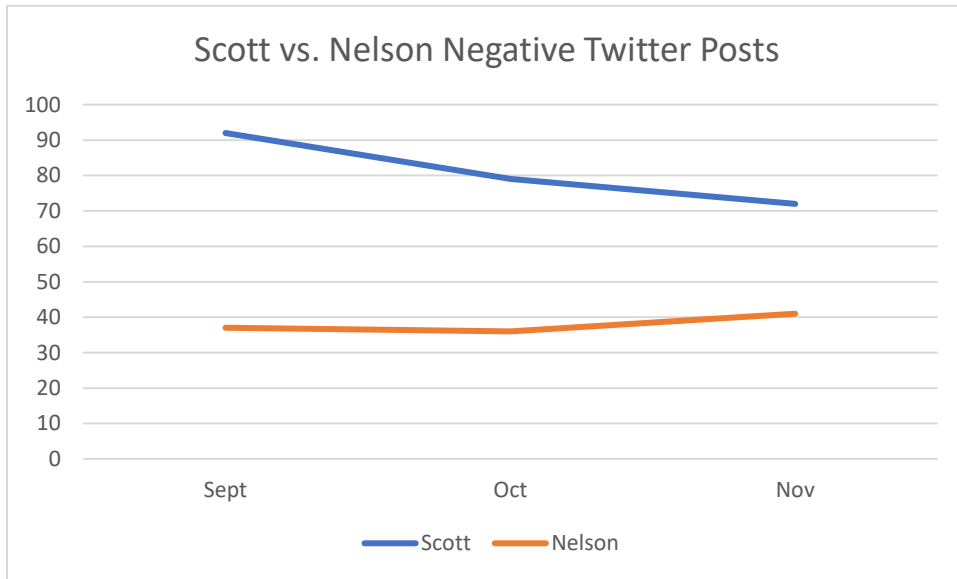


Figure 3.2 Scott Receives More Negativity Than Nelson on Twitter

The agreement scores on Twitter replies showed a stark difference between the two candidates with Scott receiving a higher percentage of negative feedback were much more negative for Scott than Nelson. The chart above shows that the replies to Nelson’s Tweets were received significantly more positive than Scott’s Tweets. Despite repeatedly attacking Scott, posts about Nelson’s scores were more positive overall on the positive. In September, Nelson received 37% negative, 51% positive and 12% scores. For October, Nelson garnered 36% negative, 53% positive, and 11% neutral. In November, Nelson received 41% negative, 55% positive and 4% neutral. Nelson also shows that users were slightly more critical during the month of November. Over all three months, Overall, Nelson’s scores were 38% negative, 53% positive and 9% neutral. Overall, the replies to Nelson’s Tweets were significantly less negative than the replies to negative response was significantly lower than that of Rick Scott’s Tweets. On

the other hand, Republican Rick Scott's scores showed a large difference from that of Nelson. Many of the comments suggested posters were unhappy with Users were more negative because they disagreed with Scott's tenure as governor of Florida. Overall, users were more specific in their responses and ranked either negative or positive. In September, 92% of the replies to Scott's critical scores were negative. In October, Scott garnered those numbers were 79%, negative, 14%,4% positive and 7%, respectively neutral. Finally, in November Scott received 72% negative, 27% positive and .8% neutral scores. With the three months combined Scott received 79% negative, 18% positive and 2% neutral scores. Because of Scott's highly negative scores, the combined scores of the two candidates would lean towards the negative with the overall scores being 65% negative, 31% positive and 5% neutral.

Facebook results for the month of September were interesting in this race. Overall, there was less negative user sentiment for candidates for both men in this race. Nelson received 25% overall negative user sentiment and Scott received a 48% total negative sentiment out of all users who posted. That said, Twitter and Facebook users were both more hostile towards Scott. I will look at the trends on the insults in a comparison between Facebook and Twitter in an upcoming chapter.

The next race would involve a Democratic female candidate, Claire McCaskill, and a Republican male candidate, Josh Hawley in Missouri. The following chart shows the difference in negative posts between McCaskill and Hawley.

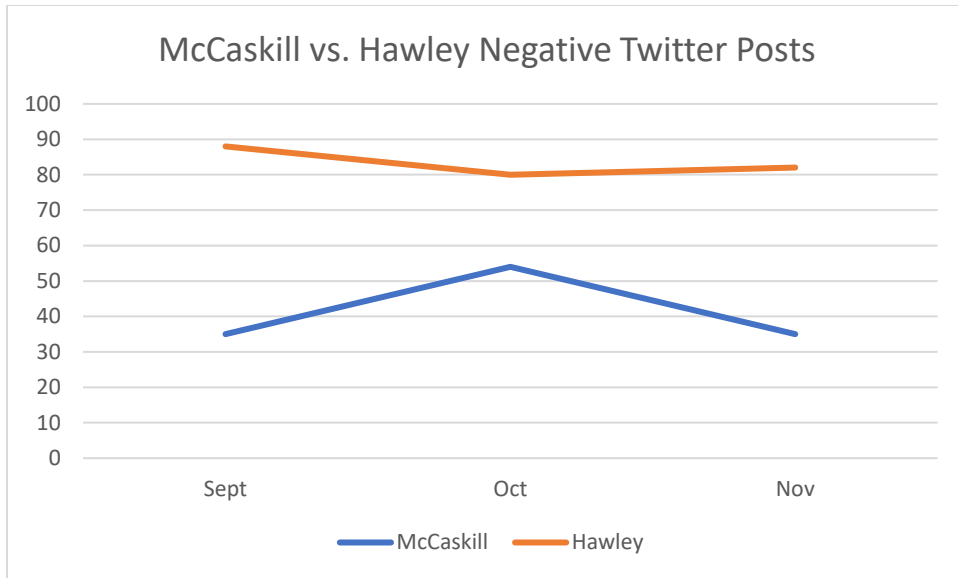


Figure 3.3 Hawley Generates More Negativity Than McCaskill on Twitter

Just as in previous races, Twitter replies to the Republican candidate were more negative than the replies to the Democratic candidate. Results would also show that the Republican candidate received more criticism. However, keep in mind, and as the sentiment analysis will show, that men and women differed in the type of criticism they received including more gendered responses for women. Despite being the Republican receiving more criticism, Josh Hawley won the race in Missouri against 2 term incumbent Claire McCaskill. Hawley previously served as the 42nd Attorney General in Missouri from 2017 to 2019. Hawley received considerable support from key Republicans including Mitch McConnell and President Trump. One of the key issues of the election between McCaskill and Hawley was healthcare—much of the issue was debated on social media platforms by users. Both candidates pledged to bolster preexisting conditions for healthcare. McCaskill was first elected to the Senate in 2006 and served another term in 2012 before she was defeated by Josh Hawley in 2018. The outcome of the election was relatively close despite the amount of negative comments that Hawley received and the results were 51.5% of the vote for Hawley compared to McCaskill’s 45.5% of the vote.

User agreement between Hawley and McCaskill was varied with McCaskill receiving more overall positive sentiment as a Democrat. Hawley received more negative response, but still won the election. The statistics for McCaskill was as follows: in September, she received 35% negative response and 60% positive with 5% neutral. In October, negative sentiment went up with 54% negative response rate. Positive sentiment was 45% with .7% neutral response. Finally, in November, the negative response rate was at its highest with 64%. The positive agreement was at 35% and .7% neutral response. Overall, the months combined McCaskill had a 41% negative response rate with 56% positive and 2% neutral.

As a Republican, Josh Hawley had a different response from viewers despite winning the race. In September, Hawley had 88% negative response and 11% positive agreement from viewers and 0% neutral response. In October, agreement was similar to September with an 80% negative response rate and 17% approval. The neutral response was at 2%. Finally, in November the negative response was at 82% with 17% approval. The neutral response was 2%. Overall, with the three months combined the negative response was 83% with 16% percent in agreement and .7% neutral response. Hawley carried most of the negativity and overall, the agreement between a female Democrat and a male Republican was 63% negative response and 35% in agreement with 2% neutral. For Facebook, McCaskill had a 29% negative user sentiment with very few insults. Overall, Hawley received 52% disagreement out of all the users that posted on his Facebook page in September.

The final Senate race that I examined was between a Republican woman, Marsha Blackburn and a Democratic male, Phil Bredesen. The results were conclusive—as a Republican woman, Marsha Blackburn received the most negative response from viewers out of all the candidates examined. Interestingly, like all the Republicans that received a negative response,

she still won the race in Tennessee. Blackburn had a long tenure in politics, serving as state senator from 1999 to 2003. She continued her political career winning a seat in the House as Tennessee's Congresswoman for the 7th congressional district from 2003-2019. Blackburn identified herself as a staunch Republican and received both Donald Trump's and Mike Pence's endorsement. She supported many of Trump's policies including building the U.S.-Mexico wall. She also reported that she carried a gun in her purse. In addition, many liberals identified Blackburn as a "wingnut" (Kaplan, 2018). Accordingly, this sentiment was a major theme throughout user comments which characterized her as a "crazy lady." Blackburn's opponent Phil Bredesen also had a history of political involvement. Bredesen was the 66th mayor of Nashville from 1991 to 1999. In 2003, he became the 48th governor of Tennessee which lasted until 2011. Bredesen was characterized as a moderate liberal. Bredesen openly criticized Trump especially for his tariff policies which he believed effected Tennessee directly. In October of 2018, Bredesen received the endorsement of Taylor Swift. Interestingly, her endorsement largely increased Bredesen's Twitter and Facebook feed positively because of the backing by the pop icon. Despite this popular endorsement, Bredesen still lost the election to the conservative Blackburn losing by ten points and only carried three counties.

Overall, the Tennessee election garnered a lot of negative sentiment from social media users, including Bredesen. But it was Blackburn that received the most negative sentiment in Twitter for all three months, with November characterized by the most negative sentiment.

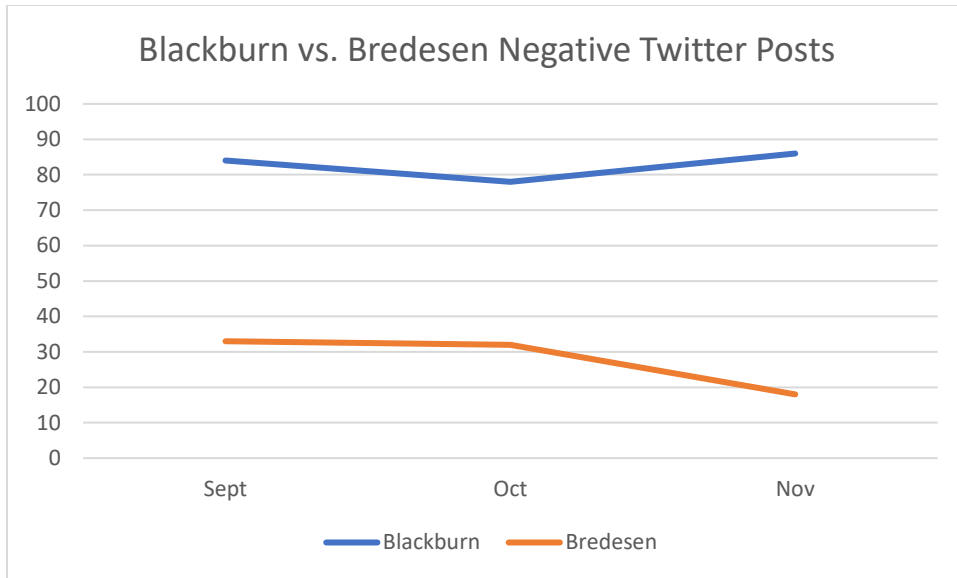


Figure 3.4 Blackburn Generates More Negativity Than Bredesen on Twitter

In September, Blackburn received 84% negative sentiment from users with only 15 % positive results and .6% neutral response. In October, Blackburn garnered 78% negative and 22% positive sentiment from users. In October, she had 0% neutral comments from users. November was Blackburn’s most critical month with 86% negative response rate and 14% positive results with .2% neutral response. Overall, Blackburn had the highest rate of negative sentiment with 84%. She had only a 16% approval rate and the lowest neutral response at .3%.

Phil Bredesen still received some negative response, but far less than Blackburn. In fact, most of his response was positive from viewers. In September, he received a 33% negative response rate with 66% positive reinforcement from users and a .6% neutral response. In October, his response rate was similar with 32% negative response and 68% positive and 0% neutral from users. Finally, in November, after the endorsement of Taylor Swift, Bredesen had his most substantial positive increase with only 18% negative and 80% positive and only 1% neutral response from users. Overall, Bredesen had a very high positive response from users at 73% --much different than Blackburn’s overall 84% negative response. His negative response

rate was only 26% with .8% responses neutral. The combined totals for the entire race was highly influenced by Bredesen's positive remarks from users with 56% being negative and 27% positive with only a .5% neutral response rate. In sum, this race supported the theory that Democrats are meaner and especially to Republican women. Facebook results were also interesting in this race. Overall, the number of negative responses was lower than Twitter, but the nature of the posts were more derogatory. Blackburn had a 51% negative response rate while Bredesen had a much lower 12% negative sentiment. In the following chapter I will look at specific trends in user sentiment by doing a content analysis of both Facebook and Twitter. The content analysis will proceed in two ways. First, I will look at trends from coding I did on an Excel spreadsheet. Then I will do a content analysis using Wordstat. In the next section, I will look at user sentiment in Wordstat by employing a sentiment dictionary to the Facebook and Twitter responses.

User Sentiment and Wordstat:

The question remains—how accurate was my analysis on user agreement? To validate my findings and ensure that my coding was not biased, in this section, I will conduct a computer trends that I established on Excel, I ran a sentiment analysis using Wordstat and the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) dictionary. The computer-assisted analysis did not find as much negativity as my analysis using hand-coding. The results on Wordstat were not as high as those in my initial analysis—because it only searches for Tweets or posts containing a limited number of words indicating emotion. but the trends were similar. In this section, I will report the percentages of negative sentiment for each candidate using Wordstat for both Facebook and Twitter. In subsequent chapters, I will examine particular words and phrases as a result of the sentiment analysis on Twitter. I also argue that utilized hand coding on Excel resulted in a more

accurate picture of user sentiment (agreement of response negativity/positivity) because I was not limited by a dictionary to consider the context the words used. During my hand coding, I was able to discern whether or not a comment made by users were either for or against the candidate in sentiment. The Wordstat analysis will serve as a check to ensure that the trends I find in my hand coding are accurate to confirm my findings regarding the harsher treatment of Republican candidates.

In the Pennebaker dictionary, I directed WordStat to search for words from used the sections in the LIWC entitled “negative emotion,” “anxiety” and “anger.” The results in percentage for Twitter are as follows: In the race between McSally and Sinema the trends were similar as my hand coded evaluation. McSally had 13.5% negative emotion, while Sinema had 6.7%. Here, just as I had previously shown McSally demonstrated more negative emotion as a Republican woman. The results were similar for Nelson and Scott. As a Republican man, Scott received more negative sentiment with the numbers showing 10.9% for Nelson and 13% negative sentiment for Scott. McCaskill and Hawley had an interesting result in WordStat. Results showed that McCaskill has a higher percentage of negative sentiment with 13%. Hawley received a 7.3%. Here, the results could be misleading. Wordstat does not take into account that some of the negative sentiment expressed by users is about the other candidate. For example, social media users would post on McCaskill’s account negative commentary about Hawley. This is why the coding on Excel is useful—it specifically identifies whether or not a post was for or against a candidate on the candidate’s account. There was a similar result on Blackburn and Bredesen. Both received higher amounts of negative sentiment with Blackburn scoring 17.6% while Bredesen received an 18.1%. It is important to note, as my study shows, that Blackburn received the highest amount of criticism in the entire study as a Republican women—(also

similar to McSally). Furthermore, much of her criticism came from Bredeesen's account as participants used Bredeesen's account as an opportunity to post damaging accounts of Blackburn. That is one of the limits of Wordstat, is that it does not distinguish criticism or negative sentiment according to each candidate—while my coding on Excel does just that. In addition to the LIWC dictionary, I also included a dictionary of my own words that reflected general trends throughout the study. The dictionary words included such words as “crazy, “ineffective” and “superficial.” The results on this dictionary were also conclusive. All Republicans in the study except for Rick Scott received higher marks having keywords from my own dictionary. McSally received 30%, Hawley received 30% and Republican Blackburn received a percentage of 20%.

Results from Wordstat were similar for the month of September on Facebook. In fact, the outcome showed that users were more critical on Facebook which is what my initial exam on Excel showed. In fact, the number of occurrences or count of each case of negative sentiment was much higher than on Twitter. In short, the results show that people are much more critical on Facebook—which is an interesting conclusion because more people use their real names on Facebook at a higher level. In most cases on Twitter, people are anonymous using a code name that is different from their actual identity.

Similar to Twitter, I ran two tests—the first utilizing the LIWC dictionary and second was the use of my own dictionary. I will first disclose the results of the LIWC sentiment test. McSally received a 10.1% negative score while Sinema received a 13.4% outcome. The result was similar in Facebook where much of the negative comments in Sinema's Facebook feed was posts about McSally using negative language which explains why Sinema had a higher score. The results are similar for Nelson and Scott. Nelson received a 16.6% while Scott received an 8% negative score. In the third case covering McCaskill and Hawley, the results were

conclusive. Hawley received a higher score of negativity with a 10.4% while McCaskill received a 6.5%. Finally, the fourth case involving Blackburn and Bredesen was equally as definitive. Blackburn received an 18.7% while Bredesen received a 16.3% negativity score. In the test that involved my own dictionary the results were more distinct. McSally received a higher score with a 13.5% and Sinema got a 12.9%. For Nelson and Scott, the results were similar to the LIWC test with Nelson receiving a 14.2% and Scott scoring a 7.7%. Keep in mind, and similar to the first test, much of the negative sentiment against Scott showed up in Nelson's feed. The third case between McCaskill and Hawley showed that people were more critical of Hawley with McCaskill receiving a 3.9% and Hawley receiving a 7.1%. Finally, Blackburn verses Bredesen showed the most difference, which is comparative to my overarching conclusions about the project—users are more critical of Republican women when the female candidate is competing against a Democratic man. Blackburn received a 25.8% and Bredesen received a 14.8% negativity score on Wordstat.

This chapter has served as an introduction to the overarching trends in the study. These initial results show that Republicans receive more criticism, and the highest amount of criticism is received by Republican women especially when the female candidate is running against a Democratic male as is the case between Blackburn and Bredesen. This chapter also shows that criticism for each candidate is evident in both feeds—meaning one can find negative sentiment about a candidate in their competitor's posts. This is only a summary of the initial findings. In the next chapters, I will uncover specific language and trends that occur in the Twitter and Facebook feeds. Furthermore, a content analysis will further bolster the results in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARTISANSHIP AND NEGATIVE EMOTION: LOOKING AT ANGER, ANXIETY AND DISGUST

Introduction: Moving from Agreement to Party Sentiment

In the previous chapter, I reported on statistics and measure of agreement. In the previous chapter, I showed that people who use social media to interact with candidates are generally more negative than positive. This is especially true as the election day gets closer. My Twitter analysis showed that as the end of the campaign became closer, social media users were more critical. In this chapter, I take a look at how partisanship factors into these interactions by showing that social media users are more hostile towards Republicans and Democrats. In the previous chapter, I reported on statistics and measure of agreement. Agreement is an indicator of whether the user showed support for the candidate or showed negative sentiment—or a personal attack against the candidate. In this chapter, I will conduct a content analysis that will confirm my findings in the previous chapter. Results showed that Democrats were more critical of Republican candidates—meaning Republicans received the most criticism at a higher percentage. Even more interesting, was that social media posts about Republican women were the most negative overall. In short, McSally and Blackburn received the highest amount of criticism from social media users. Interestingly, Blackburn, who received the highest percentage of criticism campaigned against a male candidate. McSally’s competition was female against female candidate, but still received more negative criticism than others. In this chapter, I will further dissect user social media post sentiment by examining how user party identification is related to emotion. The emotions that I will examine are anger, anxiety, and disgust.

Looking at Party and Sentiment:

There have been considerable studies completed on party and emotion. In fact, Lawless and Hayes use party as the foundation for why the public behaves as it does. For Lawless and Hayes, gender was not the major consideration for why people react to candidates as they do. Hayes and Lawless argue that "differences in campaign communication will be driven not by sex, but by party affiliation, the dominant feature of modern campaigns" (Lawless and Hayes, 2016). They further argue that "voters' attitudes have little to do with whether candidates are men or women and everything to do with whether they are Republicans or Democrats" (Lawless and Hayes, 2016). And in a way, they are correct. My study does show that users stuck to party affiliation when it came to whether they agreed with a candidate. In sum, party does matter. But as I will show in subsequent chapters, gender does make a difference. Republican women received the most criticism, or negative emotion, especially when their opponent was a man as is the case between Blackburn and Bredesen. Lawless and Hayes used party as their litmus test as to how the public reacts to candidates. The methodology they implemented looked at campaign ads and social media messages. They also looked at newspaper coverage at both male and female candidates. These were the determinants that allowed them to conclude that party matters. I, on the other hand, will look at both party, emotion and gender. It is important to note that Lawless and Hayes did look at gender as a variable for sentiment about the candidates. However, I will argue that the gender of the candidate does make a difference in agreement for or against the candidate.

As part of the analysis, I will look at the emotions that users express including anger, anxiety and disgust. There is a body of work that examines partisanship and emotion. One article on disgust entitled, "Disgust Sensitivity, Political Conservatism and Voting (2012)," by Inbar et

al., argues that people with disgust sensitivity, as scholars named it, are more likely to have were commensurate to conservative values. They argue that “not only does the momentary experience of disgust shift judgments in a politically conservative direction, individuals who are more readily disgusted reflect this in their stable moral and political attitudes” (Inbar et. al., 2012) One of the goals of the study was to “investigate a possible explanation for the link between DS (disgust sensitivity) and conservatism by examining whether the tendency to experience a certain kind of disgust is most predictive of political orientation” (Inbar et al., 2012). The scholars used a series of extensive questionnaires and surveys to investigate disgust sensitivity. They found that disgust sensitivity was positively related to political conservatism. Furthermore, the study showed that disgust sensitivity determined how the public would vote—for either John McCain or Barack Obama in the 2008 election. According to this study, I would expect that Republicans would express more disgust than Democrats during my content analysis.

In an earlier article published in 2008, "Conservatives Are More Easily Disgusted Than Liberals," disgust is examined in relation to conservatism. Inbar, Pizzaro and Bloom also conducted surveys and interviews on the internet with adults to measure the amount of disgust felt by the participants. They found that certain issues determined the degree of disgust sensitivity. For example, the higher level of disgust the greater the propensity for political conservatism. Inbar et al. posit that “this relationship appeared to be strongest for, but was not limited to, attitudes towards the “sociomoral” issues of gay marriage and abortion” (Inbar et al., 2008). Similar to my studies, much of the emotion felt of users was determined by issues and political context—for example, the confirmation hearings of Supreme Court justice Brett Kavanaugh, or the "caravan" of immigrants heading to the U.S. border. In addition, based on

these two studies by Inbar et al., I would expect that Republicans would express more disgust than Democrats.

As part of my examination on emotion, I will also be looking at anger and party. Do users of one party express anger more readily than another party? I have no expectations because this topic has not been examined by the literature. I find nothing but conventional wisdom since Republicans are closely tied to Trump and the result is they will behave in a more aggressive manner (Korestelina 2017). The result of this connection with Trump, is that social media users who are Republican will express more anger than Democrats. Furthermore, Trump is known for being a bully on social media—especially on Twitter (White 2018). Trump goes on the attack as the result of any criticism against him and his followers are likely to follow suit on social media. Anxiety is another emotion that I will examine. Once again, there are not any studies that show a connection between party and anxiety that examine the relationship between partisanship and anxiety among social media users. Based on my hypothesis that Republicans are more likely to express heightened emotions, particularly anger, I draw the conclusion that Republicans are more likely to express anxiety at a higher rate than Democrats.

Based on these conclusions and studies, I constructed the following hypotheses:

1. *Partisanship determines how Democrats and Republicans express emotion.*
2. *Republicans are more likely to express disgust than Democrats.*
3. *Republicans more readily express anger than Democrats.*
4. *Republicans are more likely to express anxiety than Democrats. Republicans are more likely to express anxiety than Democrats.*

Based on these hypotheses, I would expect that Republicans would express more anger, anxiety and disgust. My study showed that there is a mixture of emotion between Republicans and

Democrats. This is simply not true. In fact, Democrats commented at a greater rate and displayed higher degrees of anxiety, anger, and disgust overall. Although I expected that Republicans would express more anxiety and anger, because as followers of Trump—who is known as a political bully—would inspire more aggression in general. However, as my content analysis will show, it is Democrats who expressed the majority of negative emotion against Republican candidates.

Looking at Party as a Determining Factor for Partisanship and Negative Emotion—A

Content Analysis:

The chapter will proceed as follows: I will conduct a content analysis of user comments regarding anger and anxiety and then do a comparison between Facebook and Twitter. Following this analysis, I will conduct a similar examination of disgust and make similar comparisons. I will perform my content analysis using my hand-coded Excel documents and Wordstat. The hand-coding on my Excel document determined agreement, and also coded for gendered comments for both male and female candidates. I will use the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count Dictionary (LIWC) as a determinant of both negative words and phrases that signal various emotions (Tausik & Pennebaker 2010). Based on my literature review, I expected that Republicans would express more emotion involving anger and anxiety. The results showed otherwise. Democrats produced more instances of negative emotion involving anger and anxiety. Overall, I will determine, much like Lawless and Hayes, that party makes a difference. For each emotion I have constructed a chart showing my results.

Party and Emotion on Facebook:

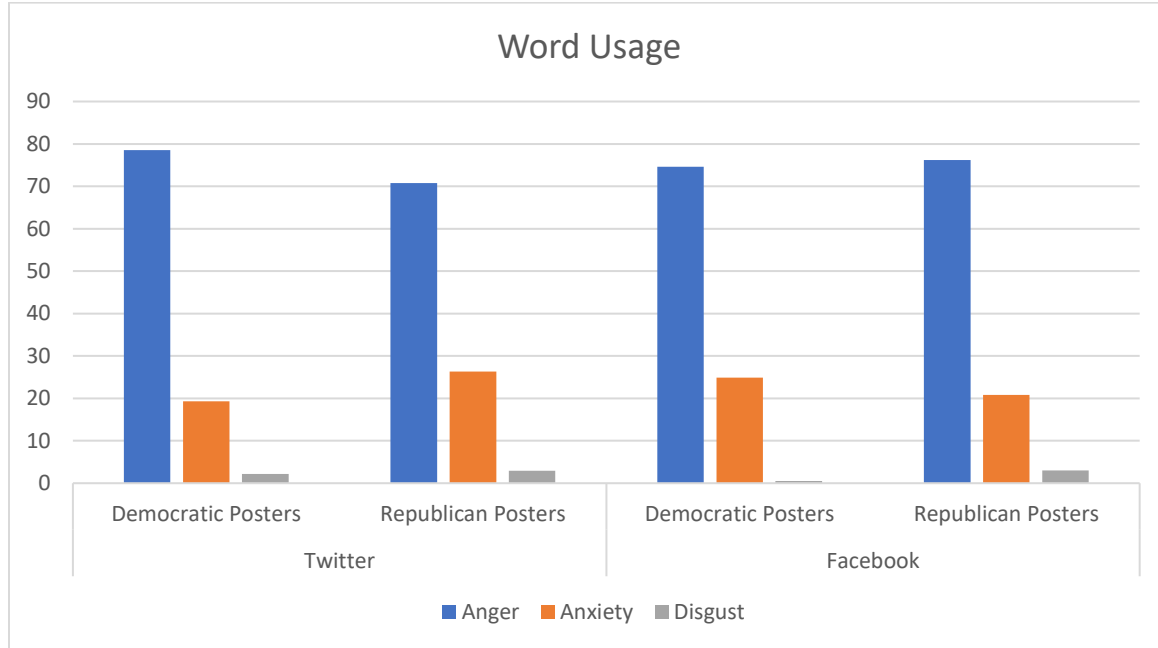


Figure 4.1 Democratic and Republican Posters Have Similar Amounts of Negative Emotion

This chart shows the percentage of anger, anxiety and disgust out of all negative responses as expressed by social media users on Facebook and Twitter. I recall that I do not know the party identification of the poster. As a result, I assume that the critical posts are posted by someone who is the opposite party of the candidate. The results are as follows: Out of all negative words 78.5% were negative for Democrats on Twitter. For Republicans, 70.8% were negative on Twitter. In comparison, on Facebook 74.6% were negative for Democrats and 76.2% of the total words were negative for Republicans. The percentage of words for anxiety were lower on both Twitter and Facebook. The results were as follows: Out of all negative words 19.3% were negative for Democrats on Twitter. For Republicans, the percent of words involving anxiety was higher at 26.3%. Facebook revealed slightly different results. For Democrats, the total percent of negative words in the category of anxiety was 24.9%. For Republicans, the result was slightly lower at 20.8%. Emotions of disgust were very low. Out of all negative comments

only 2.2% were of disgust for Democratic users on Twitter. Slightly higher, was the Republican users at 2.9% on Twitter. On Facebook, the percentage of disgust was much lower with only .5% for Democrats and 3% for Republicans. The trends that I uncovered during this analysis show that Democrats are more likely to use words related to anger on Twitter. On Facebook, Republicans are more likely to use anger words at a slightly higher percentage. Anxiety revealed different results on Twitter. With 26.3% Republicans were more likely to use words related to anxiety out of all negative comments. On Facebook, the results were the opposite. With 24.9% Democrats were more likely to use anxiety words over Republicans, which totaled 20.8%. Finally, the overall results involving disgust were similar between Twitter and Facebook. On both Twitter and Facebook Republicans were more likely to use words related to disgust out of all negative comments. These findings were supported by research done on Wordstat. On Wordstat, I recoded the negative comments so that they were either Republican or Democrat—1 was coded as Republican and 2 was coded as Democrat. In the following section I will conduct a content analysis in support of the trends I have uncovered in this analysis. I will determine how language is used by social media posters through a content analysis on Wordstat.

Examination of Anger and Facebook:

The next step was to look at the trends and what words did Republicans and Democrats use to express anger in Facebook. After I examine anger in Facebook, I will look at Twitter and how the emotion of anger is expressed. I will then compare the results between Facebook and Twitter. The first category that I looked at was anger in Facebook for the month of September. I used the “Keyword-In Context” function on Wordstat to see what types of words in the anxiety and anger dictionary from LIWC Pennebaker were used and in what context for each user

comment. The following chart show the top ten words used in anger out of all negative comments.

Table 4.2 Top Ten Words Used on Facebook and Twitter

Twitter Anger		Facebook Anger	
Democratic Posters	Republican Posters	Democratic Posters	Republican Posters
Lie/Liar/Lying	Shit	Cut	Destroy
Cut	Fight	Attack	Lying/Liar/Lies
Attack	Cut	Fight	Skrew
Kill	Kill	Lied/Liar/Lies	Stupid
Fight	Lies/Lying/Liar	Destroy	Hating
Assault	Hate	Idiot	Evil
Hate	Abuse	Blame	Kill
War	Idiot	Trick	Idiot
Destroy	Hell	Hate	Abuse
Victim	Victim	Dumb	Blame

This chart shows that for both parties words including lying, lies, liar or lied are common across Facebook and Twitter. Both parties expressed a concern for the truthfulness of the candidate. In addition, I found an interesting trend in anger. In many cases the words that were related to lying were used to delegitimize one candidate while at the same time praising another candidate. For example, one Democratic user expressed in the race between McSally and Sinema that, “These ads are a bunch of lies. McSally has done nothing, or won’t tell us about what she’s done but flies jets and vote in lock-step with Trump 98% of the time. Sinema is from a military family and has voted for money for the military and vets.” Overall, words related to lying occurred 24% of the time 4 overall in McSally’s feed by Democrats and 53%9 times of the time in Sinema’s feed by Republicans. In Sinema’s feed not only was comments related to lying more than McSally, comments against Sinema had were harsher and were more distinct because they called her a liar. For example, one Republican user expressed, “Kyrsten Sinema is a liar, she is not an independent, she is an anti-American Democrat.” Or another posted, “And the left defines the

word liar.” In the race between Nelson and Scott words related to lying were used 24%4 times of the time overall for each candidate. Once again, comments from Republicans were related to party. One user said, “More lies from the RADICAL LEFT. VOTE RED TO SAVE AMERICA FROM THE LYING RADICAL LIBERALS.” One comment made by a Democrat against Rick Scott stated, “NO integrity Scott-ads are false-can easily be fact checked. If he lies about his opponent, how can he be trusted about anything. NO INTEGRITY SCOTT.” In the race between McCaskill and Hawley, it was the Democrats who used words related to lying more frequently. In McCaskill’s feed, lying words only showed up only 12% of the and Republican Hawley received a frequency of 65% or 11 times in his feed. In the race between Blackburn and Bredesen, Democrats used words related to lying more frequently than Republicans. For Blackburn, words related to lying occurred 65% of the time, or 11 times while Democrat Phil Bredesen only incurred words related to lying at 29% or 5 times.

Republicans related a series of word use that was oftentimes more negative than Democrats. Words related to lying was a case where out of the 4 races there were two cases where Democrats were more negative and 2 cases where Republicans had more cases. Although Democrats overall had a higher percentage of negativity, Republicans frequently emoted a higher degree of negativity in user comments. In Democrat Sinema’s race, Republicans used words like “destroying,” “kill,” “hating” more frequently than their Democratic counterparts. In comparison, in McSally’s case, none of these pejorative words were used even once. Instead, there was a lesser degree of criticism words used user feed. For example, words used were, “attacks” “trick” “sucks,” and “cut.” In the case study involving Nelson and Scott, trends were the same. Republicans had less cases of negative emotion, but their attacks exuded more vitriol. In Nelson’s feed words were used like “evil,” “dangerous,” “skrew” and “stupidity.” There is no

doubt that Democrats were critical of Rick Scott. In fact, as a Republican man he received some of the highest percentage of criticism. And Democrats could certainly exhibit a high degree of criticism, but not to the degree in severity of Republicans. Democrats used words like, “destroyed,” “cut” and “morons.” In one statement, a user published that “You (Scott) destroyed us as governor. No you will not be our senator. Go away.” On the other hand, there are example of Republicans taking a much more negative stance. For example, one user calls Bill Nelson evil writing, “If you are evil enough to take away the Second, you’re evil enough to take away the First and any other of the amendments.”

There were some cases where Democrats not only had more negative comments related to anger, but the nature of their comments were equally as divisive as the Republicans. An example would be in the case of Democratic McCaskill and Republican Hawley. Overall, Hawley received a higher percentage of negative comments, which is commensurate to my findings—that Republicans, especially Republican women received a more substantial degree of negative agreement. But in this case the nature of words used meant to express anger had similarities in this case. In McCaskill’s feed, words choices such as “morons,” “fucking,” “suck” and “skewed” were meant to show anger against McCaskill. One user said, “you (McCaskill) are a fucking idiot.” Or, “YOU SUCK!!! How about being FOR AMERICA.” In these cases, Republicans delivered personal attacks against McCaskill, which was the trend in the first two cases involving McSally and Sinema and Nelson and Scott. But in this case, Republican Hawley received a considerable amount of personal attacks from Democrats. Democrats used words like “fuck,” “moron,” and “idiot” to attack Hawley. For example, one user exclaimed, “fuck you Hawley...done with corrupt comen.” Another stated that “Hawley is a colossal moron; so there’s that.” Finally, another user said, “yes, cause putting a reality show idiot in the presidency

has done so many great things for Missouri...what a bunch of idiots!” Overall, my analysis shows in this case that both Republicans and Democrats delivered personal attacks on both candidates. But how did the case with the most negativity fair between Democrats and Republicans when it involves the nature of how users express anger?

Republican Blackburn received the highest percentage of negative emotion as a Republican woman more than any other candidate, and received the majority of personal attacks made by Democrats. One user declared that Blackburn was “A DUMB TWAT.” There was a high number of the word “attacks,” in Blackburn’s feed talking about Blackburn’s policies. For example, one user confirmed that “yep. All she has are attack ads that are lies. If you have to lie to win, you don’t deserve to win!” In sum, in addition to personal attacks, many users criticized Blackburn for her policy platforms and her knowledge. One user wrote, “again, please educate yourself (or quit playing dumb) when you approach these issues, the facts are clear.” One of the defining issues during this midterm election was policies on health care. Republicans, during this time, were accused by social media users of proposing to cut preexisting conditions. Along with Blackburn, Republican Josh Hawley also received considerable amount of criticism on this issue.

Democrat Phil Bredesen received significantly less criticism than Blackburn, in addition, health care was also an issue. For example, one user inquired about the cuts that Bredesen would be making on social welfare programs writing, “will Bredesen expand Medicaid?? Just exactly what federal spending will Bredesen propose to cut?” Overall, Bredesen received less personal attacks from Republican users and most of the comments are not related to him directly. For example, a user comments on Bredesen supporters affirming, “tell your stupid idiots that are going around ringing doorbells that they just cost you my vote.”

There were some interesting trends during this analysis and how Republicans and Democrats expressed anger on Facebook during the month of September. In the first two cases involving McSally and Sinema and Nelson and Scott—it was the Republicans that delivered more personal attacks against candidates. Trends would change, however, in the races concerning McCaskill and Hawley and Blackburn and Bredesen. In these races, Democrats readily issued personal attacks, but also concern for policy issues such as healthcare—as was the concern evident in Bredesen’s feed.

Anger on Twitter:

As I did on Facebook, I will look at how language was used to express anger by Republicans and Democrats. I will look at the different trends in which Republicans and Democrats expressed the nature of their anger. In addition, I will also make a comparison of emotion between Facebook and Twitter. Once again, I used the Pennebaker dictionary as well as the “keyword in context function” to aid in my examination. I also determined an interesting comparison between Facebook and Twitter. I expected to find that users on Twitter would be more critical than users on Facebook because users are more likely to hide their identity on Twitter. Were social media users more critical on Facebook than Twitter—or vice versa? My initial conclusion shows that users on Twitter express both more anger and anxiety than on Facebook. In short, Democrats were extensively more critical on Twitter than on Facebook. However, I noticed on Facebook that despite the Democrats having more negative sentiments there were some cases on Facebook where Republicans delivered a more personal attack. Will this be the same for Twitter? Also, on Facebook—the use of words related to lying was a recurring trend on Facebook. Will I find the same occurrence on Twitter? These are all questions that I will answer as I progress through my content analysis of social media Tweets on Wordstat.

Another observation was that there are more cases denoting negative emotion on Twitter than there is on Facebook. Could this be because more people are anonymous on Twitter than on Facebook? During my Facebook examination, I recorded the name and sex of the poster. Many users used their real names so their true identity was disclosed. Would this stop users from being openly critical of the candidates? For Twitter, people often identified themselves under code names—never really disclosing their true identity. The result was more language related to anger and emotion on Twitter than on Facebook.

By using the “keyword” function on Wordstat, I was able to discern various trends on word use and the nature of the comments. Similar to Facebook, words related to lying were most abundant—especially on Twitter. Overall, words related to lying, including the words liar, lying and lied were used 149 times on Twitter—a considerable amount higher than on Facebook, which only used words related to lie 17 times. Once again, I used the “keyword” feature on Wordstat to narrow down the language to party to determine whether Republicans or Democrats were more likely to deliver a negative or personal attack. Words related to lying were more prominent from Democrats than they were Republicans. One user stated: “VOTE BLUE MARSHA LIES FOR MONEY.” McSally was also victim of personal attacks against her character with users frequently calling her an outright liar, for example, “Martha McSally is nothing but a liar.” Interestingly, criticism on Twitter was more prevalent by Democrats. In Facebook, Republicans had less instances of criticism, but delivered a more personal attack. On Twitter, it is the majority of Democrats that invoke the most negative emotion—especially when it comes to the use of words related to lying. For both, Republicans Josh Hawley and Marsha Blackburn, words related to lying were used by the majority of Democrats. One user stated, “Fear and lies are all that Marsha Blackburn has to offer. On the other hand, her challenger, Phil

Bredesen only had the use of words related to lying four times. In one of the few comments made by Republicans one user determined that, “he’s lying to you! He currently has a ‘D’ rating from the NRA. So he’s not bragging he’s lying.”

Another substantial difference between Facebook and Twitter is the use of obscenities. In Twitter the word “fuck” was used 12 times compared to the 3 times that “fuck” was used on Facebook. Out of the 12 times that the word “fuck” was used, 10 occurrences were made by Democrats. Republican Marsha Blackburn had the most attacks with viewers simply saying, “fuck you!” at a rate of 3 times. Republicans also used obscenities and were the only party that used the word “asshole” in two utterances against Bill Nelson—one having to do with gun control— “The guns are not assault weapons you fucking idiot!!! The person using the gun is the problem! You are such a bandwagon jumping asshole.” The other occurrence was about IRS reform adding that, “Bye Bill. Could have retired with dignity. My father once sent you a letter asking about IRS reform in the 1990’s...you spitefully forwarded it to the IRS. Hope you enjoy retirement asshole.”

Another word trending on Twitter was words used related to hate such as “hates,” “hated,” and “hateful.” Here, words relate to hate occurred 40 times. Out of the 40 utterances 68% were used by Democrats. It is important to note, that although the word hate was used, the majority of its context was a description of a condition and not a personal attack—even for Democrats. For example, one user said, “the NRA will never have my support. They only encourage fear and hate.” The candidate with the most use of words related to hate was Marsha Blackburn as a Republican woman. Overall, words related to hate occurred 45% of the time and 18 times in Blackburn’s feed out of the 40 times hate words were used. Another find related to Blackburn was the use of the word “cheat.” Overall, 91% of the time there were words related to

cheating occurring in Blackburn’s feed. In one tweet, a user attacked Blackburn calling a liar and attacking her gender—“Marsha Blackburn is a liar, cheater and thief! Desperate woman! #NeverBlackburn.” Words related to “attack” were also used numerous times—36 times to be exact. And once again, Republicans were attacked by Democrats. Out of the 36 times “attack” was used, 78% of the 28 utterances were initiated by Democrats.

Table 4.3 Top Ten Anxiety Words on Facebook and Twitter

Twitter Anxiety		Facebook Anxiety	
Democratic Posters	Republican Posters	Democratic Posters	Republican Posters
Fear	Shame	Worried	Terror
Shame	Crazy	Horror	Shake
Crazy	Desperate	Scare	Desperate
Desperate	Embarrass	Shame	Risk
Scare	Scare	Confused	Suspicious
Guilt	Worried	Avoid	Worried
Terror	Guilt	Doubt	Horror
Worried	Horror	Guilt	Scared
Ashamed	Confusion	Afraid	Shame
Embarrass	Distraction	Crazy	Confusion

Facebook and Anxiety:

Now that I have examined anger on Facebook and Twitter, I will now detail the expression of anxiety on Facebook and Twitter and make a comparison between the two. Keep in mind on both Twitter and Facebook words related to anger were more common. Similar to anger, there were also common trends involving the frequency of words used. The preceding table shows the top ten word trends related to on anxiety for both Facebook and Twitter between Republicans and Democrats. Words that are trending across the board were “crazy,” “shame,” “guilt,” “terror (horror),” and “confusion.” Interestingly, words such as “shame” and “fear” were highly related to the women candidates. I will discuss these trends in the next chapter related to

gender. I will now conduct a content analysis showing context of the most common words used to express anxiety. My hypothesis states that I expect to find that Republican posters express more anxiety than Democratic posters. In this case it was not true—but not by a significant amount. Overall, Republican posters expressed anxiety at 20.8% overall, while Democratic posters measured at 24.9%. The content analysis will show that in some cases words trending were dominated by Democratic posters over Republican posters.

For example, one of the words that appeared during the analysis trending was related specifically to Democratic posters. These are words about worry and related to worry. Words related to worry were one of the words trending at a high level for Democratic posters. On all but one occasion out of 6 times, words related to worry were used by Democratic posters. Which explains why worry was lower on the word usage chart for Republicans. Worry was a negative word used in context to describe an emotion related to the candidate. For example, one user used the word to criticize Rick Scott writing, “Rick Scott has never worked for Floridians. He works for corporations. If he makes it to the Senate he will sell out Florida corporations for Global corporations. Just to expand his wealth and power at the expense of others. So don’t worry it’s just business.” Another word trending by Democrats was the words related to “horror” and “horrible.” Out of the 5 times the word was used Democratic users used these words to attack the Republican candidate 100% of the time. For example, one user criticized Marsha Blackburn by saying, “she’s horrible.” Another attack against Marsha Blackburn included the following: “Marsha is a dangerous conservative with horrible ideas. DO NOT VOTE FOR MARSHA BLACKBURN!” These are largely attacks made against women—a trend that I will unpack in the next chapter about gender. The word “horrific” was used once by a Republican user meant to

attack Kirsten Sinema stating that, “Sinema is nothing but a far left liberal hack trying to pass herself off as a moderate independent. She is horrific for Arizona.”

Republicans expressed a slightly lower level of anxiety than Democratic posters. What were some of the key words related to trends for Republican posters? Words related to “terror,” “terrified” and “terrorists” was a common trend. In fact, Republican users accounted for 83% of the 5 out of the 6 times words related to terror were used. Terrorist was used largely because of a comment Sinema made about United States soldiers. One poster called out Sinema when they posted, “Arizona Senate candidate Kyrsten Sinema smeared U.S. soldiers as being terrorists in flyers distributed by her far-left activist group.” This statement put Republican posters on the attack. One poster proclaimed, “Did you (Sinema) call them terrorists? Go Martha McSally!” The preceding are some of the examples of the more common trends on Facebook related to anxiety. This section on anxiety was rather brief because most of the comments were related to women and anxiety—a trend I will fully examine in the chapter on gender. I will next examine anxiety and Twitter and make a comparison between the two social media platforms.

Twitter and Anxiety:

The results for anxiety on Twitter revealed a different trend than on Facebook. On this occasion, it was Republicans that had a higher percentage related to anxiety. In fact, the difference was 7% higher with Democratic posters measuring at 19.3% and Republican posters measuring at 26.3%. These results support my hypothesis that Republicans are more likely to express anxiety over Democrats. For Facebook, the trend was not true with Democrats measuring slightly higher than Republicans. The chart (on page 14) shows the most common words used related to anxiety. The most common words used for both Republican posters and Democratic posters was very compelling. The words used the most were “fear,” “shame,”

“embarrass,” “ashamed” and “crazy.” Interestingly, these words were most commonly related to the female candidates. It seems that users express more anxiety when they are posting about women. This is a trend I will discuss in the next chapter on gender. For this chapter, I will do a content analysis on some of the other more common trends and similarities between Facebook and Twitter.

Similar to Facebook, users expressed emotion related to worry. In fact, there were 9 utterances related to worry. The percentage of responses were fairly evenly split between Republican posters and Democratic posters. Out of 9 occurrences, 44% of them were expressed by Democrats and 55% were expressed by Republicans. This differed from Facebook because worry was primarily expressed by Republicans. On Twitter, the word “worry” was used to attack the candidates. One such attack was made against Marsha Blackburn when one user posted, “Marsha Blackburn is a terrible representative. She doesn’t meet with constituents. She worries more about what she can get for herself. She never has a plan or coherent idea. Watch her political ads. It’s time for Marsha to go.” Attacks against Blackburn were common amongst Democratic posters, particularly addressing her qualifications and honesty. Another Democratic poster wrote, “Marsha Blackburn isn’t smart enough to come up with a health care plan. She is just a bible thumping rich girl that has never worried about money so why should she care if the older got medical attention. She likes to tell you what you want to hear, knowing she can’t follow through.” Republican posters also used the word worry during their attacks against Democratic candidates. One such attack was against Bill Nelson when a user posted that, “you don’t have to worry about it—your old ass is going home.” Kyrsten Sinema also received attacks related to worry when one poster added, “Stop advertising on my feed in Twitter! Sinema is a garden variety liberal who helped create Obama care, that is the least of her campaign worries.”

Words related to “terror” and “terrorist” were common on Facebook. This is a similar word choice used on Twitter—and more frequently. On Twitter, words related to “terror” was used 15 times. On Facebook, words related to terror were used only 6 times. On Facebook, it was the Republican posters that used words in this category—83% of the time⁵ out of 6 times to be exact. This was largely a reaction to Sinema and her comment about the U.S. military. Trends were similar on Twitter with Democratic posters using words relating to “terror” 5 times. It was Republican users that had the most frequent use of “terror” with 10 occurrences. On Twitter, trends were similar with Republican posters criticizing Sinema for her comment writing that, “Kyrsten Sinema—why won’t you take back your statement comparing U.S. soldiers to terrorists? Arizona and our veterans deserve an apology for your action.” Another comment made by a veteran reads, “As a vet, how dare you say we are terrorists—you need to leave our great country you worthless libtard.” Interestingly, the context of most of the comments using “terrorist” was about the battle against terrorism in the United States. This was uncommon on Facebook and most comments were related to the controversy surrounding Sinema. One comment made by a Democratic poster criticized the NRA posting, “the NRA is a terrorist organization.” Another Republican veteran posted, “I served in Iraq and Afghanistan. I can attest that we were not terrorizing anybody. We were fighting terrorism.” Words related to “terrified” were used 3 times on Twitter. The context surrounding “terrified” was to denote something that the user was afraid of relating to one of the candidates or a particular issue, for example, women’s reproductive rights. One Democratic poster declared their support of Clair McCaskill and said, “We’re also terrified for the future of reproductive rights and we have our eyes on your Claire McCaskill.

Another common trend on Twitter was the use of words related to “scare,” “scary” and “scaring.” Words related to “scare” were expressed 19 times on Twitter. This is also another good candidate for my discussion on gender in the next chapter because words related to “scare” were expressed 12 times relating to female candidates. Even more specifically, 83% of the time or 10 out of the 12 times, “scare” was used in relation to Republican female candidates. There was also a significant difference in party. The word “scare” was used only 21% of the time by Republican posters. On only 4 out of the 19 occasions was the word “scare” used by Republican posters. One Republican used “scare” to invoke fear of the Democratic candidate, Kyrsten Sinema, becoming the Senator of Arizona when they posted, “So if you are elected and the Democrats win the Senate we get this guy as Senate Majority Leader? If that doesn’t scare you people, nothing will. Vote McSally!” The majority of comments related to “scare” was used by Democratic posters—largely against Republican candidate Marsha Blackburn. One poster simply stated, “voting for Marsha is scary.” Another user questioned Blackburn’s qualifications in support of Phil Bredesen when they wrote, “At least he didn’t go as a grossly unqualified candidate. That would be scary.”

These are some of the major trends as identified on my word chart and found in Wordstat as the most common words used by social media users. Overall, Twitter contained more words denoting negative agreement than on Facebook. In this section, I identified the major common trends in word usage. Both Twitter and Facebook used words related to “worry” and “terror.” On Facebook, Democrats were more likely to use words related to the emotion of anxiety. In comparison, Republicans were 7% more likely to express anxiety than Democratic users. Thus, my hypothesis that Republicans are more likely to express anxiety is supported by Twitter users and not by Facebook users. A more telling account of emotion, particularly anxiety, will be

examined in my next chapter on gender where I will discuss words such as “fear,” “shame,” and “crazy.” In the next section of this chapter, I will examine the emotion of disgust.

Facebook and Disgust:

Table 4.4 Top Ten Disgust Words Used by Twitter and Facebook Users

Twitter Disgust		Facebook Disgust	
Democratic Posters	Republican Posters	Democratic Posters	Republican Posters
Disgusting Disgust Repel Detestation	Disgusting	Disgusting	Disgusting Disgust

The level of disgust is also a trend that I examined during my study on emotion. The chart above shows the most common words used related to disgust. I hypothesized that Republicans would be more likely to show a higher level of disgust than Democratic users. Comparatively, words related to disgust were more common on Twitter. On Facebook, the words trending on “disgust” was used once while “disgusting” was used three times. In this case, Republican users attacked Democratic candidates 3 out of the 4 times “disgusting” was used. This trend supports my hypothesis. The only democratic user, used disgusting to attack Marsha Blackburn stating, “Marsha, Marsha, Marsha—pretty disgusting posting a phot from a church service for your campaign.” Republican users did not mince words when it came to using the word “disgusting,” although not all of them were used to attack the candidates. One user made a comment to criticize Phil Bredesen commenting, “Phil Bredesen is campaigning and trying to make people think he cares about them. Where were these articles last year, or the year before? Could it be that your disgust is self-righteous indignation?” One Republican user used “disgusting” to state their disapproval for both candidates on the basis that they were both politicians writing, “you are confusing my disdain for Kyrsten Sinema as admiration for Martha

McSally. They are both politicians, therefore by nature, they are both awful people. This one (Kyrsten Sinema) just struck me as the more vile human at the moment. It's a shame we elect our leaders now on who is the most righteous and forthright, but who is the least hideous and disgusting." Another Republican user used the word "disgusting" to attack Sinema's stance on the military and what she claimed is a "moderate" agenda. Here, the attack reads, "Your attempt to present yourself as promilitary is disgusting. Your history of disrespecting the military and law enforcement tells the true story. This act for being "moderate" is a ruse to try and get in office. If you get in, which you won't, you will return to your far-left liberal agenda. We are not fooled." Although disgusting was not used very frequently on Facebook, one trend is very interesting. Out of the 4 utterances involving "disgust," 3 out of the 4 were attacks made against women. The conclusions on this study does support my hypothesis that Republicans did use words related to "disgust" more frequently. On Twitter, words related to "disgust" were more frequent—as is the trend—users were more critical on Twitter. In the next session I will examine these trends.

Twitter and Disgust:

Emotions of disgust were significantly different on Twitter. First, Facebook had only 4 occurrences using the word "disgusting." On Twitter, there were 23 words relating to "disgust" expressed by Twitter users. On Facebook, 3 out of the 4 times "disgusting" was used by Republican users. According to my chart (see page 5), Democrats expressed disgust at 2.2% out of all negative posts. Republicans were slightly higher at 2.9%. My hypothesis predicts that Republicans are more likely to express the emotion of disgust. The results are not significant in this case with only a .7% difference between Democrats and Republicans. What is even more interesting, and foreshadows my next chapter—out of the 23 times that words related to disgust

was used 17 of them were related to the women candidates. That is 74%! Furthermore, out of the 23 utterances, 12 were attacks against Republican women for a total of 52%. This conclusion deserves serious consideration in my next chapter.

The most common form of “disgust” used was “disgusting” by both Democrats and Republicans. There were a couple comments that used the words “repel and “detestation”—both by Democratic posters. There was a difference in the nature of the use of disgusting. Although both parties used “disgusting” as a means to attack the candidates, it was the Democrats that used disgust to attack the candidates personally. Republican Marsha Blackburn received the highest number of comments related to disgust by Democratic users. Comments were very similar to the following: “Actually the focus is on keeping your disgusting self from the Senate.” Another user attacked Blackburn saying, “You just can’t stop lying can you? Bredesen would have voted with the Republican Party to confirm Kavanaugh. You are a disgusting human being. STOP LYING.” Martha McSally received the second highest criticism related to disgust by Democratic users. Disgust was used as a means to host an all-out attack against McSally. For example, one Democratic user states, “Martha McSally, you are nothing but a liar. You will lie to get what you want. Just like Trumpy, you are a disgrace. You do not belong in the Senate. You will hurt people—not help them. You disgust me. You are nothing but a fake, lying piece of shit. Go put your head in a hole and stay there.” The preceding is just a glimpse of what I will unpack in my chapter on gender. Women are under attack!

Republicans, on the other hand, did express disgust—but not at the level of vitriol that Democrats unfurled against their Republican adversaries. One Republican user used disgust to describe the political climate writing, “The political climate is disgusting. First time in my life that my family is SPLIT. We need healing.” Although their attacks were generally softer in tone,

Republican users were not above some instances of attack against Democratic candidates. The difference is “disgusting” was not used to attack the candidate personally. For example, one Republican poster criticized Democrat Claire McCaskill posting, “You are calling them disgusting for someone vandalizing their sign? Oh, ok Claire. Meanwhile, you vote your family stimulus money from the government. You are a Democrat when it benefits you and you betray them when it benefits you. You truly are the perfect opportunist.” Although my hypothesis predicts that Republican users are more likely to express disgust (it was only by .7%!), I find that it was Democratic users who more consistently delivered harsher attacks against the candidates.

Conclusions:

Overall, I expected to find that social media users were more critical of the candidates, particularly Democratic users—and the results were confirmed particularly when expressing anger. The most common negative words used (such as words related to lies), were mostly uttered by Democrats. There were some differences in attack than on Facebook between Republicans and Democrats. During the Facebook, examination I found that although Republicans had less instances of criticism, they were more likely to deliver a personal attack against the candidates—more so than Democrats. Anxiety and party had an interesting conclusion on Twitter. Republicans were more likely to express anxiety on Twitter—7% more to be exact. The criticism in Twitter as used by Democratic users was a mixture of personal attacks and overall context, particularly when it came to words related to lying and hatred. Nonetheless, the conclusion stands confirmed—Democrats are more critical and Republican women receive the most instances of negative agreement. In the next chapter, I will explore gender and negative agreement and emotion. I will answer the questions as to how and when users criticized women—and moreover, what types of gendered responses occurred. I expect that I will find that

women receive more criticism than men—especially Republican women and that they are also victim of gendered attacks more frequently than male candidates.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANGER, ANXIETY AND DISGUST: SENTIMENT AGAINST FEMALE CANDIDATES AND GENDER

Introduction:

In the previous chapter, I examined the interaction of negative emotions and partisanship. The chapter showed that in terms of anger, anxiety, and disgust, Democrats were more critical of Republican candidates—especially female Republican candidates. This was a compelling conclusion because the literature showed that Republican social media users on Facebook and Twitter would emote more negative emotion between the two parties. While conducting this examination, I uncovered an additional compelling pattern amongst social media users: I found that in terms of anger, anxiety, and disgust, users expressed more of these emotions against female candidates to a remarkable degree. In short, the language that participants used when addressing women featured more words indicating anger, anxiety, and disgust. This was especially true for Martha McSally and Marsha Blackburn—both of whom are Republicans. In this chapter, I will revisit the emotions of anger, anxiety, and disgust and focus more squarely on how they interact with gender. In addition, I will analyze Twitter and Facebook posts to determine how much gendered language they contain. But in this chapter, I will strictly focus on gendered comments and how language is used by posters to interact with the candidates. Overall, my findings show that social media posters are more likely to use women were targets of gendered language by social media posters when replying to female candidates than male candidates. Gendered language is any language that refers or relates to the male or female gender. In most cases, gendered language is used to insult the candidate. Often, gendered language will refer to commonly known stereotypes about the sexes. In my study, gendered

language is categorized as a negative emotion against the candidate. In the previous chapter, I found that users on Twitter expressed more emotion and were more critical of candidates in general. Will Twitter users also use more gendered language? While using Wordstat, I can expect that I will uncover similar trends involving gender during a content analysis.

For this chapter, the sections will be as follows: I will conduct a literature review, and then a content analysis using Wordstat on of Twitter and Facebook posts. Specifically, I determine how frequently words expressing all three emotions—anger, anxiety and disgust are used by social media users when replying to male and female candidates. I then do a careful reading for gendered language. I will conduct the analysis for both Facebook and Twitter and then make comparisons between the two mediums. This will all be followed by an analysis of my findings.

How Gender Shapes the Way Voters Treat Political Candidates:

Women are more familiar during political campaigns as they run for office more frequently now more than ever. As a result, more studies have been conducted about gender and the differences between male and female candidates, particularly their treatment by voters. In an earlier study, Eagly et al. (1992) argued that women in leadership positions often battle stereotypes that can devalue women. More current studies have shown that violence and harassment against female politicians is a regular occurrence (Bjarnegard 2018; Bardall 2011; Krook 2011; Dolan 2004). One such study suggested that when women exhibit more power and visibility the public was even more critical (Hakansson 2021). This was especially true when women occupy traditionally male positions (Eagly & Karau 2020; Rudman & Phelan 2008). Oftentimes, a harsh political environment even effects how women participate in politics. In a recent study, Restrepo and Krook (2020) argued that violence against women presents a barrier to women's political participation. Now more than ever, women have become part of the

conversation in politics as they capture more seats in Congress and in gubernatorial positions. As a result, these studies become increasingly relevant.

In recent years, how politicians engage in politics with voters has changed. The use of the internet has become a primary tool for politicians during campaigns, particularly the use of social media. In the twenty-first century it is almost a prerequisite that politicians have a Facebook and Twitter account along with a campaign website. This allows instant and twenty-four-hour access to voters. Because social media is such a popular medium of communication during campaigns there has been a body of work surrounding the use of social media, its interaction with voters and the effects it has on politicians. Now, studies have taken a gendered approach to campaigns and social media. Similar, to previous studies on female candidates that occupy positions of power the results are similar in terms of social media and political campaigns. Investigations have concluded that women who garner high visibility are more likely to receive uncivil online messages at a greater rate than male candidates (Theocharis & Barbera 2020; Rhealt et al. 2019). This proves to be a global trend when studies about women in India and Spain showed that women are often treated with humiliating remarks and that communication with the public often produced gendered stereotypes (Saluja & Thilaka 2021; Betran et al. 2021). Furthermore, the literature demonstrated that both males and females receive insults, but the conversation about women was highly related to their appearance (Betran et al. 2021). Harmer and Southern conducted research on online othering exploring digital violence and discrimination on the internet. They also identified trends that support gendered and racist abuse (Harmer & Southern 2019).

There was a specific study that was of particular relevance to my project. A study on the Swedish parliament by Josefsson not only looked at gender as a variable, but she went deeper

into her research. She claimed that it was not enough to consider that online criticism was gendered. Instead, scholars must go further into the details and uncover *how* language is gendered (Josefsson 2021). This study delegated categorized gendered language into three categories in the following manner—frequency, character and consequences. The results analysis uncovered some unique conclusions—going further than other studies on gender and social media. First, it revealed that men and women receive online abuse at similar frequencies. The difference was that women endure harassment that was is sexualized in nature. Josefsson also confirmed that women receive more comments related to their appearance. One of the interesting conclusions in this study confirmed is that men are more affected by negative feedback than women. Men were more likely to leave office than women because of online abuse. A similar study, published after Josefsson by Wagner confirmed that there were gendered insults experienced by Canadian female politicians on social media. Like the study from Josefsson, this article also explored the effects of gendered comments against women (Wagner 2020).

Similar to Josefsson, my research will build upon this body of work on gendered language and social media. I confirm that women bear online abuse that is gendered, but I also want to explore the *ways* in which language is gendered. Like my previous chapter—I examine language related to anger, anxiety, and disgust. I expect to find that women are recipients of comments by users that are related to these categories at a more frequent rate than male candidates. My study is one of the first of its kind because it looks at specific language trends among social media users. Previous studies only determine that gendered language and online abuse is affirmative. Josefsson also looks at the nature of gendered abuse against female candidates—but not as specific as my study attempts. Josefsson only confirms that gendered abuse is a phenomenon, and furthermore she talks about how it affects male and female

candidates. My study is different because it looks at how language is used by posters as well as user emotions that are generated during the midterms for the Senate in 2018. Comparable to some of the previous literature on gender and social media, I find that the language directed at male and female candidates contains similar amounts of negative emotion during their campaigns. But I can confirm, like the literature, that women endure gendered online abuse at a more frequent level. My conclusion is compelling because it shows that voters feel more anger, anxiety and disgust about female candidates over their male counterparts.

Gender and Negative Emotion: Statistics on Anger, Anxiety and Disgust:

One of the trends that this project examines is whether women face more negative emotion than men, particularly those emotions related to anger, anxiety and disgust. The results are conclusive. Women candidates incur more comments related to negative emotion compared to male candidates. After running an analysis on Wordstat, I created two charts on the results of negative emotion comparing women and men candidates. The first chart is on Facebook and the second chart is on the statistics from Twitter.

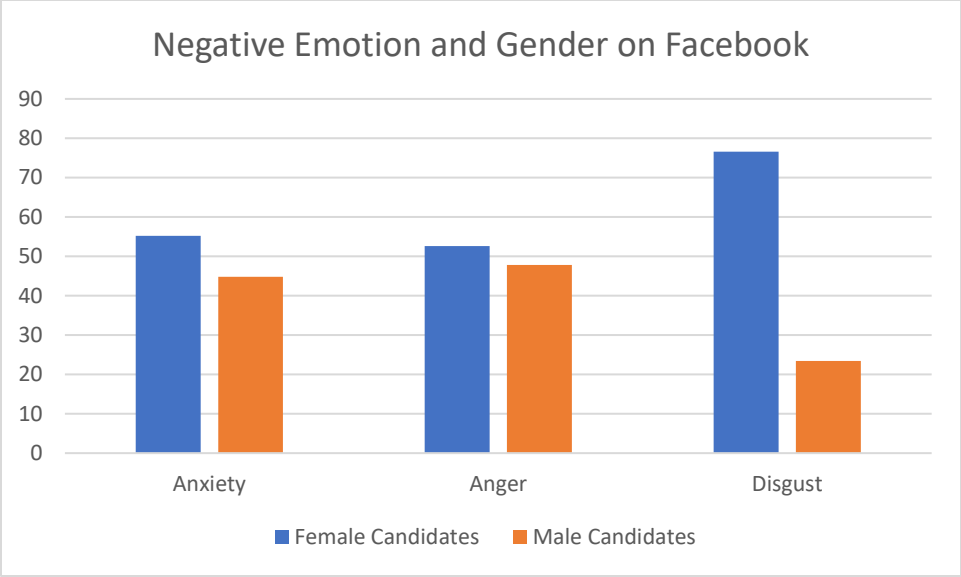


Figure 5.1 Female Candidates Generate More Anger, Anxiety and Disgust on Facebook

The results on Facebook are as follows: for anxiety women received 55.2% of negative comments while men received 44.8% negative comments. The category on anger showed similar trends with women incurring 52.6% of negative language while men received 47.4% of negative comments. Disgust also showed compelling results. Women received 76.6% of negative comments while men garnered 23.4%. The results on Twitter contained similar results.

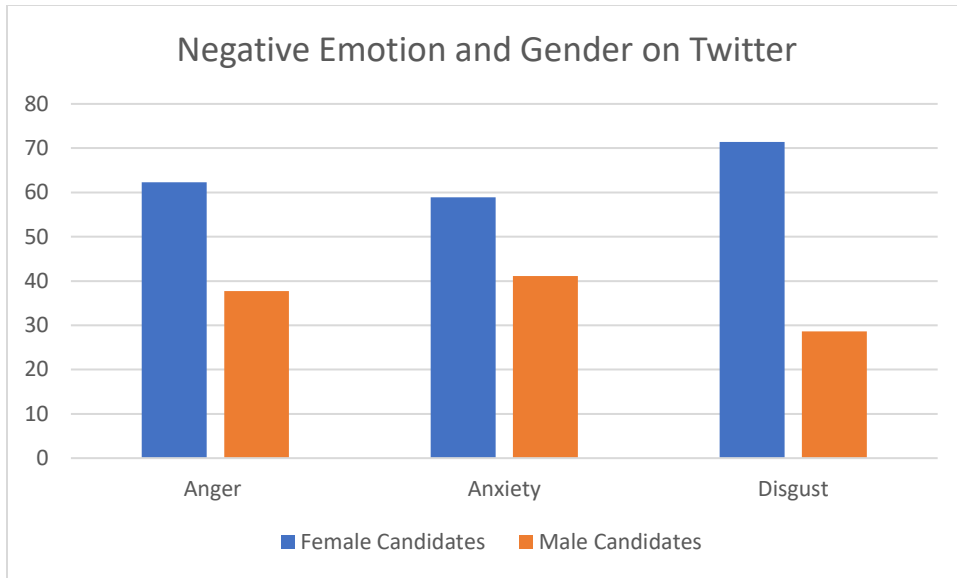


Figure 5.2 Female Candidates Generate More Anger, Anxiety and Disgust on Twitter

On Twitter, women candidates received considerably more negative language compared to men on Facebook. For anger, women received 62.3% of negative comments while men garnered 37.7% of negative language. The category related to anxiety generated similar results with women candidates receiving 58.9% of negative comments and men earned 41.1% of negative remarks. Finally, the analysis on disgust was equally conclusive. Women received a majority of the negative comments coming in at 71.4% while men generated 28.6 % of negative language.

My charts also reveal trends showing the differences between Facebook and Twitter. For anger, Twitter users have 9.7% more negative language than Facebook. Anxiety shows a similar trend with Twitter users with a slightly higher total of 3.7% more negative language than Facebook. For disgust, the statistics are almost the same. Facebook users show a 76.6% negative language against female candidates. There was only a 5.2% difference on Twitter showing at 71.4%. Disgust was the only category where Facebook users showed more negative emotion than Twitter.

Negative emotion against men also revealed unexpected results dealing with male candidates. On Facebook, in the categories of anger and anxiety, users showed a higher number of negative comments against men. For anger, there was a 9.7% difference between Facebook and Twitter with Facebook trending at the higher statistic. Anxiety showed similar amounts of criticism with only a 3.7% difference between Facebook and Twitter. The difference between Facebook and Twitter concerning disgust was very small. In this case, Twitter users showed the slightly higher number at 28.6 %, which is only a 5.2% difference.

Overall, the difference between men and women was greater on Twitter. I suggest that this trend is because users on Twitter disclose their true identity at a lesser rate than on Facebook. Facebook users are more likely to post content under their actual names. On Twitter, users are more likely to identify themselves under a code name or alternate identity. Accordingly, Twitter users prefer to receive less attention for the content of their posts. What can account for this difference? A Pew research survey in 2019 revealed that Twitter users are younger, and the majority identify with the Democratic party (Wojcik and Hughes 2019). The study also identified Twitter users as having a higher number of college graduates and they had higher levels of income. These findings suggest that Democratic Twitter users emote more emotion than Republican users because they participate at a higher rate—but they prefer to do their participation anonymously. In this chapter, I will continue to examine the nature of the gendered social media posts, and importantly, *who* is doing the posting. Does the gender of the poster make a difference in the content of Facebook and Twitter posts? In the next section, I will conduct a content analysis using Wordstat on the nature of posts regarding anger, anxiety and disgust for both Facebook and Twitter. I will then examine the gender of social media posters to determine if the gender of the poster makes a difference in emotion and language used.

These two charts confirm my hypothesis on negative language received by female candidates on social media. I argue that women generate more negative responses related to emotion. For both platforms, women received more instances of negative language related to anger, anxiety and disgust compared to their male counterparts. Similar to the study by Josefsson (2021), which also examines gendered language on social media, my charts show that men and women both receive a degree of negative comments. The question, then, is as follows—what type of language is used to differentiate between the kind of gendered language used when referring to women and male candidates? Josefsson does precisely that in her analysis on the Swedish parliament. She not only determines that women garner more sexist language, but she examines *how* gendered language is used by social media users. Similar to Josefsson’s study, I intend to generate an analysis of gendered language and negative emotion.

Top Ten Words Used:

After determining the percentage of words related to negative emotion and candidate gender, I conducted an analysis of the top ten words used for each category on Wordstat. The results showed that Twitter has considerably more negative emotion than Facebook. Facebook had 842 cases of negative sentiment out of 3316 posts at 25.4%. Twitter on the other hand, had 2093 cases of negative agreement out of 3968 posts at 60.4%. This would explain the disparity in comments between Facebook and Twitter. Overall, Twitter posters emote more negative emotion. Also note, in all categories—women candidates receive more negative emotion related to anger, anxiety and disgust.

Table 5.3 Top Ten Anxiety Words Used on Facebook and Twitter

Twitter Anxiety		Facebook Anxiety	
Women Candidates	Male Candidates	Women Candidates	Male Candidates
Shame* (24)	Shame (13)	Horror (5)	Shame (3)
Fear (21)	Crazy (7)	Terror (5)	Worry (3)
Desperate (9)	Guilt (7)	Confuse (4)	Doubt (2)
Terror (9)	Embarrass (6)	Afraid (3)	Shake (2)
Scare (8)	Worry (5)	Scare (3)	Guilt (2)
Crazy (7)	Scare (4)	Avoid (2)	Scare (2)
Worry (4)	Desperate (4)	Shame (2)	Desperate (2)
Guilt (3)	Fear (4)	Shake (1)	Risk (2)
Embarrass (3)	Confuse (4)	Guilt (1)	Pressure (1)
Confuse (3)	Distract (4)	Desperate (1)	Vulnerable (1)

This chart shows the results of the top ten words used on Facebook and Twitter in the category of anxiety. Overall, women candidates had 88 total words used by posters related to anxiety for Twitter. For the male candidates, there was a total of 58 total words emoted by posters of negative emotion. For Facebook, there was fewer used words and the number of words used was closer between male and female candidates. Women generated 27 total words related to anxiety, while men garnered 20 total words. The most significant trend shown in this chart was that women candidates generated the most words related to fear (21) and shame (24) on Twitter. I will further examine this trend during a content analysis on Wordstat to determine *how* these words related to fear and shame are used in context of the user’s posts.

Table 5.4 Top Ten Anger Words Used on Twitter and Facebook

Twitter Anger		Facebook Anger	
Women Candidates	Male Candidates	Women Candidates	Male Candidates
Liar* (104)	Liar* (54)	Liar* (29)	Liar*(18)
Kill (31)	Cut (24)	Attack (10)	Destroy (11)
Cut (24)	Attack (17)	Cut (8)	Cut (11)
Fight (21)	Assault (13)	Fight (5)	Blame (5)
War (21)	Fight (12)	Idiot (5)	Fight (5)
Attack (18)	Hate (10)	Stupid (4)	Idiot (3)
Hate (17)	Kill (10)	Hating (4)	Attack (3)
Assault (13)	Destroy (9)	Bother (4)	Danger (3)
Victim (13)	Hell (8)	Destroy (3)	Trick (3)
Cheat (11)	Abuse (6)	Kill (3)	Shit (3)

The above chart shows the negative top ten words related to anger in Facebook and Twitter. The results are more definitive in this category. Overall, women candidates received 273 words total for anger on Twitter, while men received 163 words overall. In Facebook, anger is more statistically significant with 69 total words generated. Men also had a degree of anger words used with the total being 65 overall. The overarching trend that is most predominant is the use of the words related to lying. This was an interesting find because words related to lying was used 50 more times for women on Twitter. On Facebook, words related to lying were used but women received similar use as men. For women candidates, words related to lying was used 23 times, while men generated 18 occurrences. Similar to anxiety, Twitter generated the most compelling results. Women received the most comments related to lying at 104 occurrences. Once again, this is a trend I will examine during a content analysis because it is important to discern *how* the words are used in context for each category.

Table 5.5 Top Disgust Words Used on Twitter and Facebook

Twitter Disgust		Facebook Disgust	
Women Candidates	Female Candidates	Women Candidates	Male Candidates
Sick (10) Disgust*(17) Abhor (9)	Sick (5) Disgusting (3) Detestation (1) Repel (1) Disgusted (1)	Abhor (3) Disgusting (3)	Sick (2) Disgust (1)

The above chart details the use of the words related to disgust—and the results are not as statistically significant. The most compelling results are on Twitter. Women candidates received 36 total cases used while men only incurred 11 times. On Facebook, there was very little words generated related to disgust. However, Twitter revealed some interesting results related to disgust which I will further analyze in my content analysis. Here, the word sick is used more for women than men and words related to disgust were used 17 times compared to the 4 occurrences that were generated by men. This study generates some compelling results related to the way women candidates are treated by social media users. In all three categories—anger, anxiety disgust—women received more negative emotion by users than their male counterparts.

User Gender and Negative Emotion on Facebook:

The next part of my investigation examines my hypothesis related to user gender and negative emotion. Does user gender affect the amount of negative emotion that female candidates receive? This is a question that I was able to investigate on Facebook. On Facebook, the majority of posters use their real names to identify their posts. I was able to code male and female users based on their gender. I then used the filter function on Wordstat to designate male and female users and negative emotion. I found that male users had more cases of negative emotion projected at female candidates. Out of 842 posts containing negative emotion which were posted by men on Facebook, 567 of those posts were negative comments against female

candidates totaling 67%. The results for female users was much lower. Female users totaled 256 negative responses against female candidates out of 842 negative posts averaging 30% of negative responses.

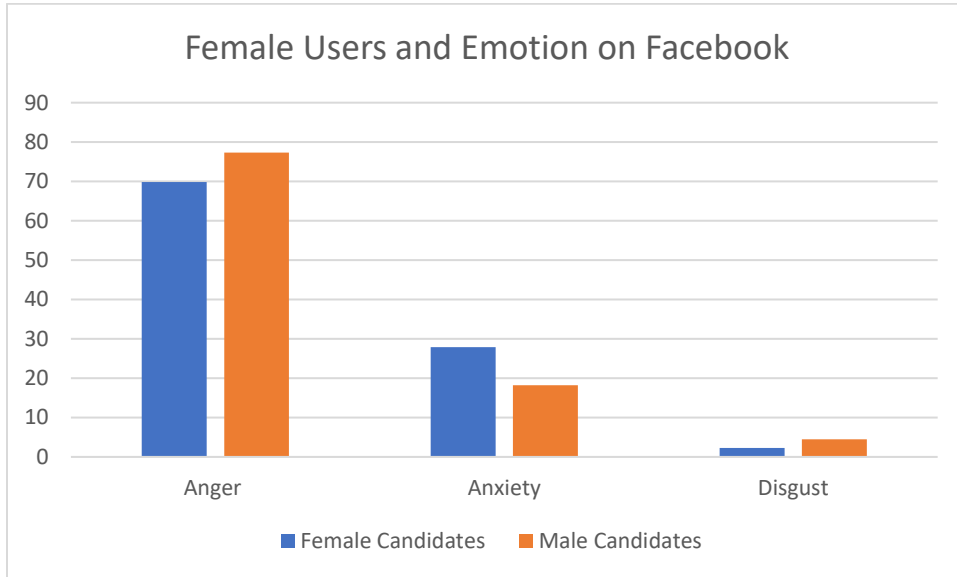


Figure 5.6 Female Users Show More Anger and Disgust Against Male Candidates on Facebook

This chart shows the amount of negative emotion expressed by female users according to candidate gender. Out of all the negative emotion expressed, female users generated 69.8% negative emotion related to anger. For male candidates, female posters totaled a higher percentage at 77.3%. For anxiety, female posters emoted less emotion. Female users expressed anxiety at 27.9% for female candidates, while totaling 18.2% for male candidates. I found that the category of disgust was not statistically significant. Out of all negative emotion expressed, female posters generated disgust at a rate of 2.3% against female candidates and 4.5% against male candidates.

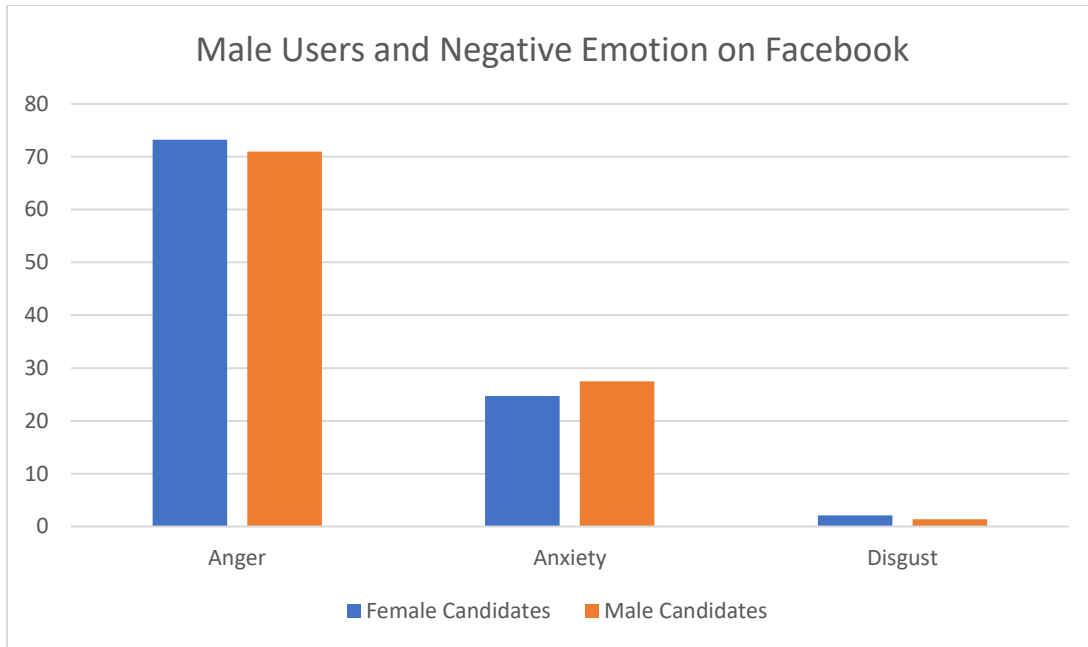


Figure 5.7 Male Users Show More Anger Against Female Candidates on Facebook

This chart shows how male users reacted to female and male candidates. According to this chart, male users react somewhat equally to male and female candidates in all three categories. For anger, out of all the negative emotion expressed male users generated negative responses 73.3% of the time against female candidates and 71% of the time for male candidates. For the category of anxiety, there was some difference with more negativity directed at men. Male users emoted anxiety 24.7% against female candidates and 27.5% against male candidates. Like female users, the amount of disgust directed at both male and female candidates was not statistically significant. Male users expressed disgust 2.1% against female candidates and 1.4% of the time against male candidates.

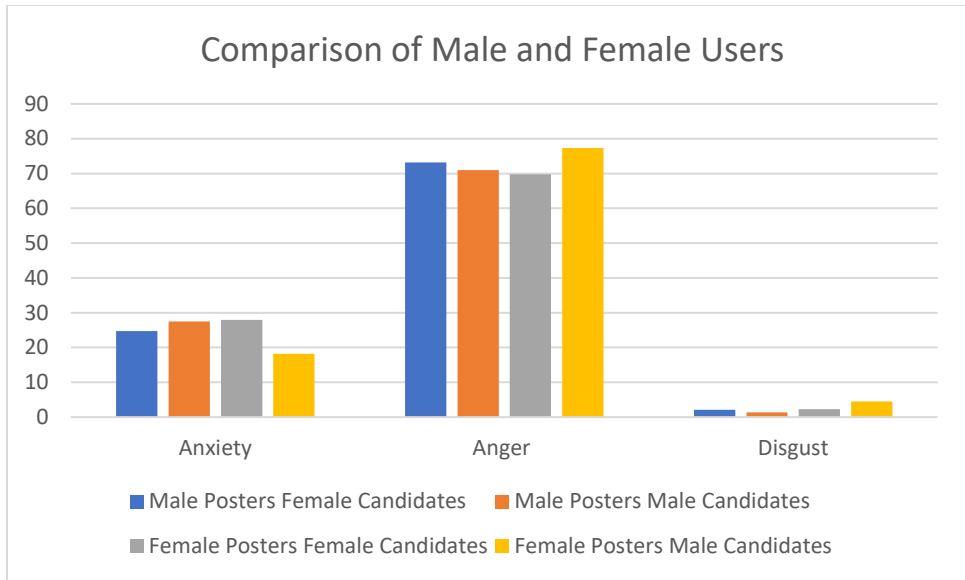


Figure 5.8 Female Users Show More Anger Against Male Candidates on Facebook

The chart above shows a comparison of male and female users and the percentage of negative emotion expressed against male and female candidates. According to this chart, the results show that male and female users post in similar degrees of negative emotion involving anxiety, anger and disgust. The bar chart shows that the results are all clustered together. But there are some nuances that should be noted. The above chart shows female posters emote less anxiety, more anger, and more disgust towards male candidates out of all negative emotion expressed. The following paragraphs will discuss the prevailing trends shown on this chart between male and female users.

Out of all the emotions, anger was most predominant. In particular, the trend shows that female social media users on Facebook present more anger than male users. What explains this trend? One study, by Simon and Nath (2004) on gender and emotion reveal that women are more likely to express negative emotions, including anger, at a greater degree than men. Despite this study, this is not what I expected. I expected to find that male users were more likely to express anger, or more aggressive behavior, at a greater rate than women. Supported by Simon and Nath,

this expectation is backed by evidence that men are stereotypically more accepted by society to express anger at a greater rate than women. However, in my study, women expressed more anger against male candidates than male users. I posit that women express more anger against male candidates because the predominant issues during the 2018 midterms involved issues that concern women. For example, some of the topics that engage women were hot button issues during the 2018 midterms. The predominant issues were reproductive rights, education, and healthcare. Also, the confirmation hearing of Justice Kavanaugh was highly publicized and engaged women who felt strongly about sexual abuse against women. These subjects would generate more anger by female social media users because women have a vested interest in these issues. Lawless and Fox argue that Trump motivated more women to get involved in political conversations. Lawless and Fox write that, “from the moment Donald Trump took office, women’s political engagement skyrocketed” (Lawless & Fox 2019). In particular, female Democrats harbored negative feelings toward Trump “and those feelings generated heightened political interest and activity during the 2018 election” (Lawless & Fox 2019).

Another study by Holmes (2004), suggests that anger in politics is related to the feeling of injustice in the political system. Holmes argues that women express a higher degree of anger towards the candidates because women have less trust in the political system and believe politicians are unfair to women in general. Another trend, is that male users expressed more anger towards female candidates than male candidates. This is what I expected, although the difference is not statistically significant. I did expect male users to express more anger towards female candidates at a more significant degree. Overall, both male and female users expressed anger at both male and female candidates at a rate higher than the level of anxiety shown in the chart. Accordingly, how does one explain that anger for both male and female users is

statistically significant against male and female candidates? For this answer, I will once again reference Holmes. In short, anger is a reaction to injustice. Like female users, who expressed more anger than male users, I posit that both men and women perceive that the system of politics is unfair and corrupt. With little trust, anger on social media is a reaction, or symptom of the political system which involves the relationship between politicians and the public. In a similar article by Ost (2004), Holmes' theory was confirmed about the public feeling a sense of injustice by the political system and politicians. However, the article goes further when Ost argues that anger is a symptom of social inequality. In response to this argument, I argue that social media users express more anger because it is, yet again, a symptom of the social stratification of society. Furthermore, Ost also argues that politicians encourage anger because it is an emotional connection to the public to maintain an "us" against "them" mentality (Ost 2004). Certainly, the public was highly polarized within the context of the Trump presidency. Excessive anger on social media is also a symptom of this trend in politics.

The results between the differences of anger and anxiety are statistically significant between male and female users. Overall, for both male and female users, rates of anxiety were all expressed in rates lower than 30%. For anger, the percentages averaged in the 70% range. There is a statistically significant difference between the amount of anger and anxiety expressed by male and female users. What explains this phenomenon? In an article on emotions and partisanship, Weeks (2015) argues that the difference between anger and anxiety is in the realm of misinformation. First, "anger encourages partisan motivated evaluation of uncorrected misinformation that results in beliefs consistent with the supported political party" (Weeks 2015). For Weeks, anger is about partisanship. This is consistent with Ost's study on anger which argues that politicians want to maintain a divided public in order to gain public support.

Anxiety occupies a different relationship to the public and misinformation according to Weeks. Weeks argues that anxiety is less about partisanship and more on the “information environment” (Weeks 2015). According to Weeks, “anxiety should increase the likelihood that individuals carefully consider a wide range of viewpoints” (Weeks 2015). Anxiety appeals to the rational in public thinking. I posit that Weeks’ theory explains the disparity between anxiety and anger in male and female users. The 2018 midterms were more about partisanship. There was fierce competition between Democrats and Republicans. With the leadership in the House and Senate at stake amidst the Trump presidency, this was one of the most controversial midterms in modern political history—and the public reached high levels of polarization. High levels of polarization increased the level of anger amongst the public which was manifested by social media users. Anxiety, which appeals more to the rational side of politics, according to Weeks, was not a predominant emotion because the public was more concerned about partisan politics rather than the accuracy of political information. I believe these theories explain the why anger was more common than anxiety amongst both male and female users.

There are some nuances between male users and female users regarding anxiety as shown in the chart comparing anger and anxiety. Specifically, women expressed significantly lower anxiety levels for male candidates than they did for female candidates. In short, women emote more anxiety against female candidates. Male users showed a different trend. Male users showed less anxiety for female candidates than they did male candidates. Overall, this is not what I expected to find related to anxiety. It was my expectation that in all emotions—anger, anxiety and disgust—that men would exude more negative emotion than women—especially towards female candidates.

At the beginning of this chapter, I argued that male posters generate total negative responses at a 37% higher for female candidates. Simply, men post negative comments at a greater amount than women. These charts show the percentage of comments delegated to anger, anxiety and disgust, but they do not give the number of posts generated overall. The next step is to see *how* the language generated by social media users is used in context. This will be accomplished by a content analysis.

A Content Analysis: A Comparison of Anxiety Between Facebook and Twitter:

This section will look at anxiety and identify a unifying thread between Facebook and Twitter using a content analysis. The focus on the following sections show *how* negative comments are used. I will use specific user comments to identify common threads and themes between Facebook and Twitter. I expected that women candidates will receive more negative comments related to anxiety. The results did identify with this trend; however, there are some differences between Facebook and Twitter. As I identified by the “top ten word” charts previously in this chapter, Twitter users were more active and had significantly more occurrences of negative words related to anxiety. Overall, Facebook users had considerably less words related to anxiety. Facebook users were much more active and statistically significant for words expressing anger. In this study, I found that both Twitter and Facebook users expressed more anxiety against female candidates. In fact, most of the words related to anxiety were directed at female candidates. (This is especially true with anger which I will examine in the next section.)

The most common word in Twitter used against women were words related to fear. Interestingly, most of the words related to fear on Twitter were directed at Marsha Blackburn who was a Republican candidate. Many of comments derided Blackburn for using fear as a campaign tactic. For example, one user added, “Marsha would rather appeal to fear than discuss

unpopular GOP policies she helped craft like social security and Medicare to pay for the #GOPTaxScam she voted for.” A similar tweet said, “You’re just mimicking Trump’s fear mongering. Shame on you.” Although comments about fear were directed at female candidates, some users expressed fear in a similar manner against Republican men on Twitter. Twitter users engaged Republican Josh Hawley in similar terms as Marsha Blackburn. For example, one user stated, “Josh Hawley is engaging in fear mongering with his tweet about Missouri losing a congressional seat.” Although directed at Marsha Blackburn, these tweets seem to identify all Republican candidates as fear mongers. The following two Tweets—“playing fear doesn’t work and “Republican’s health care strategy for the midterms: fear and misdirection”—are both directed at Marsha Blackburn but appear to identify Republican’s as candidates that use fear as a campaign tactic.

The word shame was also commonly used on Twitter. Similar to the word fear, words related to shame were directed at women. The most common usage by users were meant to shame women. Here shame is used to degrade the candidate. Bergoffen argues that shame is used to humiliate, silence and stigmatize it’s victims” (Bergoffen 2018). For example, both Martha McSally and Marsha Blackburn, both Republicans, were shamed by users. This comment against Marsha—“NRA lackey. For shame!”—directs shame on Blackburn for her connections to the NRA. Shame against Blackburn was a common thread. For example, “#ByeByeBlackburn. Shame on Marsha,” was a commonly used theme by users. Martha McSally also received comments related to shame—“#ShitholePresidentTrump and @MarthaMcSally approve of shaming and ridiculing sexual abuse victims in public for their own despicable political ambitions. Shame on you Martha!” Here, McSally is criticized for her connections to Donald Trump as well as her support of Bret Kavanaugh during his Senate approval trials and his

possible connections to sexual abuse allegations. McSally also received criticism for her policies on immigration. One user stated, “The border is secure, why are you scaring people about this? Shame on you.” Although, women received most of the comments related to shame with the purpose of shaming women, men also received comments related to shame. Democrat Bill Nelson also generated comments related to shame. For example, this comment also shamed Nelson—“You cannot interpret the constitution! Being our Senator you should speak with accuracy of the constitution! Shameful indeed! Retire now with just a grain of dignity!” Republican Rick Scott, Nelson’s opponent also garnered comments related to shame. For example, a user stated, “Here is the shameless GOP lying on preexisting conditions, from Rick Scott. He supported repeal!” Despite both female and male candidates generating comments about shame, women received more comments related to shame—especially those comments by users shaming women. Accordingly, most of the comments related to shame were directed at Martha McSally and Marsha Blackburn—both Republican women.

Another trend related to female candidates on Twitter are comments related to crazy. The common thread in connection with the use of the word crazy is that women are “crazy.” For example, one comment that demonstrates this theme is a comment received by Democrat Claire McCaskill that stated, “Thank heavens that McCaskill is a “crazy liberal” who defends insurance for those preexisting conditions and not a “sane Republican” who has signed onto a lawsuit that will allow insurance companies to deny insurance to those with preexisting conditions.” Here, this user is referring to the idea that McCaskill is known as a “crazy liberal” to her Republican opponents. In addition, comments related to crazy were also gendered. Another comment demonstrating a common thread against female candidates stated, “I always get the two crazy blondes from Tennessee mixed up? Which one is more crazy? Blackburn or Black?” In this case,

not only is the user criticizing women for being crazy, but the comment is also related to appearance of women.

Facebook had significantly less words related to anxiety during my analysis. However, there were some overarching trends and similarities to Twitter. Many occurrences related to anxiety were directed at female candidates—especially Republican women—Martha McSally and Marsha Blackburn. Similar to Twitter, words about fear were gendered. For example, one Facebook user posted, “Big combat pilot is afraid of a girl in a pink tutu. Kirsten Sinema will chew her up and spit her out.” This comment against Martha McSally references Sinema in her signature pink tutu and delegitimizes McSally’s stamina as a former combat pilot. A similar comment directed at Marsha Blackburn also questions her mental fortitude and her character when a user posted, “Why are you afraid to debate Bredesen? Is it because you wouldn’t have your corporate owners to tell you the answers as usual?” These two comments appear to characterize women as inadequate to do their jobs as Senators because they are afraid.

Also similar to Twitter, women were characterized as “crazy.” One comment against Kirsten Sinema stated, “What is expected from a person that does NOT know her gender and wants to run for the Senate seat. Sinema is a hypocrite, and crazy. Don’t vote for Sinema.” Here, the poster seems to deride Sinema for not knowing her place as a female running for Senate as she became the first bisexual female elected to office for Arizona. Hence, this comment is twofold—it criticizes Sinema for her sexual preferences and labels her as another “crazy woman.”

Shame was used differently on Facebook than it was on Twitter. On Twitter, posters directed most of their shame at women, particularly Marsha Blackburn and Martha McSally. On Facebook, the few comments that were related to shame were directed at men—exclusively Josh

Hawley, a Republican male candidate. Two posts criticized Hawley's connections to Trump: "Horrified Trump is coming to Missouri. Shame on you!" Another comment related to shame and Josh Hawley stated, "Yes, another bought and paid for by the NRA and Russia. It was about you and your endorsement from Trump. Shame on you. When did you become so disrespectful?" Here, the poster attacks Hawley's political connections and his character. A third comment related to shame attacked Republican Rick Scott of Florida. This poster stated, "Shameless transparent pandering. You cut education and healthcare, so these kids have no future. Monster."

Overall, Twitter and Facebook had some similarities as I have shown. Twitter users were much more active in expressing words related to anxiety. The focus on Facebook was not so much about shame as it was on Twitter, but still had some instances related to the words fear and crazy against women. The unifying thread between Facebook and Twitter was that female candidates received more references related to anxiety. Both Facebook and Twitter posters directed most of their comments on anxiety against Marsha Blackburn. Despite its lower number of negative comments, Facebook still exhibited some interesting trends. On Facebook, Republican Josh Hawley came in with a close second behind Blackburn for utterances related to anxiety. Hawley had 27% of the comments directed at him related to anxiety and Marsha Blackburn had the most with 46% of the negative comments directed at her. Democrat Claire McCaskill only had 4% of the comments related to anxiety in her race against Republican Josh Hawley. However, Democrat Kirsten Sinema generated 21% of the comments by posters related to anxiety in her race against Martha McSally. The next section on anger is much more user abundant. I found that both Facebook and Twitter users had some common threads related to the negative comments used against female candidates. I expected that female candidates would

generate more comments related to anger and that is just what my study shows. Accordingly, my section on anger is much more definitive.

A Content Analysis: A Comparison of Anger Between Facebook and Twitter:

This section will examine the negative comments related to anger for both male and female candidates. Similar to the last section on anxiety, I will conduct a content analysis looking for common trends amongst words used, specifically, *how* language is used to express this negative emotion. For this analysis, I expected that women would generate more comments related to anger than men. The results of this study showed that this trend is especially true by posters on Twitter. Facebook, however, showed similar amounts of negative criticism related to anger between female candidates and male candidates. Overall, there were significantly more comments related to anger than there was anxiety. But, why anger? A study on politics and anger by David Ost (2004), posits that, “anger is not something that only occasionally bursts onto the political scene, but it is central to ‘normal’ politics (Ost 2004). The article by Ost also shows that anger is often the product of economic inequality. Furthermore, political parties often capitalize on anger to promote their interests in politics. Thus, the emotion of anger is essential to politics for both the interests of the public and political parties, which, I argue, explains the abundance of comments related to anger on Facebook—and especially Twitter. For example, there were 273 total negative comments related to anger against women and 163 comments against men on Twitter. Facebook showed significantly less activity by posters with 69 total negative comments related to anger against women and 65 negative comments against male candidates.

I argue that posters generate more activity on Twitter because most of the posts are anonymous. Most posters do not use their true identity when posting on Twitter. Throughout my study on Facebook, I noted that most posters used their real names when posting comments.

Twitter does not require that users employ their real names when creating an account. As a result, Twitter users may opt to use pseudonyms that are not connected to their real names. On the other hand, social networks such as Facebook and Google + require users to employ their real names to set up an account. The theory behind this policy is that it improves the quality and content of service (Peddinti et al. 2014). One study on social media and anonymity (2014), found that, “anonymous users are generally less inhibited to be active participants as they tweet more, follow more accounts, and are more willing to expose their activity to the general public (Peddinti et al. 2014). In this study, the researchers selected topics that were considered sensitive on social media. The results showed that there is a direct connection between topic sensitivity and the posters choice to be anonymous (Peddinti et al. 2014). I argue that gender and political beliefs are a sensitive and controversial subject for users prompting them to prefer identities that are anonymous when participating on social media. Another study on identity and social media found similar results. This study found that, “anonymous platforms may allow people to self-disclose more intimate negative valence compared to real name networks (Ma et al. 2016).” This means that posters are more comfortable sharing negative comments on social media when they are anonymous. The focus of my study is on the expression of negative emotions by users related to anxiety, anger and disgust. I specifically look at the content of negative comments and how language is used to express these negative emotions. According to the study by Ma et al., negative comments are more likely to be generated by social media users when they are anonymous.

How comments related to anger expressed by social media users is also compelling. Accordingly, language used by posters related to “lying” was the most commonly used emotion on both Twitter and Facebook. On Twitter, words related to “lie” was invoked 104 times, or 38%

of the time on Twitter against women and 54 times, or 33% of the time against male candidates. These results showed that language related to “lie” was used twice as much against female candidates on Twitter. Interestingly, the results were similar on Twitter as they were for the emotion of anxiety. Although many of the candidates received comments containing the word, “lie,” it was Republican women—Martha McSally and Marsha Blackburn that generated the most comments on Twitter related to the word “lie.” The comments related to “lie” had two meanings on Twitter. The first, was to actually call the candidate a liar. For example, one poster added, “Martha McSally is a liar and fraud. She used her military service to falsely attack a civilian. That is the opposite of what ‘service to country’ means.” Here, McSally is being attacked do something that she did to the disapproval of the user warranting the title of a “liar.” In addition, Marsha Blackburn received similar comments. For example, a user posted, “@VoteMarsha-Liar cheater thief!!!” Here, like the comment against McSally, the word liar is used to attack against their character. Both are labeled by posters as liars. The second way that “lie” is used is to comment on something that the candidate does. Quite simply, the candidate lies. Marsha Blackburn received a number of comments related to this trend. For example, one poster commented, “LIES AND ALL LIES. THAT’S WHAT MARSHA IS—SHE LIES FOR MONEY.” In addition, another comment against McSally stated, “You idiots voting for McSally. Her own Pima county voted against her she lies!” Although Martha McSally and Marsha Blackburn received most of the comments related to “lie,” it should be noted that there were other candidates that also generated comments related to “lie.” Democratic female candidate Claire McCaskill also received comments related to “lie.” Another trend worth noting is comments related to the word “lie” and male candidates. Behind McSally and Blackburn, Republican Josh Hawley received a high number of comments related to “lie.” Similar, to the

female candidates, Hawley received comments that designated him as a liar as well as deriding him for telling lies. This comment does both— “Watch all your lies--#hawleyisaliar.” Here, this comment calls Hawley a liar because he tells lies according to the user.

Facebook, however, demonstrated some different trends than Twitter. Although words related to “lie” were the most common word trend on Facebook, female candidates and male candidates showed similar results. On Facebook, words related to “lie” were used 23 times, or 33% of the time for female candidates and 18 times, or 28% of the time for male candidates. However, the word “lie” on Facebook was used in the same context as on Twitter. Either “lie” was called to designate a candidate as a “liar,” or “lie” was used to express an action related to lying. One comment posted against Marsha Blackburn stated, “Why, she is a liar and not fit to be in Congress.” Another comment against Republican Josh Hawley stated, “I sure hope people see through your lies and vote Claire. I know I will be!” These examples are very close to how the word “lie” is used on Twitter. The main difference between the two social mediums is that on Twitter women receive the most comments related to anger, while on Facebook the language is fairly even between male candidates and female candidates.

Although words related to “lie” were the most common trend, there were other words that generated considerable use. For example, words related to “kill.” This was a trend that was dominated by female candidates on Twitter. For female candidates the word, “kill,” was used 31 times, or 11 % of all anger words directed at women while it was only used 10 times, or 6% of the time for men. The word, “kill,” was used as an action word—the candidates were generating an action that warranted something to be “killed.” Like the word “liar,” the candidates that received the most words related to “kill” were Republicans Martha McSally and Marsha Blackburn. Most of the comments were related to an action. For example, the candidate “killed”

something. For example, one comment received by McSally stated, “Plotting new ways to kill coverage for preexisting conditions? Don’t lie Martha, we know your voting record.” In this comment, the poster is criticizing McSally for “killing” health care coverage, while at the same time deriding her for “lying.” Republican Marsha Blackburn generated the most comments related to “kill.” The following comments uses kill multiple times related to Blackburn’s stance on public policy— “On to victory? Not you Blackburn. You defended Trump’s agenda? That AGENDA, which you supported 100% -KILL COVERAGE OF PREEXISTING COVERAGE, KILL SOCIAL SECURITY, KILL MEDICARE AND MEDICAID. Wake up Tennessee. Blackburn is attacking Seniors, Children and the sick. Blackburn OUT.” Although McSally and Blackburn received most of the comments related to “kill,” men also generated similar comments. One candidate, in particular, stands out—Republican Rick Scott. One user posted the following comment— “Your environmental policies killed me.” In this case, kill is used in such a way that Scott did something against the poster. For example, Scott’s stance on climate change “killed” the poster.

One of the more interesting trends is the nature of the word “kill.” This is language related to violence or an act of violence against something or an individual. On Twitter, this type of language was directed at the female candidates—especially Republicans Martha McSally and Marsha Blackburn. Not only do women attract words related to anger, but they generate words related to violence at a greater rate than male candidates. Females and their relationship to violence is not uncommon. Scholars have studied the correlation between language and violence against female politicians. There have been an increasing number of studies around the world that report intimidation and harassment of female politicians and language related to violence. These efforts to stop women in politics is not new. Men are identified as the “public sphere” of

politics and women are said to occupy the “private sphere” of politics. Violence against women in politics is an attempt to limit women’s contribution and political participation. Accordingly, “women are seen as interlopers into the male space of politics” (Krook 2017). Violence against women is a product of misogyny in today’s society. This is culture of violence against women “enforces stereotypes between “good” women and “bad” women for perceived violations of appropriate gender norms” (Krook & Sanin 2019). I argue that the expression of anger by posters is a form of violence against women. All of the top ten words as shown in my previous chart on Twitter show that women have more language related to violence while men have lower utterances by posters. Words like “cut,” “fight,” “war,” “attack,” “hate,” and “assault” were commonly generated by posters against female candidates on Twitter. Except for the words “cut” and “attack,” men had considerably less language related to these terms on Twitter. As I mentioned previously in this section, there were not considerable differences between anger words and usage on Facebook. Aside from the word, “lie,” other word trends were not statistically significant. My theory explaining this phenomenon between Twitter and Facebook is due to the anonymity that Twitter provides users (see earlier in this section). In short, users are more likely to post negative comments if they are anonymous. In the next section of this chapter, I will look at how words related to disgust are used by posters on Twitter and Facebook.

A Content Analysis: A Comparison of Disgust Between Facebook and Twitter:

The final emotion that I will examine on Facebook and Twitter is that of disgust. Although words related to disgust were not as frequent as they were with the negative emotions of anxiety and anger—there are still some interesting trends. As expected, Twitter users were more active. They expressed disgust at a greater level than users on Facebook. On Twitter, there were 47 occurrences of disgust between male and female candidates. On Facebook, the results

were not statistically significant with only 9 occurrences of disgust between male and female candidates. One interesting trend on Twitter, was that female candidates received the most language related to disgust with 36 total occurrences, or 77% of disgust words used, while men only had 11, or 23%, of total utterances related to disgust.

Twitter users demonstrated the most compelling use of disgust. Similar to anger and disgust women received the most comments related to disgust—especially Republican women. Marsha Blackburn received the most negative comments with 34% of the total occurrences. Martha McSally received the second highest number of words related to disgust with 19% of the total utterances. Male Republican candidates, Rick Scott and Josh Hawley, also received comments by posters related to disgust at 13% of the total occurrences. Words related to disgusting were of the highest frequency of the words related to disgust used. There were two ways that disgust was used. The first trend was used to criticize the candidate’s character as disgusting. For example, one user called Marsha Blackburn disgusting when they posted, “You just can’t stop lying can you. You are a disgusting human being. STOP LYING.” The second way disgusting was used was to express a state of emotion. For example, this trend is demonstrated by this highly vitriolic post against Martha McSally: “Martha McSally, you are nothing but a liar. You will lie to get what you want. Just like Trumpy, you are a disgrace. You do not belong in the Senate. You will hurt people not help them. You disgust me. You are nothing but a fake, lying piece of shit. Go put your head in a hole and stay there.” Here, the user is disgusted by the perceived character and actions of the candidate and expresses disgust. Male candidates, although they received less comments related to disgust, showed similar trends. For example, one comment directed at Rick Scott stated, “Many more are disgusted with you, Rick Scott.” Here, the word disgusted is used to express a state of emotion by the public.

Democrats also received criticism related to disgust. Democratic women, Claire McCaskill and Kyrsten Sinema also received comments related to disgust which still outnumbered the utterances of disgust related to male candidates. The most compelling case was that of Republican Marsha Blackburn. Her challenger was Democrat Phil Bredesen who only generated 8% of the cases of words related to disgust compared to Blackburn's 34% of all cases. In all emotions including disgust, anxiety and anger this result was a similar trend. When I designed the case studies between candidates, I intentionally paired male and female candidates of different parties and genders together to determine if gender and party made a difference during a campaign. For example, Martha McSally and Kyrsten Sinema were two females competing against each other. Similarly, Democrat Bill Nelson and Republican Rick Scott were both men competing for a seat in the Senate. Interestingly, Democrat Bill Nelson did not generate any comments related to disgust, while his Republican competitor received 8% of the cases related to disgust. I also paired Democrat Claire McCaskill and Republican Josh Hawley to see if candidate gender and party would make a difference. McCaskill and Hawley received somewhat similar cases related to disgust with McCaskill generating 8% of cases against Hawley's 4% of the cases related to disgust. As I previously mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph, the most compelling result was the pairing of a Republican women and a male Democrat. In all emotions, anxiety, anger and disgust, Marsha Blackburn received the most negative comments over her Democratic male counterpart. Comparisons of men and women in gender research have been studied extensively over the span of many decades. Most early studies found that men were valued by the public over their female counterparts. For example, Matlin (1987) argued that, "by the time they reach adulthood, most women agree with most men that males are superior" (Matlin 1987). Another study by Lips (1988) posited that, "not only are

males viewed as different from females, they are viewed as superior to them” (Lip 1988). However, other studies have generated different perceptions of comparisons regarding emotions directed at males and females. Eagly (1990) stated that there is “strong evidence that women are evaluated quite favorably, in fact, more favorably than men are evaluated” (Eagly 1990). Despite Eagly’s study, more recent studies have shown different results. A study on gender and women’s ascent up the organization ladder, by Heilman (2001) showed that men are often preferred by employers than their female counterparts. Heilman wrote, “the scarcity of women at the upper levels of organizations is a consequence of gender bias in emotional evaluations” (Heilman 2001). In addition, Heilman argued that because of gender bias men with equal qualifications as their female counterparts will still advance over women. My study shows that women are still at a disadvantage regarding public attitude and emotion. This is especially true of female candidates, particularly when a female Republican candidate challenges a male Democratic candidate.

On Facebook, the results related to disgust were not statistically significant. Words related to the word “disgust” were only used three times at 33% out of the total words used for the category of disgust. In two of these cases, Democrat Kyrsten Sinema was the target by posters. In both cases, the word “disgust” was used to designate a state of being disgusted. For example, one poster added, “Your attempt to present yourself as pro-military is disgusting.” Democrat Phil Bredesen received one comment related to disgust which was used similarly to the two cases against Kyrsten Sinema.

There were other words in the category of disgust that were noteworthy trends. For example, on Twitter Republican Marsha Blackburn generated the most comments associated with disgust, especially those related to the word, “sick.” Out of all the cases related to the word,

“sick,” Blackburn received 36% of the cases. For Blackburn, the use of sick in her cases was used to express a state of being. The user expressed a condition of being “sick.” For example, one poster stated, “I’d take @PhilBredesen every day of the week and twice on Sunday. He’s a conservative, business minded job creator who is NOT corrupt like Blackburn. (And I’m a Conservative, gun owning husband and father who is sick of the bickering.” Other comments related to sick showed that the poster was “sick” because of the actions of the candidate. For example, Martha McSally received 27% of the comments related to the word, “sick.” One post reads, “It’s sick how you try to shield yourself with American Heroes, while lying about your repeated attempts to eliminate protection for preexisting conditions.” Republican Rick Scott also received comments related to the word, “sick,” at 18%. One poster added, “#RedTideRick don’t vote for this dude. Sick sob! Look it up—what the fuck this dude did to his constituents.” Here, similar to Marsha Blackburn and Martha McSally, the poster is made “sick” by the actions of the candidate. Democrats received very few comments related to sick. In fact, Democrat Claire McCaskill did not receive any comments using the word “sick.” Republican Josh Hawley only received one comment using the word sick and Democrat Phil Bredesen also only received one comment related to the word, “sick.”

Overall, as this examination shows, Twitter generated the most comments related to disgust. In comparison, Facebook showed very few comments in the category of disgust. Earlier in this chapter, I explain why there is a difference—Twitter users are more likely to use pejorative language because they do not disclose their true identities (see pages 23-24 in this chapter). These trends are similar to negative words used by posters in anger and anxiety—women candidates receive the most negative comments—especially Republican women. Accordingly, this study shows that Democratic posters are the most negative against Republican

female candidates. In my previous chapter on party and negative emotion, I referenced a study called, “Disgust Sensitivity, Political Conservatism and Voting (2012),” that showed that Republicans are more likely to emote emotions related to disgust (see Inbar et al. 2012). My study generates a different result. This study shows that Democrats are more likely to exude language related to negative emotion, including anger, anxiety and disgust. This is especially true of language related to gender. In all cases of anxiety, anger and disgust women generated the most cases of these negative emotions by posters on social media.

A Content Analysis: Does Poster Gender Make a Difference?

This section will determine if poster gender makes a difference with a content analysis. In a previous section in this chapter (see pages 11-17) I examined charts based on poster gender and negative emotion in all three categories—anger, anxiety and disgust. During this analysis, I showed that female posters exhibit more anger against male candidates and more anxiety against female candidates. Furthermore, I found that male posters generate more comments related to anger against women and more anxiety against male candidates. This section will look at *how* language is used to express anger and anxiety by male and female posters. I will examine anger and anxiety only because disgust was not statistically significant by male and female posters. It is important to note that overall men generated more cases of negative emotion against the candidates at 567 posts at 67%, while women exhibited 256 or 30% of the negative comments against male and female candidates (see also pages 11-12). Quite simply, male posters were more active on Facebook and generated more negative comments. However, male posters did not use gendered language during their attacks against female candidates.

First, I will examine negative emotion based on male posters. Male posters exhibited some interesting trends. First, the amount of negative comments directed against Republican

women was significant. Republican Marsha Blackburn received 28% of the comments related to anger, while Republican Martha McSally generated 14% of all comments directed in anger. Another interesting trend is that Republican Josh Hawley received a significant number of comments related to anger at 17%. The statistics related to anxiety showed similar results. Marsha Blackburn received 23% of the comments related to anxiety. Martha McSally generated 14% of the comments in the category of anxiety. Male candidates also exhibited some interesting trends in this category. Male posters commented at a rate of 16% against Republican Rick Scott and 14% against Democrat Bill Nelson.

One of the key words used by male posters were words related to “lie.” Words related to “lie” were used 24% of the time out of all words in anger posted by male candidates. Importantly, most of the words related to “lie” were used against women at 62% of the time by male posters. All women generated words related to “lie,” but the most common use of the word was directed at Republican women including Republican Martha McSally and Marsha Blackburn. Words related to “lie” were used by male posters either to insult the candidate by calling them a liar, or to denote an action of lying committed by the candidate. For example, a poster added that, “Marsha Blackburn is up to her ears in lies.” Democrat Kyrsten Sinema received some negative comments from male posters as well. One poster stated that, “They also deserve to not have to deal with lying, phony, self-centered Democrats like you. Thank you for further damaging the Democratic party!” Here, the poster insults Sinema’s character, and states that she is bad for the Democratic party. Overall, male posters expressed anger against female candidates at a greater rate than male candidates. It is important to note that, although they expressed anger with a high degree of vitriol, the comments were not gendered. Meaning, male posters did not use language that attacked female candidates for being women. In short, there

were more comments against female candidates by male posters in anger, but the language used did not attack female candidates in a gendered way.

Male posters also expressed anxiety against female candidates. Male posters expressed anxiety against the candidates at a lower rate. Male posters expressed anxiety against the candidates at 18.2% while women expressed anxiety against female candidates at 27.9% (see page 12). Interestingly, male posters expressed anxiety against male and female candidates at similar degrees (see chart on page 14). Furthermore, male posters expressed similar amounts of anxiety against Democratic candidates and Republican candidates. This differs from the emotion of anger where male posters generated more comments based on anger at Republican women. For the most part, the comments were not gendered against women. Anxiety was expressed in similar language between male and female candidates. It should be noted that there was one trend. Oftentimes female candidates are portrayed as “crazy” by posters. Kyrsten Sinema received a comment which designated her as a “crazy lady.” For example, a poster stated, “What is expected from a person that does NOT know her gender and wants to run for the Senate seat. Sinema is a hypocrite, and crazy. Don’t vote for Sinema.” Here, the poster attacks Sinema’s sexuality as a bisexual candidate as well as calling her crazy for her beliefs. Marsha Blackburn received a considerable amount of criticism related anxiety. Most comments were attacking her character like the following comments that said, “she’s horrible.” Others attacked her credentials and her qualifications to run for office. For example, the following comment questions Blackburn’s ability to participate in a debate: “Why are you afraid to debate Bredesen? Is it because you wouldn’t have your corporate owners to tell you the answers as usual?” Here, the poster not only attacks Blackburn’s abilities, but also criticizes her for her connections to large corporations. Republican Rick Scott also received criticism based on his policy choices from

male posters. One poster criticized him for his policies on education and healthcare: “Shameless transparent pandering. You cut education and healthcare, so these kids have no future. Monster.” Overall, male posters expressed more anger against women than they did for anxiety. In fact, male posters expressed anxiety against male candidates and female candidates in near equal amounts. I also concluded, that although men generated more comments in anger against female candidates, they did not use gendered language to criticize female candidates in both categories based on anger and anxiety.

This section will examine comments against the candidates based on posts made by female users. Female posters generated less comments than male posters based on anger. Female posters generated comments against the candidate at 68.8% while male candidates generated comments related to anger at 77.3% (see chart on page 12). Female posters demonstrated some interesting trends related to anger. While male posters generated the majority of posts against women, particularly Republican women, female posters criticized Republican men at greater levels. Republican Josh Hawley received the most comments in anger at 29%. Republican Rick Scott was second at 16%. However, Marsha Blackburn also garnered a significant amount of anger at 16% by female posters. Martha McSally and Kyrsten Sinema received similar amounts of criticism at 12% and 14% respectively. Overall, men received 53% of the negative comments by female posters in anger.

Similar to male posters, female posters criticized male and female candidates, but the language was not gendered against the candidates. Also, similar to male posters, words related to “lie,” were the most common at 27% out of all anger words used. Out of all the times words related to “lie” were used, 65% of the posts were directed at male candidates. Furthermore, 59% of the time comments related to “lie” were used against Republicans Josh Hawley and Rick

Scott. Similar to male posters, comments using words related to “lie” were used to question the character of the candidate. Accordingly, an example of a comment like this was the following against Josh Hawley: “Not You!!!! All you and Trump want to do is ruin this country and Missouri. I sure hope people see through your lies and vote Claire. I know I will be!!!” Here, Hawley is criticized for his connections to Trump which raises questions about his character. Criticism based on a candidate’s connection to Trump was a common theme for female posters. I posit that support for Trump amongst female posters would have been low because of Trumps previous allegations of sexual abuse against women. In fact, Roth and Collins (2019) argue that language and policies supported by Trump marginalized vulnerable groups especially women. During Trump’s presidency, Roth and Collins argued that Trump had a “gold plated pulpit” in which to “spread his misogynistic hostile rhetoric and propaganda: anti-women objectification, devaluing and demonization through hegemonic ‘wordfare’ while feeding and fueling sexism across the country” (Roth & Collins 2019). Clearly, connections to Trump and the Republican party generated more negative comments by female posters against Republican candidates who demonstrated a link to Trump and his policies. Accordingly, Republican Rick Scott received negative comments questioning his character. The following comment references Scott’s connection to the environment as well as questionable connections to his wealth: “Blaming the algae blooms that are killing our environment and tourism on Nelson. Snake! I can’t wait to not hear your lies anymore. Go visit your blood money in the islands, Skeletor, and get outta my state!” This comment also attacks Scott’s appearance and character by connecting Scott to the evil character, Skeletor, from the He-Man series which was very popular in the 1980’s. Another interesting trend were the comments by female posters regarding the confirmation hearing of Justice Brett Kavanaugh. During Kavanaugh’s confirmation hearing much of the controversy

was surrounding his sexual abuse allegations against a number of women. This issue would likely interest women—which was apparent in their comments on social media. In fact, 35% of the comments on words related to “lie” were about the Kavanaugh hearings. Some examples of posts exhibiting this trend were of the following content: “KAVANAUGH LIED!,” or “HE LIED!!! NO LIAR SHOULD BE CONFIRMED TO THE SUPREME COURT—PERIOD!!!!” In particular, Josh Hawley received substantial criticism for his position of the Kavanaugh hearing, which did not go unnoticed by female posters. For example, the following post demonstrates the sentiment of female posters against Josh Hawley: “Since you are campaigning hard on ‘behalf’ of sexual assault survivors, why are you so silent in regards to Brett Kavanaugh. You have an opportunity to show survivors how you are going to fight for us. Your silence speaks loudly to me!!!”

Although men received substantial criticism regarding anger from female posters, female candidates also received similar sentiment. Marsha Blackburn received considerable criticism from female posters concerning her attack ads against her opponent Phil Bredesen. For example, the following two posts criticize Marsha Blackburn for lying about her attack ads against her opponent Democrat Phil Bredesen: “Yep. All she has are attack ads that are lies. If you have to lie to win, you don’t deserve to win! Bredesen speaks of what Tennesseans are really concerned with! He is the only choice for Tennessee!” A second post about Blackburn’s attack ads reads: “Why would Marsha change her lying, hateful attack ads? It shows who she is.” Here, these two posts show that male posters are critical of Marsha Blackburn for lying, which denigrates her character as well as her campaign for producing ads against Bredesen.

Female posters also emoted language related to anxiety against the candidates. However, compared to anger, anxiety generated a significantly less number of occurrences on emotion.

Female candidates received more comments from female posters related to anxiety at 57% out of all the posts. Out of all the posts emoting anxiety, Republican Marsha Blackburn received 41% of the posts by female users. Interestingly, Republicans garnered 77% of the negative comments related to anxiety by female candidates. Republican Josh Hawley had the second highest number of comments against him at 36%. Blackburn was criticized for her connections to Donald Trump on numerous occasions. For example, one poster commented, “Is Marsha a Trumpie, or a RINO? Very confusing.” Josh Hawley was also criticized for his connections with Trump, for example, the following post— “Horrified Trump is coming to Missouri. Shame on you!” Here, both Blackburn and Hawley were criticized for their connections with Trump. In this case, both male and female candidates were treated equally by female posters. Furthermore, Blackburn was criticized by female posters because she belonged to the Republican party. For example to following post showed this sentiment—“Marsha is a dangerous conservative with horrible ideas. DO NOT VOTE FOR MARSHA BLACKBURN!” Here, not only is Blackburn criticized for her connections to Trump, but also because she is a member of the Republican party. Importantly, similar to male posters, criticism against both male and female candidates was not gendered. Interestingly, female posters “shamed” male candidate, Josh Hawley. The following post shames Hawley for his connections to the NRA and to Trump: “Yes, another bought and paid for by the NRA and Russia. You would not make a statement regarding Russia hacking Claire McCaskill’s emails because it was about your endorsement from Trump. Shame on you. When did you become so disrespectful?” This post not only attacks Hawley for his connections to Trump and the Republican party, but also questions his character in support of his Democratic opponent Claire McCaskill.

Overall, female candidates were far more critical of candidates belonging to the Republican party. Blackburn received slightly more attack posts than Josh Hawley. Furthermore, although female posters criticized both male and female candidates, gendered language was not used to articulate these attacks. In this case, male and female posters were similar in their language regarding anger and anxiety. They both were critical of Republican candidates, particularly female candidate Marsha Blackburn. This suggests that both male and female posters were aligned with the Democratic party. Democrats were more active on Facebook, and they were more critical than their Republican counterparts. The next chapter will examine gendered attacks on social media through a series of interviews with person's involved in politics. Thus far, I have examined language on social media and constructed theories based on my findings through content analysis and Wordstat. This next chapter will test these theories in real life. Does social media effect how and why women run for office? Does Twitter and Facebook effect the campaign experience of male and female candidates running for office? These are the questions I will answer in the next chapter through 16 interviews. Importantly, I will want to show that my findings in previous chapters hold up to real life campaigns.

CHAPTER SIX

SOCIAL MEDIA IN REAL LIFE: THE INTERVIEWS

Introduction:

My examination in the previous chapters while using Wordstat generated many questions. In previous chapters, I found that Democrats are more critical of Republican candidates, especially Republican women. Furthermore, women generate more negative comments by Facebook and Twitter users than their male counterparts. This exploration has prompted me to ask the following questions: For example, the questions I produced during my study on negative sentiment on Facebook and Twitter against male and female candidates were the following: is there fear of running for office by both male and female candidates because of social media? Is there stereotyping of women and men during campaigns on social media? What type of experience of running for office was influenced by social media? I conducted a series of interviews that would question what participants think about criticism on social media. Is there stereotyping of women and men during campaigns on social media? What type of experience of running for office was influenced by social media? Also, what types of negative sentiment did candidates receive during their campaigns on social media? The goal of this chapter is to see how the answers to these questions played out in real life situations. The answers to these questions, I interviewed 11 female and 5 male political activists. All of the participants that I interviewed had experience in politics whether they were social media influencers, teachers of politics, or campaigned for public office, or currently hold a political position. In previous chapters, I found that women generated more negative emotion and social media users employed language that targeted women. For example, posters used language that specifically shamed women. Based on these findings, I expected that the female participants women would have a negative experience

with social media during their campaigns. Meaning, they would be the target of criticism on Facebook and Twitter more than male candidates. Like my findings in previous chapters, I believed women would be the victims of gender stereotyping on Facebook and Twitter at a greater degree than men. I wanted to use the interviews as a gauge as to whether social media would contribute to the participants having a fear or hesitancy of running for office. I believe women experienced more gender stereotypes which contributes to women having a fear or hesitancy of running for office. However, the interviews revealed a different trend than what I found in previous chapters. What I found was very different than I expected. Although it was shown that the female interviewees experienced negative women do endure pressure from social media, after the interviews, I found that men were also targeted by social media users during their campaigns. Furthermore, male candidates had a degree of gender stereotyping on Facebook and Twitter. I also found that criticism was higher for the female African American and Latina participants. In the following sections, I will examine the results of the interviews and outline the prevailing trends as shown by the interviews.

The experiment was conducted by completing 16 interviews. I chose the participants based on their connection to politics. All but 3 participants either ran for office, will run for office or currently hold a position in public office. The other three were as follows: one was a PhD student in political science, another was a teacher of political science, and one participant was a clerk for the General Assembly in Connecticut. I interviewed 5 male subjects, all of which ran for office, or currently hold a position in public office. Eleven of the subjects were female of which I interviewed one Democratic African American and one Democratic Latina—both of which currently hold public office in Connecticut. I interviewed participants from both parties—4 were Republican and one participant was unaffiliated with either party. All if of the candidates

were located and campaigned in Connecticut. I am a resident of Connecticut, so it was easier to interview participants from my own state. The drawback is my results may not be applicable to other regions of the United States. The ages of the participants range from 26 to 76. I generated interviews using the snowball sampling method. All of the participants knew someone who I could interview. Thus, my ability to generate interviews was by word of mouth and referrals.

The types of questions I asked were specifically designed to uncover the relationship, knowledge and gauge the interviewees' experience that each participant had with social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter. I started each interview with questions about the basic demographics of the participant's like age, race, gender, residency, and party affiliation. I then asked participants if they planned on running for office, or had held an office. I then followed up with a battery of questions about what the participants' experience was like during their campaigns for public office. This was followed up by questions related to how the experience running for office was for each participant as it related to social media. Other questions were about gender stereotyping on social media. Each participant was asked to give examples of gender stereotyping on social media against both male and female candidates. An important follow-up question was about whether or not social media had an effect on candidates who run for office. For example, did Facebook and Twitter discourage male and female candidates from running for office? Overall, the questions were directed to find out if social media had a direct effect on campaigns and whether or not there was evidence of attacks by social media posters based on gender.

Experience of Running for Office:

This section will discuss the participants' experience during the time they ran for public office. The experience of running for office was a mixed bag. Some of the candidates had a

positive experience while others had a very negative experience because of the activity on social media. Accordingly, I wanted to discern how social media effected the participants while running for office. There is a body of work that examines the effect social media has on candidates during a campaign. One such study examined negative comments made by users on Twitter (Hua et al. 2020). The study showed the different types of attacks that were generated on Twitter against House candidates in the 2018 midterms. The article identified 5 categories of criticism based on Tweets from posters. The first was “offensive name calling.” Here, language by posters was used to insult and abuse the candidates. The second type of insult was “threats of violence,” in which language was used to “cause mental or physical pain (Hua et al. 2020). Another type of attack identified by Hua et al., was “discrediting information.” This involves posting untruths about the candidate or “sharing true information about the candidate in a hostile way (Hua et al. 2020). The fourth category of insult was “attacks on identity.” These attacks were based on traits such as race, gender, religion, or gender identity. The fifth common attack was “adversarial message repetition.” These type of attacks against the candidates involve multiple posts of the same content by the poster in order to draw negative attention to the candidate. My participants during the interviews showed these types of attacks on social media—which I will discuss later in this chapter. A similar study examined online abuse against female candidates. Harmer (2019) found that women of color are subjected to a higher degree of “misogynistic abuse and racial slurs” (Harmer 2019). Harmer identified 4 trends of gendered and racist abuse: gendered and racist abuse, silencing and dismissal, questioning intelligence and position, and ‘benevolent’ othering. Harmer also argued that is it difficult to avoid online abuse because it is essential that representatives maintain a level of communication with their constituents. Another article by Gorrell et al. (2018), also examines abuse of candidates in the

UK by Twitter users. Gorrell et al. concluded that abuse generated by politicians has increased in recent years, despite Twitter's effort to curtail abusive language. Furthermore, the study finds that male members of Parliament and conservatives may generate more abuse from Twitter users. The article also finds that while men may garner more abuse, female candidates are "more likely to be subject to online stalking and sexual harassment" (Gorrell et al. 2018). In a similar study on the UK, Ward and Mcloughlin (2017) examined online abuse and gender. The study showed that female MPs have received a substantial amount of threats and comments related to sexual violence as well as harassment. The article cited a BBC Radio 5 survey of female MPs of all parties. The survey showed that a critical majority of the candidates (9 out of 10), reported generating online and verbal abuse from the public, which resulted in a third of the candidates considered quitting as a result of the verbal abuse. Ward and Mcloughlin also concluded that verbal abuse online against female candidates is not just a problem in the UK. There are a wide range of countries and political systems that demonstrate this trend. Furthermore, social media also are motivated to criticize women "in an attempt to delegitimize female politicians, restrict their rights to communicate and inhibit them from taking an active part in the political arena, but also sense that abusers feel threatened by high profile women politicians speaking out" (Ward & Mcloughlin 2017).

The literature suggests that conservative male and female candidates generate more negative criticism when campaigning (see Gorell et al.). The literature suggests that female, and oftentimes, male candidates and conservatives (see Gorrell et al.) endure more negative experiences when running for office. My interviews showed mixed reviews from the participants. In some cases, there was very little tension between social media users and the candidates, while others generated a series of negative comments. I will examine the participants

through party and gender and will start with the Republican candidates. I interviewed three Republican candidates—two office holders—two men and one female. The Republican female candidate was a 56-year-old, white, female who was mayor of her town. The first Republican male was a 47-year-old, white male who ran for a position on the Board of Education and won. The next Republican male was a 53-year-old, white male who won office as mayor of his town three times. The participants were asked what position they held, what was their experience running for office, and if they would consider running for office again, and if so, would they run for a higher office than they held currently? Furthermore, the participants were asked if they were concerned about how they would be treated in social media? Accordingly, the follow-up question inquired that if there was no social media, would the participant be more likely to run for office? The 53-year-old mayor said that he basically had a positive experience when running for office, although it was scary at times because he was in the public sphere. He liked the fact that he was able to meet so many people. He was not terribly concerned with running for office because Facebook and Twitter were not as popular during the time that he ran for office in 2013-2015. He also felt that social media would not change his desire to run again or for higher office. What would discourage him is finances because it costs money to run for office. The Republican, 47-year-old Board of Education member was a first-time candidate for public office and felt that he learned a lot in the process. Overall, he had a positive experience and believed that he learned a lot about how the system works—and doesn't work. He was undecided if he was going to run for office again because he still had two years left in his current position. What he did find discouraging is the fact that, oftentimes, it was hard to get things done and create change for the better. He was not concerned about social media because he felt his "footprint" was not that big—meaning, he did not have a considerable social media presence. The third Republican

female also had a positive experience when running for the mayor of her town. She said, “I loved every aspect of it and loved meeting the people.” The public saw her as a harbinger of change because “people loved where they live—they just don’t like how its run.” This participant would definitely run again, but would not run for higher office. Instead, she would rather run for the local position because “the town needs help. I would rather help at home, which effects more people. I would rather concentrate in town before I go somewhere else. I found that I have to be the voice for those that want change. I am not ready for higher office. I want to get more involved in my town.” This participant reported that social media would not discourage her from running for office. She experienced “very little negativity.” The only problem she had was with the operation of Facebook itself—when she went to “boost” a post, it was denied by Facebook. She made a clear distinction about social media on the local level and the national level—“on the local level, women are definitely being empowered.” At this level they receive more “praise” from social media users. She reported that at the national level female candidates receive more criticism from social media users. For her, “media plays a lot at the national level.” For example, candidates at the national level are more likely to receive more negative comments from Facebook and Twitter users.

Overall, Republican candidates had a positive experience when running for office. Gorrell et al. argued that men and conservatives may receive more negative comments on social media. On the other hand, the Republican candidates that I interviewed did not share this experience. Both men had good experiences when running for office, and the female candidate also did not report a negative experience. I think an important exception to these findings was that these candidates are at the local and state level. The female Republican participant suggested that candidates at the national level may be received differently than those candidates at the local

level on social media. This trend might explain why my candidates during my case studies for Senate—both male and female—generated a significant amount of negative emotion. All of my participants held office at the local level and state level in Connecticut. Furthermore, the conclusions in my Senate case studies for this project suggest that Republicans—especially Republican women—would garner more negative emotion from social media users. This trend was simply not the case for my Republican participants during these interviews.

My Democratic participants, however, had a different experience during campaigning and social media. Like Republicans, some of the Democratic candidates had positive experiences. I interviewed 8 Democratic office holders. All of the participants held office at the state level. Out of the 8 Democratic participants, 5 of them had something to say about the negativity of social media during their campaigns. Furthermore, 3 of the participants were Democratic men ranging from ages 41-76. All of the men were white. The women candidates ranged in age from 41 to 62. Three of the female candidates were white, while the other two were African American and Latina. My study shows that 2 Democratic men had negative experiences with social media, while 3 of the Democratic female candidates cited excessive criticism from Twitter and Facebook. This was especially true of the Democratic females who were the African American and Latina candidates.

The first candidate that I will discuss was a 41-year-old, white, man who held office as mayor. Running for office a number of times between 2009-2015, this participant reported a negative experience on social media. Although the candidate expressed that he had a positive experience during his campaigns he cited that social media changed over time. When he first ran in 2009, social media was not as popular. But as time went on “it got ugly overtime.” He stated that social media changed the way candidates communicated with the public. This participant

experienced a significant amount of criticism on social media—that was even gendered. I will identify these trends later in this chapter when I talk about gender stereotyping. This section examines the general experience of running for office by the candidates. It is important to note, that although this participant experienced frequent criticism on social media, he was not discouraged from running for office. Similar to this candidate, another Democratic male candidate who was 76 years old, and held public office for 25 years, also talked about the negative aspects of social media. This candidate was concerned about how he would be received by social media. He said that social media “can have a negative impact” and that “keyboard warriors contribute to the toxic nature of the political environment and spread false news.” This participant, being more critical of social media, stated he would be more likely to run if social media, like Twitter and Facebook, did not exist.

Three of the Democratic women had similar experiences with social media as these two male candidates. A forty-eight-year-old white, female Democratic state representative had a negative experience with social media. She was concerned how she would be treated in social media, and she “didn’t know it would be as bad as it was.” She also stated that she would be more likely to run if there was no social media stating that “that’s where the most brutal and nasty and thoroughly unkind action takes place.” The most severe attacks unfolded on social media against my African American and Latina participants. A forty-two-year-old, Puerto Rican City Council member cited that she had a very bad experience while campaigning. She stated that she was concerned about how she would be treated on social media. In fact, she did not have a Facebook and Twitter page until she ran for City Council in 2021. Engaging in a lot more “door knocking,” this candidate saw social media as a negative aspect of campaigning. She identified that herself, and the other candidate for City Council, who was an African American,

generated the most criticism on social media. She specifically said she was targeted by the opposition on social media and called “racist.” She even stated that she had been appointed nicknames on social media by the opposition such as “Barbie,” and “Bobblehead.” Furthermore, this participant revealed that she noticed that none of the male candidates had nicknames on social media. Because of her experience, this participant concluded that she would be more likely to run for office if social media did not exist.

The 49-year-old, female, African American City Council member also had a negative experience on social media. This participant is the majority leader of the City Council. Furthermore, she is the first female and first minority to hold this position in public office. Accused of being “racist” on social media, this candidate was not discouraged to run despite the criticism she received on social media. She stated, “I don’t spend a lot of time letting social media worry me.” She did state that male and female candidates are treated differently on social media which I will identify later in this chapter. Another candidate, who was 36-years-old, and was unaffiliated to any party, had a similar opinion. This candidate ran for the position of probate judge and was backed by both parties. She recognized the negative aspects of social media during campaigning. She stated, “there is a lot of mudslinging and name calling.” Furthermore, she reiterated that, “social media is the detriment to society. It turned into a forum where anybody can put out information they want, and it turned into something that wasn’t intended. It is hard to control the narrative on social media.”

Although a majority of the Democratic candidates had a negative experience, a few of the Democratic candidates had a positive experience with social media. A 72-year-old, white, male who ran for City Council in 2020, but lost, said that social media did not affect his experience when running for office. Furthermore, social media did not affect his experience when running

and if he did get negative comments “I just block them.” Another 43-year-old, female candidate for the state representative of Connecticut had a “great experience on social media.” Although she was concerned about social media she said, “I don’t go down the rabbit hole of engaging. I have a thick skin—I don’t engage.” Another female mayoral candidate stated, “she had a great experience on social media with very little negativity,” and said that the public had confirmed that, “I was a viable candidate for the position.” A state Senator in Connecticut said she never had a Facebook or Twitter account until she ran for office. Although she was not too concerned about how she would be treated on social media she did say that, “running for office was much simpler when those things did not exist.”

Overall, social media had an effect on the candidates experience when running for office. It was important to note that the Republican candidates did not report a negative experience. These findings about Republicans dispute my findings in previous chapters on emotion and gender. At the national level, I found that Republicans, particularly Republican women, receive the most negative sentiment from Facebook and Twitter users. This was simply not the case for my participants who were Republican during my interviews. My Democratic candidates, on the other hand, reported more cases of negative experience when running for office. Many were concerned how they would be treated on social media, and furthermore, it effected their decision on whether they would run for public office again. The most notable cases of social media abuse were against the African American and Latina participants. Accordingly, women who are minorities often face discrimination in media outlets in general. Gershon (2012) argues that, “coverage of women and minority members of Congress may be unfavorable. Faced with a ‘double barrier’ of race and gender, minority Congress women often receive more negative and less frequent media coverage than all other representatives” (Gershon 2012). My interviews

show that minority women do, indeed, face a “double bind” when dealing with the public on social media. These two candidates generated the most negative content on Twitter and Facebook than candidates who were white. And, as this next section on gender stereotyping will show, the African American and Latina received some of the harshest criticism by social media users.

Gender Stereotyping on Facebook and Twitter:

This section will examine gender stereotyping during campaigns on Facebook and Twitter. Participants were asked a battery of questions on this topic. First, participants were asked how male and female candidates were treated on social media? Secondly, the participants were asked to give examples of gender stereotyping on social media for both male and female candidates. Some of the candidates referenced personal experience while campaigning, or cited examples that they had seen on social media by other candidates. The literature on this topic reinforces gender stereotyping of female candidates during campaigns. One such study on female candidates and campaigns on Twitter in India, by Saluja and Thilika (2021) concluded that there are three trends related to women and social media. First, Twitter users often place a high level of significance on female candidates and physical appearance. Secondly, social media users “often relate a female politicians leadership qualities with aspects of her gender identity” (Saluja & Thilika 2021). For example, it is more acceptable by Twitter users for women to engage in issues that are appropriate for their “nurturing” qualities like health care and education, while male politicians are most notable for their masculine qualities appropriate for issues such as foreign policy. The third finding of this article was that women are often “treated with humiliating gendered remarks” (Saluja & Thilika 2021). Similar studies also confirm gender stereotyping on social media. Rheault et al. (2019) find that “women are targeted by uncivil

comments online” (Rheault et al. 2019). Furthermore, the article showed that the higher the status that a female politician achieves, the more likely she is to receive negative comments by social media posters. In addition, Sobieraj (2017) argued that social media attackers use three strategies to attack women, “intimidating, shaming, and discrediting—to limit women’s impact on digital public’s” (Sobieraj 2017). Based on the literature, I would expect that my female candidates would generate more comments related to gender stereotyping. Overall, my interviews showed that this trend was correct. Importantly, the participants could identify patterns of misogyny against women. There was one exception, however. A Democratic male candidate, who held office as a mayor, received exceptional amounts of online criticism. Accordingly, many of the participants could identify examples of gender stereotyping against men. I will outline these trends in the following sections.

First, participants were asked how male and female candidates were characterized in social media? Secondly, I asked them to give examples of gender stereotyping on social media. Some candidates said there was no difference between the two. For example, the 53-year-old, Republican, male candidate, who ran for mayor and Congress, reiterated that there was “no difference” between the two. Similarly, the 72-year-old, Democratic, male City Council candidate also said, “I never really considered it being different.” Other candidates stated that there was a clear difference between the types of comments that male and female candidates generated on social media. One of the common trends that the participants identified was that women were characterized as “angry, bitches, control freaks and more emotional” while they were running for office and positions of power. Furthermore, one participant reinforced this trend when he said that women are viewed as “aggressive” on social media while running for public office. On the other hand, men were seen as “great leaders” during their quest for power

in politics. Another interesting finding was the question of qualifications when running for office. A white, female, Democratic candidate for state representative stated that a female candidate's qualifications often come into question on social media. Women, who are characterized as "inexperienced," or "unqualified" have a harder time proving their value as viable candidates. She stated, "our work experience is often in doubt. Men are taken at face value. Women are asked to prove their experience. Men are accepted by the public for whatever they say they did." Furthermore, she said that, "men are never asked how they are going to raise or care for their children." Similarly, the Democratic, 62-year-old, white, state senator revealed that she thought "that my male colleagues have more leeway. Men are not judged as harshly on social media." Another candidate for City Council reinforced this ideal when he said that men are viewed "in mostly positive terms. They are strong, positive and forceful." A few of the candidates used presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton as an example of how women are portrayed on social media. For example, she was characterized as an "evil woman, not feminine and as a masculine woman." Furthermore, one participant added that, "Donald Trump's qualifications were not characterized by his gender." A 43-year-old, female, state representative reported that, "some of my colleagues have been criticized over their looks. They were criticized over an outfit they wore." Furthermore, she said that, "I don't see men getting these comments." One candidate had a different point of view about how women are treated on social media. The 56-year-old, white, Republican 2021 candidate for mayor said that, "on a local level, women are definitely being empowered." She reiterated that women are only receiving "praise" for their efforts when running for local positions of power.

There are three compelling cases that support gender stereotyping on social media. The first was experienced by Democratic male candidate for mayor. The next two were the

candidates who are the minorities in this group of participants. The 41-year-old, white Democratic male mayor had a different experience than most men out of my participants. His most recent public appointment was a four -year term as mayor in 2015. When asked how male and female candidates were characterized, he had negative comments about both sexes. First, he said that women are criticized by their appearance—“and very often in misogynistic terms,” and furthermore, “very often sexualized.” His opinion on male candidates was very similar stating that, male candidates are “very often stereotyped depending on who they are. They are held up to a masculine ideal.” When asked to give examples of stereotyping by social media users he was very specific. He said he’s “seen it a million times” regarding women. He was referencing the many memes about Hillary Clinton and her appearance. Photos would capture a “bad moment, with wide eyes, or when she was aggressively making a point during a debate.” Furthermore, this participant stated that Hillary Clinton was portrayed as “crazy, emotional and unhinged, which ties into common tropes about women.” However, he was equally critical about men when it came to perceptions of the public on social media. He stated that men are expected to be “strong, patriarchal and a real tough guy.” Furthermore, he said he was compared to the notion of the male ideal while campaigning and while in office. For example, Trump was considered a picture of the “alpha male.” This type of ideal “can be used to cut people down,” and effected his relationship with the public at the personal level. This participant even sent examples of criticism from the public on Twitter. For example, one user posted the following against the participant: “The #oathkeepers will give their life, wealth and sacred honor to #ProtectOurChildren. Sadly, liberal pussies like @RepJohnLarson and @MayorDanDrew would never do the same in their own community.” Here, the participant is characterized as being less masculine by his opponents (the Oath Keepers—a right wing militia group), and therefore, is called a “pussy” because of his

affiliation to the Democratic party. The experience of this interviewee was particularly compelling because, although the participant agrees that women are sexualized by social media users, he also uses his own experience with the public to show that men can experience gendered attacks on Twitter and Facebook.

Female office holders that were minorities had similar experiences on Facebook and Twitter. A 42-year old Puerto Rican, female City Council member talked about her negative experience with posters on social media. When asked how male and female candidates were treated on social media, she was very specific alluding to her own experience. She said that men were characterized as “stronger, more capable, more qualified and less criticized on physical appearance.” Furthermore, she stated that men “were judged more by their actions and was not told to keep quiet.” This participant who characterized herself “as an attractive woman,” stated that “personally, I was told I was a know it all.” In addition, she said, “it was all about her physical looks,” and she was judged differently than her male counterparts, reiterating that her “value has always been more about physical appearance—it’s everywhere—women are criticized by their physical appearance.” When asked for some examples of how female candidates and male candidates were portrayed on social media, she said men were also held up to masculine standards. She stated that men were portrayed in a “masculine way,” and characterized “as a powerful person.” A specific example, she gave on social media were the pictures that were posted of the candidates by social media users. Images depicted men and women on what she called, “power poses.” Specifically, women were portrayed differently than men. Men were pictured in a much stronger manner while women were captured as “bitchy, as opposed to being strong.” This participant reiterated that social media contributed to a very negative experience during her 2021 campaign for City Council. In addition, she said that her

negative experience was attributed to the fact that she was a female candidate who was also a minority. She noted that candidates running for the same position did not warrant as much negative press on social media that she had experienced.

Another City Council member, who was also a minority, had a similar experience as the Puerto Rican office holder. This 49-year-old, African American female, was the first majority leader on City Council as well as being the first African American female to hold the position. She stated that male candidates had a different experience with social media users than female candidates. She reported that, “males don’t take the same criticism as women. They are seen as being forceful as they engage more with the public. And it’s more acceptable for them to express their opinions.” Furthermore, she contributed her relationship with social media users as influenced by her race. She stated that, “I’m not a huge fan of how women are treated in general.” Social media users “even called me racist.” In addition, she reported that, “as women, we become a default target by the public. We are attacked differently than our male counterparts.” When asked to cite examples of gender stereotyping—her answers were very similar to the common trends referenced by other participants in this study. She confirmed that social media users, “reflect on how women dress. The more attractive you are, the less credible you are compared to men.” She also mentioned that men have their own battles on social media. Growing up in the South, she had preconceived ideas of what makes up a man. She stated that a man must be a “manly man, and his masculinity might be questioned.” And furthermore, if a man does not measure up to these standards, he is called a “snow-flake.” However, she did report that, unlike female candidates, “very rarely is their intelligence questioned.” Overall, in this study candidates who were of the minority reported having negative experiences on social media.

Could this be a prominent thread? The literature says so. Gershon (2012) states that females who are also in a minority group face a “double-bind” when navigating their relationship with the public as well as media coverage. Furthermore, one of my participants, who also ran for City Council in the same town as my female, African American candidate, actually referenced the majority leader when asked for examples of gender stereotyping in social media. He said that as the first African American majority leader in the City Council, “Republicans were always attacking her. They called her racist because she was black. Also, the opposition party had no women in office—they were all male.”

Are Women Discouraged from Running for Office?

In this section, I will examine if the participants thought that the amount of negative comments women received on social media effected whether or not women would run for office. The participants were asked the following question: Do you think that the volume and type of social media coverage that women attract encourages or discourages women that run for office and leadership positions? The literature on this topic shows that oftentimes women are discouraged from running for office because of online abuse. This is determined by a trend of online abuse against female politicians. First, fewer women run for office overall than men (Comer et al., Fox 2001; Lawless & Fox 2004; Miller 2016). This has been linked to the fact that women endure more online abuse than men (Comer et al. 2021; Cuthbertson et al. 2019; Di Meco & Brechenmacher 2020; Rhealt et al. 2019; Trimble 2018). Other scholars argued that “while women receive the most benefit from social media through visibility and reach, they also experience the worst consequences: a disproportionate amount of harassment because of their gender” (Comer et al. 2021; Cuthbertson et al. 2019; Tenove & Tworek 2020). For example, a study on the 2020 U.S. Congressional race determined that “female candidates were significantly

more likely to receive online abuse than their male counterparts” (Guerin & Maharasingam-Shah 2020). The study also showed that on Facebook, “female Democrats running for office received 10 times more abusive comments than male Democratic candidates” (Guerin & Maharasingam-Shah 2020). In addition, online abuse appeared to be more prevalent for female candidates from minority groups (Comer et al. 2021). Importantly, increased abuse from social media outlets deterred women from running for public office (Comer et al. 2021).

Based on the literature, I expected that the participants in my survey would agree that women would be discouraged from running for office because of the increased criticism on social media. The results of the interviews showed a mixture of opinions about the likelihood that women would run for office based on online abuse on Facebook and Twitter. A white, Republican male candidate stated that the amount and nature of comments was not based on gender. Rather, it was the content of the post made by the candidate that determined the amount of engagement from social media posters. For this participant, women would not be deterred by social media at the local level. He said hesitation, however, occurs at the national level, such as the Senate. He said, “women do not have the ambition for higher levels of office” because local levels, “have more of a direct relationship with everyday life. Legislation at the local level is much more impactful during our everyday lives.” Thus, ambition to run for office was not really affected by social media, rather, for this participant, it was about making a difference at the local levels. Similarly, a white, Democratic candidate for City Council agreed that, “social media should not have any bearing on whether they (women) run or not.” One female, Republican participant even said social media encouraged her to run for mayor. In fact, she said, “it made me feel like I could do it.” Another Democratic, female state senator even said that social media “attracts certain groups.” She reiterated that, “I think the fact that you have to deal with social media attracts a

certain type of person, for example, people younger than myself because they are more prepared than me.”

Although some of the participants confirmed that social media did not make a difference, most of the participants agreed that Facebook and Twitter do affect the probability that women will run for office. One white, Democratic, male participant who was mayor added, “I can only imagine that it (social media) discourages them. The social media atmosphere does deter them because of the focus on appearance, especially for women.” Another white, male, Democrat for City Council confirmed this point of view reporting that, “it discourages women because of the nature of social media. It’s a forum for attacking by ‘keyboard warriors.’ I see comments about women’s appearance all the time—I never see any for men. You have to be a super human being to rise above it.” Female office holders also felt social media deters women from running for office. The 42-year-old, Puerto Rican, female City Council member reported that she had a bad experience with social media and reiterated that it would discourage women from running for office. “Yes,” she argued, “the social media that women face is a deterrent—the higher your profile the more criticism and judgement you face.” Similarly, a Democratic, female State Representative felt very strongly about social media as a detractor for women’s campaigns. She added, “In this environment its discouraging. It’s too negative. You have to be perfect all the time—it’s exhausting. Social media could be such a great tool. But instead, people use it to bash someone else—it’s discouraging.” The Democratic, female, African American City Councilwoman agreed, but added social media can even be a deterrent for men. She said, “Yes, women are discouraged from running for office because of nasty comments. It’s a turn off for men as well. But women feel more vulnerable. It can be scary. There is a legitimate concern for women.” Even the female, unaffiliated candidate for Probate Judge felt women are at odds with

social media. She said, “social media discourages women from running for office—and it’s not just posts—it’s the type of posts. There are pictorials, photos, images, that could discourage women from running because of negative feedback.” Overall, all but three of the office holders believed that social media does effect women’s ambition for running for office. Either the participants were referencing personal experiences during campaigns, or they were confirming trends on social media that they had witnessed overall. Importantly, the overarching conclusion found in this examination confirms that social media has a definitive effect on whether or not women run for public office.

Conclusion:

My interviews uncovered a variety of different trends involving social media and campaigns. First, the Republican candidates did not report a negative experience when running for office. The negative experience belonged to Democrats, especially women who were also minorities. Overall, this study shows that social media did have an effect on campaigns by the participants that I interviewed. Almost all of the participants could identify examples of gender stereotyping, especially for women. The overarching trend identified by the participants is that posters in social media made negative comments about women’s appearance as well as questioning their qualifications and abilities to obtain a leadership position. The participants reported that most men did not generate similar types of criticism from social media users. In addition, all but three of the participants agreed that social media would affect women’s ambition for running for office. Importantly, they reported that the negative aspects of social media would be a deterrent for seeking public office.

My interviews in this examination generated some interesting conclusions. But how do these conclusions hold up against my overall findings in previous chapters? Perhaps the most

compelling aspect of this examination is the experience of Republicans and Democrats with social media during campaigns. My interviews showed that Republicans, in fact, did not have negative experiences during their campaigns with Facebook and Twitter. Importantly, it was the Democratic participants that encountered the most negative aspects of social media during their campaigns. In my previous chapters, this simply was not the trend. My study shows that Republicans generated more negative emotion than Democrats. Additionally, the study shows that Republican women such as Marsha Blackburn and Martha McSally generated the most negative sentiment from social media users. These conclusions are not what I expected to find. The candidates that I interviewed are all from Connecticut, which is a blue state. I anticipated that because Connecticut is predominantly Democratic, that more negative sentiment would have been generated against the Republican candidates. This is simply not true. In fact, Republican candidates reported that they felt “empowered” by social media, which encouraged them to run for office. These findings might be explained by the fact that all the participants were at the local and state level in Connecticut. My case studies on the 2018 Senate races were at the national level. I suggest that conservative candidates at the national level generate more negative emotion by social media users—in fact, Democrats were meaner of the two parties.

It is important to note possible weaknesses in my study regarding the interviews. Overall, I felt my interviews were well balanced. I interviewed 5 men and 11 women. Four of the candidates were Republican. I also interviewed women who were minorities. Furthermore, I had an interesting selection of candidates. Some of the candidates held positions at the local level. However, I also interviewed candidates who were state representatives at the national level. But the weakness of the interviews could be in the demographics. All of the candidates were from Connecticut, which may not give a full picture of what social media looks like in different

regions of the country. However, I thought the interviews generated a good picture of what interactions between social media users and candidates look like during campaigns. Much of my findings during the interviews was supported by scholarly literature. Overall, I felt this examination was successful in uncovering the predominant trends involving gender stereotyping and campaigns. Furthermore, the conclusions generated by the interviews would be a good starting point for further research.

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