
MASCULINITY,
FEMININITY,
AND
AMERICAN
POLITICAL
BEHAVIOR
Monika L. McDermott

Masculinity, Femininity, and American Political Behavior

Masculinity, Femininity, and American Political Behavior

Monika L. McDermott

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford. It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press in the UK and certain other countries.

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: McDermott, Monika L., 1966- author.
Title: Masculinity, femininity, and American political behavior / Monika L. McDermott.
Description: New York, NY : Oxford University Press, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2015048185 | ISBN 9780190462802 (hardcover : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780190462819 (pbk. : alk. paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Political participation—Sex differences—United States. | Party affiliation—Sex differences—United States. | Political psychology—United States.
Classification: LCC JK1764 .M3936 2016 | DDC 306.20973—dc23
LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2015048185

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Printed by WebCom, Inc., Canada

For
David R. Jones

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe many thanks for help with this project, but first and foremost I have the great pleasure of thanking my students as my inspiration. As the introductory story in chapter 7 describes, the students in my Women and Politics class in fall 2010 and their lively discussion of gendered personalities contributed to the idea that became this book. Three of these students in particular—Caitlin Meyer, Justin Gillis, and Laura Smulian—worked as research assistants for me. Their work was important in getting this project off the ground, and I thank them especially.

Fordham University was financially vital to this project. They not only funded my undergraduate research assistants they also provided research funding to the project itself. Grants from the Office of Research and their Faculty Research Grants program, and the Undergraduate Research Program's Faculty Research Grant Program, provided the resources for the survey that forms the backbone of this book. I am grateful to the university for these funding opportunities and specifically to James Wilson, former director of the Office of Research, and to Mike Latham, the former dean of Fordham College at Rose Hill—a tireless champion for undergraduate research and its funding (and a fellow UCLA Bruin).

John R. Petrocik (JRP) deserves special recognition and gratitude as my teacher and mentor both in graduate school and after. Without him my career would have taken a very different path. As an incoming graduate student in international relations at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), I took an American political behavior class from JRP and never looked back. He has the ability to captivate students and generate interest in topics they have (or at least I had) never considered before, not just in American political behavior but also in statistics and practical quantitative research. Even fourteen years after signing off on my dissertation, he took the time to read draft chapters of this manuscript and provide his (typical) thoughtful insight and support.

I would also like to thank my friends and family, both those inside the profession and out, who have tolerated my obsession for the past few years. There are too many to mention here, but those whom I may have put upon the most include Noel and Jeremy Kehoe, Oksan Bayulgen, Jeff Ladewig, and Megan Thee-Brenan. Not only did they tolerate my complaints and single-mindedness, they did so with grace. Each one of them contributed to the book by talking through my ideas with me, and offering suggestions and ideas of their own. This supportive role was shared by my family, although their insistence on not visiting the East Coast meant they were subjected to far less frequent complaining, for which I am sure they are grateful. To my mom and my late dad I owe special thanks. Being raised in a house full of intellectual curiosity, academic support, bad puns, and chew-and-show is a precious thing.

I have also had support from professional colleagues. Kathy Dolan and Monica Schneider each generously read a draft of the first chapter and provided me with very helpful comments. I thank them for insights that I would have otherwise missed. My colleagues at Fordham also deserve thanks. They have cultivated an environment of inspiration and high expectations in scholarly research and publication by setting impressive examples.

My gratitude goes out to Angela Chnapko, my editor, and Princess Ikatekit, editorial assistant, at Oxford University Press. Angela was very supportive throughout the sometimes difficult process of reviews and revisions, and her backing of the manuscript was strong and encouraging from the start. Princess was helpful, cheerful, and patient throughout the publication process. Both are excellent at what they do and pleasures to work with.

I turn now to the difficult task of thanking my husband, David Jones. I would not be what I am without him. He has patiently and uncomplainingly supported my many job changes as well as the moves we have made from state to state in my quixotic search for greener grass. He has also been instrumental in helping me turn this research into a book. His stability, sense of humor, and willingness to sacrifice his research time to play for me the roles of editor, sounding board, and careful critic have kept me going. For that, and because he is my best friend and the love of my life, I dedicate the book to him. Here's to you, Jones!

Masculinity, Femininity, and American Political Behavior

CHAPTER 1

Gendered Personalities and Political Behavior

Man up, Harry Reid.

—Sharron Angle (*quoted in Hennessy 2010*)

Politics is a substantially gendered institution in America. Masculinity and femininity affect and define multiple areas of our politics, including, but certainly not limited to, electoral contests, governing, policies and issues, and the images and positions of the two major political parties. Our culture delineates masculinity and femininity by associating the former with toughness and competitiveness, and the latter with softness and compassion, in both social and political worlds.

The quote in the opening epigraph and others like it demonstrate just how politically prevalent these concepts are. During a public debate between candidates for the United States Senate seat in Nevada in 2008, Sharron Angle told Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid to "man up," as quoted above. Angle was criticizing Reid's refusal to debate the solvency of Social Security. The quip was meant to call Reid to task for his unwillingness to discuss this very tough issue (commonly referred to as the "third rail" in politics), which demonstrated, in Angle's opinion, a lack of masculinity. Angle's gendered attack got her press attention, but it was far from original in its theme. Questioning the masculinity of political candidates—"wimp baiting," as one journalist put it (Feinsilber 1989)—is nothing new in American electoral politics. We generally expect our political candidates to display resolution and strength, making the accusation of weakness a traditional favorite and one that can really stick. Perhaps no one knows

this better than former president George H. W. Bush. In 1987 *Newsweek* ran a cover story about the then vice president and presidential candidate with the screaming headline: "George Bush: Fighting the 'Wimp Factor.'" It was not the first time Bush had heard the slur; in fact, the *Newsweek* story was accompanied by a survey that found a slim majority of Americans believed that Bush's image as a "wimp" was a problem for his campaign. Despite the wimp factor, Bush won that election, only to lose his bid for reelection in 1992 while again suffering the indignity of the label. Not only did Bush's opponent, Bill Clinton, publicly accuse him of a "wimp-out" on the issue of crime (The Associated Press 1992), but during the campaign it was also embarrassingly revealed that former president Ronald Reagan had hesitated to pick Bush as his running mate back in 1980 because he thought Bush was a "wimp" (Schwartz and Edsall 1992). While Bush's presidential advisers fought hard to shake what was essentially a "feminine" image with campaign stunts, such as putting him in boxing gloves for a pre–presidential debate photo opportunity, they largely failed (Ducat 2005). His campaign understood the importance of gendered images for candidates.

Beyond electoral politics, masculinity and femininity also help define the nature of governing. Not only are candidates expected to display strong characteristics, but elected officials need to act on that strength once in office. Politics is a rough world in which conflict reigns. As in the electoral arena, those not up to the task of making difficult decisions in the world of governing can be accused of being soft and lacking in masculinity. Arnold Schwarzenegger, the former Republican governor of California, famously called Democrats in the California state legislature "girlie-men" (over one-quarter of the legislators were actually women) for not passing his belt-tightening budget (Nicholas 2004, B1). The line—which originated from a *Saturday Night Live* television comedy sketch mocking Schwarzenegger—was such a hit that the California College Republicans sold T-shirts printed with "Don't be a girlie man: vote Republican." Another tough-talker, although one of significantly smaller physical stature than Schwarzenegger, 1992 presidential candidate Ross Perot was famous for calling Washington politicians "sissies" for not making the hard choices he thought necessary to improve the country.

Gendered ideals also delineate policy issues in our political world. Political theorist and commentator Irving Kristol assigned gender to policy when he pointed out, "The American welfare state has had a feminine coloration from the very beginning" (Kristol 1996, A16). Kristol was neither the first nor the last to see this connection. In American politics, the goal of helping those in need is seen as a feminine one because it involves

caretaking and compassion, traits we associate with femininity. For this same reason, issues like health care and education are also seen as feminine. However, masculinity also defines issues in American politics. For example, the arena of national defense is an unmistakably masculine one, centering on keeping our image and stance in the world strong. Even those viewed as foreign policy "doves" see the need to act tough on military issues in America because a "masculine-gendered discourse is the only permissible way of speaking about national security if one is to be taken seriously by the strategic community" (Tickner 2001, 53). This type of masculinity in foreign policy was embodied by President George W. Bush when he landed in a fighter jet on the deck of an aircraft carrier to announce the end of major combat operations in Iraq. Some media and political commentators swooned over the masculinity of the move, comparing Bush to Tom Cruise playing a macho fighter pilot in the movie *Top Gun* and also to Ronald Reagan, perhaps the ultimate man's man and foreign policy tough-guy. The aircraft carrier move even inspired an action figure, the "George W. Bush Elite Force Aviator," wearing a replica of the flight suit Bush wore that day and posed with a helmet tucked under his right arm. The White House was well aware of the domestic benefits of a masculine image in foreign policy and was working to achieve it.

Finally, although certainly not exhaustively, masculinity, femininity, and the policies associated with them play a role in differentiating our two major parties. Americans "associate stereotypically masculine and feminine traits with the Republicans and Democrats, respectively" (Winter 2010, 603). Each party owns gendered issue areas. Republicans own the issues that are viewed as manly and aggressive—such as defense and foreign affairs—while Democrats typically own issues that are feminine and caring, like health care, welfare, and poverty. Liberal commentator Mark Shields put it this way when writing about the 1988 presidential election:

> Voters currently trust the Democrats to nourish and nurture the body politic and Republicans to deal with the difficult and hostile forces in the outside world. To oversimplify, the compassionate Democrats are the Feminine Party and the hard-headed Republicans are the Masculine Party. (Shields 1988)

As these various scenarios demonstrate, politicians, pundits, and political scientists alike see the workings of gendered dimensions across a wide range of American politics.

Despite this oft-noted link between masculinity, femininity, and politics, scant research considers whether or not gendered concepts affect an *individual's* political behavior. Yet findings from both political science and

psychology suggest an intuitive, unexplored way in which the gendered dimensions of masculinity and femininity in our society might be expected to affect individuals politically: that is, citizens' gendered personalities.[1] We know from decades of research into personality and politics that an individual's personality traits affect his or her political predispositions. Personality characteristics stem partly from genetics and partly from socialization, making them early and influential forces in an individual's life. Extensive psychological research also shows that masculinity and femininity are distinct personality trait dimensions that influence individuals' social attitudes and behavior. Terman and Miles argued in a formative study that masculinity and femininity "are so deep seated and pervasive as to lend distinctive character to the entire personality" (1936, 1). As such elemental personality forces, gendered personalities are a potentially vital factor in understanding political behavior.

One likely reason for a dearth of inquiry into the influence of individuals' gendered personalities on their political attitudes and behavior stems from the conflation of gender and biological sex in most political behavior research. Before proceeding I must make clear the distinction between the terms "sex" and "gender" and how I use them in this work. I define each term in a standard gender-research sense: "sex" is the biological difference between men and women; "gender" is the construct society has built over time to reflect behaviors and beliefs thought to be typical of, though by no means unique to, the sexes and their roles in society (e.g., Deaux 1985).

Gendered personalities specifically are the sets of personality traits that originated with societal sex roles. Femininity and masculinity comprise two separate personality dimensions, originally based on society's expected social role for each sex and the personality profile that facilitated filling that role. The masculine dimension encompasses traits that were once associated with the male role of family provider. Masculine individuals are those who are independent, aggressive, competitive, and willing to take risks, among other traits. Femininity, in contrast, is made up of the personality traits expected of the traditional role of mother and caretaker. Individuals with feminine personalities are tender, affectionate, and sympathetic. Each of these personality dimensions is a cohesive compilation of traits reflective of traditional role expectations, but at the same time they are not mutually exclusive within any single individual.

While political science research has long equated sex and gendered personalities—categorizing only men as masculine and only women as feminine—an extensive psychological literature, as well as the original research presented in this book, abounds with studies finding that biological sex and gendered personalities should be considered separate forces

in shaping individuals' attitudes. Changes in societal roles now allow, and perhaps even require, men and women to possess traits once thought only appropriate to the opposite sex. I discuss these concepts and their unique features in more detail later in this chapter, and I demonstrate empirically the extent to which gendered personalities do not conform precisely to biological sex in a traditional feminine-woman and masculine-man way.

In this book I address the gap in research regarding masculinity, femininity, and American political behavior. I do so from the point of view that gendered personalities operate similarly to more general personality traits (namely the "Big Five") in determining political attitudes and choices. Given the relevance of masculine and feminine dimensions to virtually all aspects of our political world, many potential effects are likely. I specifically hypothesize that individuals' masculine and feminine personality traits substantially influence, respectively, their partisan affiliations, their vote choices, their ideology, their levels of engagement in political life (including political knowledge and interest), and their attitudes toward the roles of the sexes in social and political life. For example, the delineation of our two parties based on masculine and feminine issues should drive more masculine personalities to the Republican Party (GOP) and more feminine personalities toward the Democratic Party. If these effects do exist—and the evidence in this book will demonstrate that they do—such an examination is crucial to our understanding of personalities and politics, gendered personalities generally, gendered elements in politics, and American political behavior overall.

To reiterate, the book's overarching argument is that masculinity and femininity, as important personality dimensions acquired very early in life, play a strong role in determining a range of individual citizens' political attitudes and choices. To test this general theory, each of the book's data chapters (chapters 3 through 6) analyzes a different aspect of political behavior, encompassing all of those mentioned above, by presenting a specific hypothesis (or hypotheses) and rigorously testing it through empirical analysis. The primary data source for these analyses is an original survey, the Gendered Personalities and Politics Survey (GPPS). This 2011 survey provides the first-ever nationwide measure of gendered personalities, and represents the only known measure of gendered personalities *and* political attitudes in a single survey in the past three decades in America.[2]

On topic after topic, the results of these analyses demonstrate the significant role that gendered personalities play in shaping political attitudes and behaviors. I demonstrate that masculinity (as the tough personality dimension) increases Republican Party identification and voting for Republican candidates, while femininity (the compassionate profile)

does the same for Democratic affiliation and voting. In addition, masculine traits boost political engagement. Individuals who are higher in masculine traits, including competitiveness, dominance, and standing up for one's beliefs, are more likely to show an interest in and knowledge of the political world. Furthermore, an analysis of individuals' judgments of the appropriate social and political roles for men and women shows that those whose gendered personalities conform to traditional profiles also believe in a traditional division of labor between the sexes—that men belong more in politics while women belong more in the home.

In the process of analyzing each of these important areas of political opinion and behavior, I also examine the role that gendered personalities play relative to that of the more common biological sex distinction. Depending on the political topic under examination, the relative influences of gendered personalities as opposed to sex vary. Gendered personalities can explain some things that sex itself does not explain well (in political preferences); gendered personalities and sex can both contribute, independently, to politics (in political engagement); and sex and gendered personalities can work in combination with each other in the form of gender conformity (in attitudes toward appropriate sex roles in politics and society). In this context, the results not only highlight the importance of gendered influences, they also help to extend understanding of the effects, and limitations, of both sex and gendered personalities in politics. The remainder of this chapter builds a step-by-step foundation for the rest of this book, reviewing the relevant literature on personality and politics and on gendered personalities in psychological research, and explaining the basis for my general hypothesis.

PERSONALITIES AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

> The only form of study which a political thinker of one or two hundred years ago would now note as missing is any attempt to deal with politics in its relation to the nature of man.
>
> —Wallas *1921, 35*

Since the early 1900s when Graham Wallas lamented the singular focus on rational and intellectual decision-making in the study of politics, research into natural and impulsive influences on behavior has taken root. Because human beings are not necessarily born as the blank slates they were once believed to be, innate predispositions are receiving much more attention. While the debate between rationality and impulse continues in political science, the study of individuals' personality traits and their relationship

to political attitudes and behavior has brought a natural, and empirically demonstrated, relationship to the forefront.

The basic theory regarding personality and politics holds that individual personality helps to produce one's attitudes and subsequent behaviors because personality comes first, temporally, in human development. Personality is "causally prior" to attitude formation (Gerber et al. 2010, 115). In fact, many scholars now argue that at least a portion of personality is heritable, rather than predominantly environmental as once thought (see, e.g., Bouchard et al. 1990). This view places personality among the core elements of an individual's psyche. Not only is personality there from the beginning, it is also still there at the end. Personality and the composite of traits that form it are consistent throughout the course of an individual's lifetime, especially from adulthood forward (McCrae and Costa 2003; Roberts and DelVecchio 2000).

Because personality is such a basic and constant force in a person's life, it has the ability to strongly influence attitudes and decision making that come later. Personality provides individuals with general predispositions that influence their preferences in terms of both opinions and choices and actions. While no single personality trait or dimension of traits can be said to directly cause a specific behavior, personality provides an underlying tendency for different behaviors in different situations (Ajzen 1987).

Relatively early work in personality and politics examines various individual aspects of personality. This research shows that personality traits such as pessimism and alienation (McClosky 1958) and dogmatism (Alker and Poppen 1973) can lead to a more conservative disposition. At the same time, self-confidence (McClosky 1958), a moral outlook (Alker and Poppen 1973), and impulsivity promote a more politically liberal penchant. And of course, work on authoritarian personality has shown a relatively consistent link between that personality type and ideological conservatism (Adorno, Levinson, and Sanford 1950; and more recently, Hetherington and Weiler 2009). This early research is characterized by a focus on ideology as the general political predisposition of interest. The research is also noteworthy, however, for its rather diverse—some might say unfocused—array of potential personality factors. The lack of a defined personality framework at that time prevented any truly cohesive or thorough examination of personality effects on politics.

The recognition in the 1960s and 1970s of broad factor structures in personalities (see specifically Eysenck 1964), made up of multiple individual and related traits, changed the nature of personality research. The development of the Big Five factor structure in particular broke new, fruitful ground. Researchers during this time period discovered consistent clusters

of personality traits that formed five broad dimensions of personality: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (e.g., McCrae and Costa 1987). The openness factor captures personality traits that contribute to an individual being open to new experiences and having wide-ranging interests. Conscientious individuals are those who follow a regimented existence. The extraverted are, as they sound, outgoing, and they frequently enjoy being the center of attention. Individuals high on the agreeableness personality factor are largely sympathetic to other people and their feelings. Finally, neuroticism measures the extent to which an individual is emotionally unstable, experiencing things like mood swings or excessive worry. The neuroticism factor is also frequently measured in the opposite direction and labeled "emotional stability."

When researchers discovered and developed these factors, it was believed that the five alone accounted for the vast majority of an individual's overall personality. As discussed in the gendered personalities section below, however, there are influential factors that lie outside the Big Five, many of which remain unexamined. Nevertheless, following the discovery and validation of the Big Five factors, personality research turned to predominantly studying them. This provided a much more unified framework for the study of personality effects than work that had come before, but also in some ways it was a more limited one.

Recent research into personality and politics analyzes the Big Five framework almost exclusively. Two of the more recent and prominent examples of this research are by Jeffery Mondak (2010) and Alan Gerber and his colleagues (2010, 2011a, among other pieces). Their respective studies demonstrate how the Big Five factors can influence not only underlying predispositions but also specific political attitudes, partisan affiliation, and political behavior. This research finds that conscientiousness and emotional stability are positively related to conservatism, while openness contributes to liberalism (Gerber et al. 2010 and 2011a; Mondak 2010). In sum (and perhaps not surprisingly), individuals who are more regimented in their lives and less emotionally labile have a higher probability of being ideologically conservative; while those who are less so, on each measure, reflecting a more easygoing lifestyle, have higher probabilities of holding a liberal orientation. The extent to which an individual's interests range across a variety of areas—the openness factor—has the opposite effect promoting liberal rather than conservative orientations. Personality can also influence attitudes in different policy domains: the general ideological effects are reflected in both social and economic policy preferences. In addition, while not influential on overall ideology, extraversion contributes to economic conservatism. Agreeableness promotes

economic liberalism but also social conservatism (Gerber et al. 2010, 2011a).

In addition to underlying ideological orientations and issue domains, personality also influences our most important electoral variable: party identification. Not surprisingly, the effects are very similar to effects on ideological leanings. People with conscientious natures and those with emotionally stable personalities are significantly more likely to affiliate strongly with Republicans (Gerber et al. 2011a; Mondak 2010). At the same time, those high in openness are significantly less likely to be Republican (and are therefore more likely to be Democratic).

Further research goes beyond attitudes to examine the link between personality and political *behavior*—namely voter turnout and choice. While the influence of personality does not guarantee specific voting activity or decisions, by influencing predispositions it certainly makes some outcomes more likely than others. For example, personality affects individuals' levels of political interest, knowledge, and attention, and in turn also the probability they will turn out to vote. Consistent findings across studies are that individuals who are more open to new experiences are also more likely to be politically engaged (interested in and knowledgeable about politics) (Gerber et al. 2011b; Mondak 2010). More agreeable individuals, on the other hand, are less likely to be politically interested and informed. When it comes to participating in elections, researchers find that the conscientious are less likely to partake in politics not only in terms of voting (Gerber et al. 2011b) but also when it comes to other civic actions, such as attending public meetings or participating in political campaigns (Gerber et al. 2011b; Mondak 2010). Individuals with high levels of openness are more likely to participate in a variety of ways (Gerber et al. 2011b; Mondak 2010). In sum, individuals with broader interests are more likely to vote, while those who follow a more rigid way of life are less likely to do so.[3]

An additional behavioral aspect—for whom individuals vote—has received less attention in personality and politics research, especially in the United States. There are currently two notable exceptions to this scarcity, both based on Big Five personality studies conducted with very large convenience samples of individuals visiting personality testing websites. In an individual-level study of personality effects in the 2004 presidential election, researchers find significant vote effects for all five personality factors (although the sample size of 5,623 may be responsible for some of the statistical confidence) (Barbaranelli et al. 2007). The results demonstrate that agreeableness and openness both had positive effects on voting for John Kerry, while conscientiousness, energy (the authors' form of extraversion), and emotional stability all had negative effects. Similarly, in a state-level