**Title: Archetypes and Gender in Political Campaigns**

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**Abstract:** In this paper, I offer a new framework for understanding how political candidates present themselves and their gender-based identities to their constituents through their presentations of self in campaigns. Drawing from literature on presentation of the self and gender performativity, I present a theory of gendered archetypal identity, through which I argue that political actors construct their personal identities in relation to universally understood archetypes, which stand for ideal representations real-world characters or roles. Through an in-depth content analysis of House of Representatives campaign websites, I find that the roles candidates might choose to perform are limited to range of gender-based archetypes and identities that vary depending upon electoral context, incumbency status, and gender of opponent.

While the goal of any electoral campaign is, quite simply, to win as many votes as possible, the process by which a candidate attempts to win those votes is far less straightforward. An important aspect of a campaign is the marketing of a candidate to the voters. Much like in the world of consumer goods, in politics packaging is everything. While candidates might not have much control over many of the personal attributes they bring to the table, they do have some level of freedom to decide how those personal attributes will be presented, or packaged, so to speak. In presenting oneself to the public, a candidate should be expected to take great care in ensuring not only that his or her most favorable attributes are accentuated but also that the image he or she projects properly adheres to voter expectations.

One way in which candidates attempt to meet those voter expectations is through their *presentations of self* – the emphasized identities they present in their social interactions with their constituents (Goffman 1959; Fenno 1978). These presentations of self can be viewed as the social performances candidates put forth in an effort to make a connection with and gain the trust of their constituents. As candidate behavior is often conditioned by the perceptions they hold of who their constituents are and what their constituents want, they should be expected to put forth the self-image most closely in line with their perception of voter expectations. This process of self-presentation, however, requires candidates to negotiate their identities between how they would like to be seen and how voters actually see them. No matter how much care a candidate exerts in constructing his/her identity, he/she only has so much control over how that identity will actually be received.

One factor that may complicate that process of image construction is *gender*. Previous research has found that voters often hold different expectations for male and female candidates, and that those expectations may vary depending on electoral context and candidate partisan identification (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Kahn and Fridkin 1996; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Herrnson et al. 2003). How a candidate wishes to present herself politically might in some contexts conflict with how she is expected to present herself as a woman. The process of image construction, therefore, might require candidates to negotiate their gender and political identities to fit in line with their perceptions of voter expectations.

In this paper, I propose a new way of looking at how political candidates negotiate their gendered identities through in presentations of self. While most previous research has focused on how the campaign strategies of male and female candidates differ in the aggregate, my approach considers a range of context-specific gender identities candidates might use to present themselves to the public while still conforming to expectations of a political system governed by the norms of a binary gender system.

By taking a grounded theory approach to the analysis of presentations of self on campaign websites for the 2010 U.S. House of Representatives campaign cycle, I have developed a theory of candidate identity construction that conceives of presented candidate identities as performances of loosely scripted ***gender archetypes*** that are based on ideal-types of gender-based political roles.

My theory of gendered candidate identity is built on two separate bodies of scholarship that, while well-established in their respective fields, have heretofore developed independently. First, political scientists have identified the importance of presentation of self by political candidates. In their campaign communications, candidates present themselves with the intention of identifying with and gaining constituent trust. The second is the theory of gender performativity, which conceives of gender as an ongoing, performatively constituted process through which gender norms and expectations are established and reproduced through a series of reiterative and stylized body and speech acts. Gender identities, in this sense, are the socially-scripted products of those performative acts. When we perform gender, we are presenting our own interpretations of those pre-existing, culturally-defined social scripts.

Compared to the pattern observed in everyday life, the process of gender identity construction within the context of a political campaign operates at a much more conscious level. Political identities are, by their very nature, deliberate in intention, as politicians take great care to ensure the most appropriate, or politically advantageous, identity is presented. When they present themselves to the public, they must attempt to satisfy a number of diverse, and often conflicting, social role expectations. The negotiation of gender role expectations, I argue, is simplified through the use of gender-based archetypes, which offer candidates an easily accessible, pre-packaged, and culturally-approved character they can perform in order to identify with voters. Through my research I find that decisions regarding what type of archetypal character a candidate might choose to perform is constrained not only by a candidate’s gender but also by such factors as candidate partisan identification, dominant district ideology, and the gender of a candidate’s opponent.

**Presentation of Self in Political Campaigns**

Congressional candidates are concerned with how they are perceived by voters and, therefore, spend a great amount of time, energy, and money focusing on how they will present themselves to their voting constituency. Presentation of self is important because it is the primary means through which current and potential members of Congress seek to identify with and gain the trust and confidence of their constituents (Fenno 1978). Fenno’s conception of the presentation of self is derived from sociologist Erving Goffman’s depiction of the self in *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Li*fe (1959) in which he uses a theatrical metaphor to explain how people present their social identities.

In the theater of social interaction, Goffman equates people with actors and the impressions they make on others as performances of a particular social role that should vary according to the requirements of scene or play. Social life can then be viewed as a series of performances in which we attempt in some way to control the impression others obtain of us through our performance of a variety of context-specific roles. If we view the self as an inherently social entity that is the product, rather than the agent, of social interaction then our social identities are not entirely under our control, but are instead shaped by other social actors and by the environment within which those interactions takes place. Social context, therefore, limits the ways in which me might appropriately present ourselves.

Fenno adapted Goffman’s conception of self-presentation in his analysis of the presentation of self by members of Congress in face-to face communications in their home districts. He found that members’ presentations of self, though varied, are primarily constituent-driven. In their presentations of self, members aim to prove their trustworthiness to their constituents by reinforcing the idea that they are “one of them,” and by strategically choosing how they will explain their Washington activity. Much of this calculation on how to present oneself is based on *perception*: the perception the Congressman holds of his district and the perception he believes his constituents have of him.[[1]](#footnote-1) If he wishes to be successful, the Congressman’s constituents must perceive him as being trustworthy. And while members’ ability to prove their trustworthiness is largely dependent on their own character, experience and abilities, it is also shaped by how well they relate to their constituents (Fenno 1978). In order to gain the trust of his constituents, a Congressman must be perceived as more than competent; constituents must be able to personally identity with him. This ability to identify with their districts is dependent upon how well the member perceives his audience or his “perceived constituency” (Fenno 1978, p. 128).

At the time of his study, Fenno focused exclusively on men, making no mention of the effect of gender on a candidate’s presentation of self. This was likely due to the fact that there were very few members of Congress who were women at the time of his study and the issue of gender, therefore, was not as prominent. Moreover, studies of Congress in the 1970’s, when the study was conducted, were not explicitly concerned with gender, but rather focused on other forms of representation (Miller and Stokes 1963; Weisberg 1978). This is noteworthy because Fenno simply could not include the role of gender in the members’ presentation of self and, therefore, was not able to incorporate it into his theory. Contemporary scholars, however, have tried to account for gender effects in a variety of areas, including within Congressional bodies and in elections (Sapiro 1981; Kahn 1993;1994; Burrell 1996; Fox 1997; Rosenthal 1998; Lawless 2004), but the findings have often been inconclusive. In some contexts, women and men present themselves quite differently, while in others, presentation of self is affected more often by partisanship and constituent demographics.

Unlike Fenno, Goffman extended his theory of the self as a performed identity to include the process by which people present their gender identities. Goffman refers to expressions of gender as *gender displays*: performances of idealized masculine and feminine behavior (Goffman 1976). Gender, in this conception, becomes a role that we play which both expresses and reinforces the gender norms of a particular culture. This idea of gender as a performed identity has had a lasting impact of the works gender identity scholars, specifically that of Candace West and Don Zimmerman in their 1987 article, “Doing Gender,” in which they argue that gender is an ongoing activity that is achieved through social interaction (West and Zimmerman 1987). While derived from Goffman’s conception of gender displays, West and Zimmerman disagree with his portrayal of gender as a role or “optional dramatization” that can be performed and modified at will. Gender identities, instead, are compelled social performances that serve to “simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category” (West and Zimmerman 1987, p. 146).

Gender in western society is regulated by a binary framework that views male and female as two mutually exclusive categories organized around perceived ‘essential’ differences. Men do gender one way; women do gender another way. Throughout our lives we learn what is expected in terms of appropriate gendered behavior, and within our social interactions we help to create and re-create that difference-based gender order (Lorber 1994).While there may be no essential male or female quality, the dichotomously organized gender order relies upon the perceived fact of gender difference. Gender is the glue that binds and holds us accountable to the binary gender system, and those who fail to do gender appropriately risk being harshly judged for disrupting the gender order.

While West and Zimmerman’s approach does well at explaining how gendered behavior and gender norms emerge out of social interactions, it has been criticized for paying little attention to the social and psychological processes involved in the formulation of individual gender identities (Kelan 2009). In focusing almost exclusively on gender as it is performed in the presence of others, they fail to explain how individuals comes to acquire particular gender identities. The addition of a poststructuralist approach helps to explain how gender and gender identities are historically and socially constituted, primarily through language (Foucault 1990). Poststructuralism challenges the foundationalist assumption that individuals are free-thinking and autonomous social agents in complete control of their lives and identities (Namaste 1994). Instead, we are bound by socially instituted norms and discourses that limit the range of identities from which we can choose and, consequently, our capacity for social action (Namaste 1994; Jaggar 2008). We are, therefore, the product or effects of our social world rather than autonomous agents in control of its production.

This post-structural conception of identity as socially produced has influenced the work of queer theorists, who challenge the essentialist claim that that gender and sexual identity are fixed or natural, in addition to rejecting binary distinctions based on sex and gender (Lorber 1996; Burgess 2000). Queer theorists, most notably Judith Butler, apply this perspective to gender identity in order to reveal the ways in which gender and sex are produced within a binary framework conditioned by heterosexuality (Jaggar 2008). Butler is not content to accept that gender is irreducible to two categories, especially the two endorsed by western philosophy. Butler instead conceives of gender as a system of social classification that is “socially instituted to function as irreducible” (Jaggar 2008, p. 6). The notion of gender as a dichotomous variable is so central to how we identify ourselves and our peers within our social world, that we take it as a given, as a natural fact, often failing to notice how unstable and socially constructed it actually is.

In Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, she argues that there is nothing given about gender. Gender does not express some core or pre-existing identity, but rather is the culturally enforced performance of idealized femininity and masculinity, constituted through the “stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 1990). Categories of gender are fluid and constantly changing, and gender itself is a constructed identity instituted through ongoing and repetitive discursive and bodily gestures, behaviors, and movements. While offering the illusion of something concrete and permanent, gender identities are simply the product of repeated social performances, which gain meaning through the dominant social order (Connell 1995). How one does gender is not indicative of any “true” identity, but is instead a momentary performance one puts on at a particular place and time, which is reflective of socially established categories of gender. In every social situation, people do gender. These gender performances need not conform to a strict model, but they must fit within established categories if people want to avoid recrimination from their peers. According to Butler, we all put on a gender performance in some way. It is not a question of *if* we perform gender, but a matter of *how*.

This concern with *how* one performs a particular gender identity is largely dependent upon social context. Although we are confined to a limited range of appropriate roles we might play, we do have some freedom to choose which among those roles we might play. Thus, there is an implied level of personal agency in the process identity formation. How we come to acquire and present a given identity, while constrained by social expectations, is also shaped by how we view ourselves in relation to that range of appropriate roles. The identities we choose to perform are those which we most identify with, and that with which we most identify is influenced largely by our life experiences.

According to Louis Althusser’s conception of the process of *interpellation*, we come to recognize ourselves in relation to the cultural ideas and values we come across (Althusser 1972). As individuals engaged in a constant process of defining and re-defining ourselves, we are also being defined by the generalized social categories of the society in which we live. Among the set of pre-existing identities, we adopt the one we believe most represents who we are, or who we might wish to be. Althusser draws from Jacques Lacan’s theory on *the mirror stage*, which holds that identity formation begins when a child literally sees herself reflected in a mirror and recognizes that image as one of her (Lacan 1977). This self that the child sees, however, is not exactly an objective representation, but an assumed image of what that the child supposes herself to be. When we view ourselves in a mirror, the reflection that we recognize only encompasses those elements that we *choose* to see, which are themselves understood in relation to the world around us. We only know ourselves in relation to other people and the ideas they espouse.

In short, we are products of our social environment, which is itself embedded in a particular dominant ideology. This ideology serves as a filter through which we perceive the world around us and it is only through our perception of ourselves in relation to the dominant ideology that we come to know ourselves. When we come into contact with a particular ideology, regardless of whether or not we agree with that ideology, we are encouraged to acknowledge its validity or relevance in our social world. And through our acknowledgment we thereby become subject to that ideology – we internalize it and come to define our own identities and our places in society in relation to it.

Thus, the way we see ourselves is a subjective representation of the reflection offered to us through the mirror of ideology. What is implied here is an element of choice. The process of social role identification is a highly subjective one guided by our own experiences, our own interpretations of ideology, and our own choices. Not choice in the sense of being completely cognizant of the process by which we come to internalize ideology, but choice in terms of recognizing ourselves in the social roles presented to us, and choosing whether or not to both acknowledge and adhere to those possible identities. How we choose to acknowledge our call to subjecthood is structured by our own subjective interpretations of that ideology. While the immediate cultural context, and its corresponding ideology, determines what ideas, norms, beliefs, and values we come across, we decide how to put those ideas into action. Ultimately, we decide which roles we perform, and those roles we perform consistently become our identities. Our personal agency, then, can be said to lie in our subjective interpretations – in the way we repeat.

In terms of gender, we learn the appropriate roles, responsibilities, and expectations for our gender through the dominant gender ideology. The gender identities we acquire and the ways in which we perform those gender identities depend upon our own interpretations – the meanings we gather of that dominant ideology. Because the dominant ideology is disseminated through other people, who have interpreted it in their own way, it is conveyed differently through each instance of interpellation. Consequently, interpellation can sometimes lead one to experience *contested subjectivity* – contradiction and ambiguity in subject expectations (Jasinski 2001). We are exposed to multiple dominant ideologies over the course of our lives, all of which we interpret differently. Often times the values, norms, and expectations we are exposed to through these ideologies are in conflict with each other, leading to a “crisis among subject positions” (Wess 1996, p. 195). However, it is within this space of conflict that human agency takes place, for to resolve the tensions between subject identities we must make a choice. While the range of social roles we might perform is already set, our identities take form when we decide which ideology will take precedence. And this choice of identity can differ depending on the environment within which it is presented. Context matters.

The more social role conflict in a given environment, the more options we have in constructing our identities. Conflict-laden environments, however, also present more challenges, as individuals may have more difficulty reconciling the two opposing ideologies. This is especially true of individuals in more public environments where they are forced to resolve those social role conflicts in order to avoid recrimination for inconsistencies in self-presentation. In these situations, individuals might present a more intentional social role performance, one that while based on their identity, is deliberately constructed to depict the individual in a particular light. Political candidates are constantly visible in the public eye and, as a result, are especially concerned with their public identities. We should expect that they will be much more intentional in their public performances than most people in their everyday lives. The interpellation process, by which candidates internalize the dominant ideology, should also be a far more conscious process than it would be for the average individual. When doing gender, political candidates are highly aware of the dominant ideologies – and their associated norms, values, and expectations – that inform the performances of their constructed identities.

**Archetypes and the Construction of Gendered Political Identities**

Political candidates are bound by the dominant political and social ideologies present in a given electoral environment. In presenting themselves within a situated context, the range of appropriate performances or rhetorical strategies from which they might choose are already set. The roles they might choose to perform, as well as the standards by which those performances will be judged, are determined by the dominant cultural and historical traditions and processes governing that environment. What is considered an appropriate self-presentation in one context might be radically different from what is considered appropriate in another. In American politics, there are certain generic roles that dominate the political environment, and many of these roles are delineated along fairly strict dichotomous gender lines. What is deemed appropriate for male candidates is often very different from what is expected from women, and these expectations can also vary depending on the electoral environment.

The electoral fortunes of women candidates are especially affected by the dominant ideologies – the gender-based norms, values, and role expectation – governing a given electoral context. For example, women are often perceived as being more compassionate and emotional than their supposedly more rational male counterparts. Such perceptions can often lead voters to view women differently and to expect them to have different competencies and character traits.

Previous research has found that women have the greatest electoral success when they run “run as women,” reinforcing, rather than compensating for those gender-based expectations (Kahn 1993; 1996; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003; Panagopoulos 2004; Dolan 2004; 2008).

Certain gender-based expectations have become so embedded within the fabric of the political culture that many people expect that candidates of different gender to behave in particular *gender appropriate* ways. In order not to be punished for violating gender norms, many candidates may make a conscious effort to abide by these norms to varying degrees by performing or *doing gender* according to their own perceptions of what is considered appropriate. Of course, in performing gender in socially recognizable ways that correspond to established gender categories, they reinforce the very gender norms that limit how they are allowed to present themselves.

Determining how to do gender appropriately, however, isn’t always a straightforward task. Expectations for women candidates can often be contradictory, as what voters expect from their leaders often conflict with what they expect from women, in terms of appropriate gender-based behavior (Jamieson 1995). Women leaders are trapped in a “double bind”. While leaders are expected to be assertive and confident, women who are perceived as too assertive, too confident, or too interested in gaining influence over others, are often held as violating gender norms (Carli 1999). They may be characterized as being *too aggressive* or at worst *bitchy* (Jamieson 1995, p. 5). Political women who *act like ladies*, leading more indirectly or expressing emotion or concern for others, however, risk being viewed as ineffectual (Jamieson 1995; Carli 1995). Women candidates are stuck in what Jamieson conceives of as a Femininity/Competence Bind. Women in leadership positions are often faced with a paradox: if they present themselves as *too feminine* they run the risk of being perceived as less competent, and yet if they present themselves as too strong or too confident, they might be accused of acting *too masculine*.

The double bind is one of many ideological tools used to limit women’s political agency. In exercising their political power, women are bound by a particular set of “governing codes” – familiar narratives and stereotypes crafted and contested in the media that limit the ways in which they might act. Each candidate’s political identity, how she might choose to present herself to the public, is “crafted and contested in the media” through the use of metaphor (Anderson and Sheeler 2005, p. 3). Metaphors in politics function as the unstated, yet socially agreed upon meanings that shape the reality of a given contextual situation (Ivie 1990). In any given situation, the language, symbols, and images employed serve as the vehicles through which metaphors are disseminated and made intelligible. And through the use of metaphor, a given reality with its own set of meanings, norms, and expectations is constructed.

The metaphors that are dominant in a particular political context function as both constraints and rhetorical resources for political figures. The way in which a candidate constructs and performs a given identity is structured by the metaphorical landscape within which identity construction takes place, but that candidate also has some agency in deciding how they will use those metaphors to construct a political identity that serves their pragmatic political goals. The identities of political women in the U.S., Anderson and Sheeler argue, have come to be defined by “metaphorical clusters” – groupings of metaphorical concepts and the corresponding system of metaphorical expression for those concepts, which together form a coherent system of metaphorical concepts used to define the identities possible in a given situation (Lakoff and Johnson 1981).

Vasby and Anderson identify four “metaphoric clusters” that have historically shaped political women’s identities in the U.S: “pioneer”; “beauty queen”; “puppet”; and the “unruly woman”. Each are associated with their own set of stereotypes and contradictions. All of these metaphorical clusters serve as frames for stock characters or generic forms of a specific political identity that exhibits certain key, though by no means universal, characteristics. The “pioneer”, for instance, should be someone who is a trailblazer, exhibiting such characteristics as perseverance and hard work. These women are often the first to achieve something, most commonly the first to serve in a particular office. The “beauty queens,” on the other hand, are often identified less by their political and professional accomplishments and more by their charm, beauty, or good graces. The “puppet” is not often seen in modern day politics, as these were most often political spouses who served as extensions of their husbands’ political careers. The “unruly woman” represents a reversal of the beauty queen and the puppet. Unruly women are the women who transgress the narrow boundaries of ‘appropriate’ femininity, the women who are assertive or behave aggressively, the women who have crossed over into the ‘bitchy’ side of the double-bind.

The ‘bitch’ metaphor associated with the unruly woman cluster is perhaps one of the most pervasive metaphors applied to women in American politics. It is most often applied to women in politics who seem to defy or disrupt the established gender order by exhibiting more stereotypically masculine behaviors. These women are often viewed as being somehow unfit, making a spectacle of themselves, or creating disorder “by dominating, or trying to dominate, men” (Rowe 1995, p. 31). But these are also the women who tend to exhibit what traits many people expect from a political leader, but the double bind tells us that demonstrating political competence can come at a great cost, as there is a fine line between being viewed as a lady and being viewed as a ‘bitch’ (Jamieson 1995). The ‘unruly woman’ metaphoric cluster is a complex one, which encompasses most women who are perceived as acting ‘out of place.’ But of course, the ‘unruly woman’ and ‘bitch’ metaphors are rarely self-selected, but rather the result of media frames imposed on women for particular behaviors or performances deemed inappropriate. The same applies to the beauty queen or the puppet. Political women, intent on appearing both competent and trustworthy, will likely attempt to adhere to the standards set by the double bind, exhibiting both stereotypically feminine and masculine traits, such as compassion and assertiveness, simultaneously. The metaphors they choose to incorporate into their self-presentations might pull from multiple distinct metaphorical clusters.

While candidates might make the conscious effort to incorporate certain metaphors into their presentations of self, the effect those metaphors have on the intended audience are not so easily manipulated. Metaphors do not signify a straightforward meaning, but rather serve as “containers for meaning,” structuring our perceptions and understandings, but not standing in place of them (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Let’s imagine a candidate did, in fact, want to associate themselves with the ‘unruly woman’ metaphor. If that candidate’s actions and behavior did not measure up to the intended audience’s perceptions of what makes an ‘unruly woman’ then the use of that metaphor would most likely not have the intended effect. Conversely, a candidate whose actions and behavior did evoke the ‘unruly woman’ metaphor would most likely be just as unsuccessful in presenting some contradictory metaphor. In order to make sense, metaphors must be consistent and correspond to expected actions and behaviors. Part of image construction, therefore, involves not only the evocation of suitable metaphors, but also performing those metaphors appropriately.

The use of metaphors in image construction will make the most sense when the metaphors presented are grounded in fundamental or shared features of human experience. The notion that certain metaphors feature more prominently in the human psyche and, therefore, have a more pronounced effect is illustrated in Michael Osborne’s pioneering work, “Archetypal metaphor in rhetoric.” Archetypal metaphors, Osborne (1967) argues, are derived from those experiences that are “inescapably salient in human consciousness,” which draw from “fairly universal human experiences” (Osborn 1967, p. 116). Examples of archetypal metaphors are light and darkness, the cycle of life and death, the sun, the sea, war and peace, and sexuality. All of these concepts evoke a sense of nature, or that which is *natural* to human experience. They are those things that we take as a given and that are easily identified by most people in a given social or cultural context. While most metaphors used in common speech do not necessarily evoke a sense of the universal, some have more rhetorical punch than others. In western society, we share a vast system of metaphorical conceptions that help us to makes sense of the complex world in which we live and interact. We use metaphors as a means of connecting what we see in the world to our own experiences and understandings. Archetypal metaphors might be viewed then as those metaphors that are universally understood by a given population, which stem from shared cultural and historical experiences. These are the images that serve as models or ideal types of people, ideas, institutions, and social artifacts in the world around us.

In saying that archetypal metaphors are ‘ideal types,’ I am not making an evaluative judgment, nor am I implying that they are representative of some idea of the perfect or morally superior object. I instead define ‘ideal type’, in a Weberian sense as a methodological construct used to compare people, objects, or processes in relation to some abstract notion of their pure or essential form. Ideal types do not exist in reality, but rather are extreme representations of socially agreed upon models of real world phenomena, which are more often based on generalizable statements or stereotypes than on idiosyncratic patterns or behaviors. An archetype then can be viewed as the universally recognized ideal form of a real-world phenomenon. In the process of individual image construction, it might be said that people refer back to a set of archetypal identities in deciding how they will present themselves. While much of this process might be entirely unconscious, most people do make the conscious effort to narrow the range of archetypal identities they might refer to.

One of the most obvious ways people narrow their range of identities is along the lines of gender. In terms of ideal types, most gender identities in western culture correspond along the dichotomous boundaries of male and female. While there are various male and female archetypal identities one might refer to in constructing their gender identities, most can be said to fit neatly within ‘male’ or ‘female’ frameworks. In making this assertion it is important to keep in mind that I am referring to ideals. While most gender identities do not fit neatly into male/female categories, archetypal gender identities do. Still, there are a range of male and female archetypes, all with corresponding metaphorical legs that sustain them and keep them relevant within our collective social psyche. Archetypal roles and identities serve as vehicles for the sustenance and transference of social norms. Metaphors, then, might be viewed as the rhetorical wheels, so to speak, through which those identities are conveyed to the external social world.

In the political realm, there is an even narrower range of archetypal identities that actors might pursue. And these archetypal identities are highly delineated along the lines of gender, dichotomously construed. In presenting themselves to the public, then, political candidates might be said to be acting out or appealing to particular archetypes, which speak to both dominant gender and political norms. As their primary goal is to gain constituent trust, it should be expected that they will tend to emphasize certain archetypes over others. A woman candidate, for instance, would not want to intentionally put forth the archetype of ‘bitch’, but she might, however, come across that way unintentionally if she, for instance, does not act out the role of ‘strong woman’ successfully. While candidates might intend on presenting an archetypal role in one way, they have little control over how different members of the public might receive it. What one individual in a particular context finds *bitchy* behavior might be perceived as a sign of strength by another individual, or in a different context. Candidates, therefore, must be aware of the intended audience and the intended social context in which a particular archetypal role in presented.

Throughout my analysis, I identified several key archetypes that both male and female candidates perform in presenting themselves to the public. Ranging from the very stereotypically feminine ‘mother figure’ to the stereotypically masculine ‘alpha male’, they all speak to the various gender and political roles that political men and women are often expected to fulfill. In my analysis, I distinguish between those archetypal role presented by men and those presented by women. I do not, however, mean to imply that the gender identities of male and female candidates can be neatly organized along dichotomous lines. Rather, political candidates operate in an environment that is highly gendered and, therefore, make the conscious effort to perform gender roles that correspond with the dominant gender dichotomy. Nevertheless, as I find throughout this study, while political candidates must perform within the confines of a binary gender system, the range of roles they might perform are numerous and diverse, ranging from the stereotypically feminine/masculine to more progressive archetypes.

**Research Process**

My archetype-based conceptualization of candidate identity construction and performance was developed through the act of performing a content analysis of 2010 U.S. House of Representative candidate campaign websites, which focused specifically on candidate presentations of self through their personal biographies and visual images. Through a grounded theory approach, theory is developed inductively through the systematic collection and analysis of data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Not only does the data serve as the foundation of the theory that develops, but the data also determines the conceptual categories and analytic codes that are constructed through the analysis (Charmaz 2006). Thus, instead of beginning with a theory that will be tested through the data, the theory emerges through the collection and analysis the data. This analysis was applied to a range of cases, selected to vary along the lines of district ideology, candidate partisan affiliation, gender of opponent, and candidate incumbency/challenger status. Such variance allowed me to consider the range of identities that might be performed in a diversity of electoral contexts. In the following section, I outline the archetypal categories that emerged from my analysis of the data.

**Primary Archetypes**

Political Candidates are often expected to perform multiple, sometimes conflicting role in presenting themselves to the public. But even as many attempt to present these multiple roles simultaneously, one role often stands out above all others. I refer to this as the *primary archetypal role*; the role that a candidate can most visibly be identified as performing. While in the broader social world, presented roles are generally fluid and not easily organized along dichotomous feminine-masculine lines, among political candidates who are often expected to adhere more strictly to expected gender roles, that gender binary is far more pronounced. Political candidates, in presenting themselves to the public, tend to perform roles that are clearly identified as masculine or feminine and that correspond to their own self-proclaimed gender identities. The process of image construction and performance can be said to be both externally and internally regulated; externally, by social expectations, and internally, by self-adjustment to those expectations. As a result, presented primary archetypes of political candidates can be clearly organized along the gender binary.

I separate archetypal roles into feminine and masculine categories, which correspond to women and men candidates. Among women candidates, I identified five primary archetypes: the professional woman, the modern woman, the tough woman, the mother, and the martyr. For the men, I also identified five primary archetypes: the professional man, the alpha male, the common man, the boy scout, and the modern man. I discuss each of these archetypes individually below, starting with the women.

**Archetypes Performed by Women**

*The Professional Woman*

The professional woman archetype represents the woman who puts her career and professional ambitions above all other priorities. Rather than emphasizing her personal charisma, her family, or her personal traits, she instead directs attention toward her education, credentials, and professional background and skills. She is the characteristic career woman who exemplifies the values of hard work, ambition, and tenacity necessary to compete in a professional, male-dominated environment. In order to prove just how well they fit the professional woman build, the candidates presenting this archetype can often be seen highlighting their qualifications and achievements, focusing on their skills and education, and drawing attention to what they have accomplished in their professional careers, both in and out of office. The candidates who have held elective office seem intent on promoting the bills they have passed, sponsored, co-sponsored, or even played a role in vocally endorsing, along with the committees they have served on, and the leadership positions they have held in those committees.

*The Modern Woman*

The modern woman is essentially ‘the total package’, who can seamlessly fulfill both professional and personal or familial obligations simultaneously. While she can perform the roles of a stereotypical man, she is still able to maintain her femininity. The modern woman brings to mind the image of the classic 1980s Enjoli perfume commercial in which the female protagonist brags that she can “bring home the bacon, and fry it up in a pan.” This woman is powerful and independent, but somehow less threatening than the seemingly “defeminized” professional woman. Modern women are competent and strong leaders, but not at the expense of their feminine attributes. They perform all the roles of the professional woman, while also devoting time to their families and communities. These women are charming, friendly, and likeable, often presenting themselves in the role of the beauty queen or cheerleader.

*The Tough Woman*

The tough woman is perhaps the most overly masculine of the archetypal roles presented by woman incumbents. By “masculine” I mean that she demonstrates many of the behavioral and personality traits one typically (and stereotypically) associates with men. She is the strong, fearless, aggressive, independent, take-charge kind of woman who doesn’t take crap from anyone. Not only does she “bring home the bacon,” she also single-handedly takes down the pig from which the bacon came. Of course, she will leave the cooking to the more “feminine” women. The tough woman is in many ways the gender outlaw, transgressing the line of the gender binary through what many would consider her “masculine” behavior. Whether it be her extreme self-confidence, her tough attitude, her competitive spirit, or her interest in stereotypically masculine pursuits, such as hunting or watching/playing team sports, the tough woman represents an almost complete reversal of traditional gender roles.

The tough woman might be pegged a “tomboy,” while others might more pejoratively describe her as a “bitch,” or what Anderson and Scheeler refer to as the “unruly woman.” The “unruly woman” creates disorder by violating “the expectations of femininity and the social hierarchy” and draws attention to the social constructedness of gender roles through her disruption of the gender dichotomy (Anderson and Sheeler 2005). The “unruly woman” also might, according to Anderson and Sheeler, make “a spectacle of herself” through “unladylike behavior”; “creates disorder by dominating, or trying to dominate men”; might be “excessive physically,” whether in body shape, physical action or in speech; “makes jokes, or laughs herself”; and “is associated with thresholds, borders, margins, or taboos” (Anderson and Sheeler). This transgression of gender boundaries can often be problematic, Anderson and Sheeler argue, unless the woman is able to turn the negative stereotypes associated with the “unruly woman” into something more productive.

*The Mother*

The mother role serves as a representation of the traditional feminine ideal. She is the woman who places great value on family, prioritizing her role as wife and mother before personal and professional ambitions. She is friendly, caring, compassionate, and focused on helping others. Her nurturing qualities are aimed not only within her family and home environment, but are also directed outward to her community. As she spends time volunteering at charitable organizations, or within her local school system or church, she presents herself as the “mother-to-all,” giving all she has for the well-being of the community. While women performing the less traditionally feminine roles of the tough woman or the professional will tend to use a more aggressive or action-oriented dialectic, the mother’s mode of communication and problem solving methods tend to be focused more on the ethic of cooperation. Her focus in the community will thus be on “working together” to come to fair and sensible solutions. In a sense she is advocating that everyone get along and “play well with others.

Keeping with the spirit of strong communities, a woman performing the mother role also evokes the values of “Republican Motherhood” as she actively instills in her children the values of education, hard work, and civic virtue. Many of these women make sure to emphasize just how well their children have turned out, as they attend prestigious colleges, devote their time to civic organizations, and uphold the strong morals and values necessary to properly participate in the republican process. And as a woman who has taken on the duty of turning her children into rational, moral citizens, she must also uphold the highest of moral values herself. The most effective way of proving their moral fortitude is through expressions of religious devotion, as many of these women make a point to highlight their faith in God and their active involvement in community churches.

*The Martyr*

The martyr might be viewed as an extension of the mother archetype in that, much like the mother, she is primarily concerned with caring for others and giving back to the community. She does a lot of charity work, works to instill in others the high moral and ethical values she herself upholds, and puts the needs of others above her own. On the surface the martyr may even seem to possess all of the key qualities of the mother role, however, as we dig a little deeper we see that the main distinction lies in the underlying motivations behind the performance of these roles. The performance of the mother is rooted in genuine love and care for her family and community, whereas, the performance of the martyr is rooted in self-sacrifice as a moral obligation. The mother presents herself as the giving and compassionate care-giver because she wants to; the martyr does because she has to. If the martyr does not stand up for the just and noble cause, then no one else will. At times, the martyr’s willingness to stand for a higher cause or truth, despite the injury she might incur as a result, borders on the self-righteous. This may be expressed through strict religious devotion or through tales of overcoming great hardship while still maintaining one’s ethical values. Martyrs may also come to believe that their “ceaseless giving permits them to manipulate and feel superior to those they are helping, even as they complain about how deprived they are” (Goldberg 2001, p. 85). As much as the martyr points out all that she has done to help others, she also indicates all that she has given up.

**Archetypes Performed by Men**

*The Professional Man*

The professional man is the male counterpart to the professional woman. Like the professional woman, he is ambitious, hardworking, action-oriented, and focused mostly on emphasizing his professional background and qualifications over his personal attributes. In presenting himself to the public, the focus is on his ability to lead in a professional and rational manner. In many ways he mirrors the characteristics encompassed within the professional woman archetypes. The difference between the two lies in the way in which they are presented. The women can be seen actively engaged in a process of justification, spending a great amount of time explaining just how much their accomplishments matter and just how qualified and competent they are. The men, on the other hand come across as less forceful in drawing attention to their credentials, as though their accomplishments should speak for themselves.

*The Alpha (Hegemonic) Male*

The alpha male is the quintessential ‘manly man.’ Confident to the point of arrogance, ambitious, competitive, and reliant on brute strength over cooperation or compromise, the alpha male can perhaps be seen as the most stereotypically masculine archetype as he evinces many of the qualities western society most associates with men. In a sense, the alpha male is the ‘archetypal male’, as the extreme embodiment of all that signifies the ‘masculine’ in our culture. And as the essential archetype of the masculine, the alpha male is the character that most reinforces traditional notions of gender roles and the gender dichotomy. Consequently, we should expect the alpha male to position himself within the role of the provider and protector, of both his family and his constituency. The alpha male should also be active, whether it be through debating on the House floor or outside doing manual labor. The alpha male is not afraid to roll up his sleeves and get his hands dirty, be it figuratively or in reality. Furthermore, the alpha male should always present himself as the dominant figure in any negotiation; he is the top dog who will not back down from a fight, only halting his efforts when he has accomplished his objective.

The alpha male can be performed to varying degrees. In its more moderate form, the alpha male comes across as verbally aggressive and arrogant, and utilizes forceful rhetoric and a dominant persona to get his message across. This version of an alpha male evinces stereotypically masculine personality traits, but is more refined and not so rough-around-the-edges as the more physically-oriented extreme alpha male. Rather than leading through brute force or intimidation, the moderate alpha male relies more on his powers of persuasion.

*The Common Man*

The common man is the “everyman,” the average Joe who comes from modest beginnings, but through hard work was able to “pull himself up by his bootstraps,” so to speak, and achieve great success in life. In presenting himself to the public, the common man is interested in convincing people that he is “one of them.” In order to convince us of this fact, the common man will make a point to draw attention to his modest, working class background. Very likely he grew up in a working class neighborhood where his father, and possible his mother, supported his family through a working class job as a factory worker, a firefighter, or a policeman, etc. In many cases, the common man himself has or still works in a “working class job,” and is proud of that fact.

*The Modern Man*

While his title might imply that he is the direct corollary of the modern woman because his existence arises out of the same processes from which the modern woman is developed, the modern man instead can be viewed as more of the complement of the modern woman. While the modern woman represents a progressive, albeit still stereotypically feminine, notion of the ideal woman, the modern man stands in as her progressive partner. The modern man then is the egalitarian-minded, sensitive man who is capable of fulfilling the traditional role of providing for his family, but who chooses to support his mate, or the modern woman more generally, in her ambitions. The key here is choice. The modern man doesn’t need to depend on or support the modern woman, he wants to.

Some of the key characteristics that define the modern man are a progressive-minded egalitarian social and political stance, a focus on cooperation over dominance or over aggressiveness, a thoughtful or sensitive demeanor, and a conscious prioritization of family and parental obligations. The modern man is in many respects the opposite of the alpha male, presenting himself as a calm, compassionate, and caring individual unafraid of showing his sensitive, more stereotypically feminine side. As someone not afraid to embrace his softer, more “feminine” side, the modern man is not likely to be seen engaging in more stereotypically masculine pursuits, such as hunting, but rather takes time for more thoughtful and less competitive leisure activities, such as gardening and reading

*The Boy Scout*

The boy scout is the characteristic “do-gooder” type: honest, loyal, friendly, and idealistic; he is the man of good moral character who is mainly concerned with living a just an honorable life. As a man governed by a strong moral and ethical code, the boy scout believes that everyone should follow the rules and work on getting along peacefully. A humanitarian at heart, the boy scout does his best to help those in need. Even as his idealistic beliefs often times border on the naïve, he is always willing to lend a helping hand. The boy scout is also a humble character who gives while asking nothing in return and upholds the highest ethical standards, even when faced with the harshest opposition. No matter the personal cost, the boy scout can be expected “to do what is right.” The boy scout is much like the martyr in that he selflessly gives his service to those in need, yet, unlike martyr types, he is less self-righteous in his agenda and less strident in his methods. He doesn’t make it his conscious decision to stand firmly for a certain cause, but rather focuses on doing no wrong. In many ways, he is reminiscent of Jimmy Stewart’ character in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*.

The boy scout archetype also shares some character traits with the common man in that he comes across as humble and loyal to his community, but the boy scout differs in both his optimistic temperament and his almost innocent sense of good will. Unlike the common man, who sees himself as the opponent of the corrupt and greedy elite, the boy scout instead, almost naively puts his faith in what he sees as the inherent, though sometimes latent, good nature in all. While the common man has become distrustful and embittered by hard times, the boy scout has somehow been able to maintain his youthful faith and trust in humanity.

*The Outsider*

In the last category is the outsider. He is the outsider in the sense that he appears somehow not to belong in the pool of serious candidates. This outsider status might derive from his inexperience or lack of political sophistication. He might be what one would call a “sacrificial lamb,” who is thrown into the political ring by party leaders who fear putting a more competent candidate up against a strong opponent. His campaign is probably underfunded and his chances of winning slim to nothing. In many cases, this man is not even aware of the sacrificial role he is performing, instead believing himself to be playing a more consequential role. Another type of outsider are those who are conscious of their sacrificial lamb characterization. These men are often intentional outsiders who are running to bring attention to a particular issue or to point out some injustice within the ruling government. They are likely frustrated and unafraid to express their anger, even if at a cost to their electability. But this angry attitude will attract some disenfranchised voters, even while turning off still more voters.

**Context and Archetypes**

Through their biographies candidates are afforded a great amount of freedom to express themselves and to shape the way in which their personal characteristics will be presented to the public. In this process of identity construction, they are able to choose not only which details to emphasize, but also which to downplay, or even to leave out completely. What they choose to leave out is just as important as that which they choose to include. Those details included should be carefully selected to suit their intended political purposes, while those aspects of their personal backgrounds they choose to leave out are often the very details that might contradict their very carefully constructed public images.

Through the process of an in-depth content analysis of a total of 50 campaign websites, I was able to identify several key archetypal roles that political candidates perform in presenting themselves on their campaign websites. While in many cases candidates performed multiple roles on their website, one generally stood out above the rest. Through the performance of the primary archetypal role, candidates presented to the public their most defining role and, therefore, great care was taken to ensure not only that the most favorable role was presented, but also that the intended role was performed appropriately. It is important to keep in mind that primary and secondary roles are not always consciously or intentionally presented. Sometimes the archetypal role a candidate might wish to present as primary is overshadowed by some other role. Thus, while candidates do make a conscious effort to present themselves in a particular way, the way in which they perform certain archetypal roles are still constrained by their own personalities and life experiences. While there are a vast range of primary archetypal roles male and female candidates might choose to present in their online communications, decisions regarding which archetype to put forth are often dictated by such factors as candidate party identification (i.e. Republican or Democrat), incumbency status, and candidate perception of constituent preferences.

While many studies have focused on how male and female candidates differ, in general, with regard to their campaign messages, issue agendas, and personality traits and characteristics (Kahn 1993; Herrnson, Lay, Stokes 2003; Dolan 2005), less is known about how gendered identities are constructed and presented in individual cases and across particular contexts. Thus, for my analysis, I selected cases from a broad range of individual and electoral district characteristics, rather than simply at random. This is not say that I simply chose candidates at will, but that I intentionally selected a distinct variety of cases to observe. Specifically, those cases varied in terms of district ideology, incumbency/challenger status, and gender of opponent. Such variance allowed me to more closely examine the role of electoral context in constraining a candidate’s primary archetypal performance.

What I found was that gender matters, but only for some candidates. Sometimes women candidates are more likely to “run as women” – but only when running as challengers against male incumbents. And male candidates are most likely to run “as men” when running as incumbents in conservative districts. However, considering that almost half of the candidates (23 out of 50), both men and women, performed the role of the professional man/woman, one can most logically conclude that professionalism and political competence are the characteristics most central to political candidate identities – far more so than partisan ideology and gender expectations.

Gender is only one aspect of a political candidate’s identity, and it influences each candidate in different ways and to different extents. So much research has focused on the differences between male and female candidates that it is easy to forget how small the gender effect is for many candidates, even as it plays a central role for others. Rather than dictating how a candidate might act, gender instead serves as a restraint, which limits the range of roles a candidate might choose to perform. But gender effects do not operate in a vacuum. Contextual factors and gender intersect to jointly shape the process by which candidates choose which archetypal role to perform. Studies focusing on how men and women differ in the aggregate have tended to underestimate the role context plays in mediating gender effects. Political candidates are held to a number of diverse, and often conflicting, social role expectations and it is through the performance of archetypes that they interpret and negotiate their own individual roles within those expectations. If we wish to improve our understanding of how political candidates attempt to connect with and gain the trust of voters, we must look at how such factors as gender work in tandem with other context-specific elements of a campaign. We must look at the total picture, rather than discrete components of candidate identity. Conceiving of candidate presentations of self as the performance of pre-scripted archetypal roles is one way of doing this.

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1. At the time of Fenno’s study, very few women served in Congress. As a result, his study focused only on men, which is indicated by the exclusive use of a male pronoun. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)