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In The Crying Double Standard Hessekiel seeks to prove here hypothesis: In scenarios where the voter perceives the source of a candidate’s tears as emotional instability, a male candidate will be more penalized for crying than a female candidate, but when compassion is used to explain a candidate crying, a female candidate will be more chastised.

About the Author

Kira Hessekiel, T’13, is a Political Science major. Her interests in the field of political science are wide-ranging, but it is American politics and political psychology that she is most drawn to. Those close to Hessekiel know of her passion for American Politics and, according to Hessekiel, frequently forward her articles and videos “any time a politician cries.”
Abstract

Crying is a volatile human behavior in the American political arena, one whose results can vary from complete career collapse to praise. Today, many pundits and politicians alike argue that a “crying double standard” exists in contemporary politics, meaning that tears from men are perceived more positively than those from women. However, is this claim true in the mind of the American voter? Psychological research on crying suggests that humans are programmed to have a strong response to seeing another person cry, one that can differ depending on the context and gender of the crier. Psychologists have also studied the complicated formations and rules of gender stereotypes, which political scientists have added to in their studies of female candidacy in the U.S. From this framework, as well as the directly preceding research by scholar Deborah Jordan Brooks, comes this paper’s hypothesis: in scenarios where the voter perceives the source of a candidate’s tears as emotional instability, a male candidate will be more penalized for crying than a female candidate, but when compassion is used to explain candidate crying, a female candidate will be more chastised. To evaluate this hypothesis, I propose an experiment where online participants read newspaper articles about a fictional male or female candidate crying in a scenario commonly perceived as either compassionate or emotionally unstable and respond to a series of close-ended questions. The paper closes with a discussion of predicted outcomes and alternative explanations if my hypothesis does not hold true.
About this paper:

This paper was the culminating project for Professor Schildkraut’s Political Psychology class, a course that examined the human process of decision-making from a political perspective. Focusing mainly on American work in the field, we talked about how people form their opinions of candidates or policies, process new political information, attribute blame or credit, and the influence of personality and emotions on these processes, as well as inter-group conflict, stereotyping, and prejudice. Taking the class topics as a springboard, this final paper required us to choose a subject that interested us and create a research proposal testing a hypothesis in that subject.

I chose to focus my proposal on crying politicians initially because of a clip I watched from The Daily Show with Jon Stewart that showed current Speaker of the House John Boehner crying on video in myriad situations. Intrigued as to how this behavior might affect his public perception, I investigated further and found many comments from female politicians criticizing the positive or neutral reactions to his behavior and claiming a woman politician would suffer from similar stunts. This assertion from women across the political spectrum combined with the dearth of scholarly research in the area convinced me that the intersection between gender, crying, and context was a topic worth pursuing.

Part of the research proposal assignment required a thorough literature review of previous and related work. To glean more information about crying and stereotypes, I relied heavily on traditional psychology and social psychology sources, then combined my findings with sources from political psychology. Recent research from Deborah Jordan Brooks on gender and political crying was also critical to how I constructed my experiment.
Introduction

Ask Edmund Muskie, 1972 Democratic presidential primary candidate, about the political repercussions of crying, and he might tell you they are severe: the collapse of Muskie’s campaign is widely attributed to a moment of crying on the campaign trail (Michener, 1972). But recent events seem to indicate that this rule no longer applies – Republican Speaker of the House John Boehner is known for sobbing on and off the floor, and Hillary Clinton’s moment of tears at a New Hampshire 2008 primary campaign stop was given partial credit for her victory in that contest (Steinhauer, 2010; Healy, 2008). Yet the stigma still exists, especially for women candidates, that, as Clinton herself said, “If you get too emotional, that undercuts you” (Brooks, 2011, pp 597).

While recent research by Deborah Jordan Brooks has found that in general, “male and female candidates are similarly penalized” for crying, this research does not address the issue of context, or how the circumstances surrounding the incident affect voter perception of the event (Brooks, 2011, pp 597). As crying become a regular occurrence in American politics, it is clear that new information is needed to support or refute the claims made by pundits and politicians that a “crying double standard” exists and to help predict and understand voter reactions and decisions about politicians in the face of tears. This paper will seek to clarify and answer these questions.

I will begin attacking the issue of crying and gender in politics by taking an in-depth look at the many layers of prior scholarly research that make up this complicated question, starting with psychological research on adult crying and observer reactions to a crying adult in various circumstances. While in the psychology realm I will give an overview of theories on gender stereotypes, specifically discussing how these theories were formed, the difference between
prescriptive and descriptive stereotypes, and what these theories predict about crying and emotion in men and women. From here I will segue into the world of politics and gender, reviewing the work of political scientists on the assumptions made about women and men in politics and how those affect the chances of female candidates. Within this field falls Deborah Jordan Brooks and her previous work on gender and emotionality in elections. I will spend extra time explaining her methods and findings as they directly precede my work, but will also demonstrate why her claim that no crying double standard exists might not be correct. To finish my literature review, I will transition from the academic to news world in order to give an overview of crying in American politics in the past forty years.

By combining my observations as well as the psychological and political research I uncovered, I will offer my hypotheses: that in scenarios where the voter perceives the source of a candidate’s tears as emotional instability, a male candidate will be more penalized for crying than a female candidate, but when compassion is used to explain candidate crying, a female candidate will be more chastised. In order to combine testing my hypotheses with qualifying Brooks’ results, I lay out the design of an experiment that will emulate her original. Participants will read newspaper articles where a fictional male or female candidate cries in a manner perceived as emotional or compassionate and then evaluate that candidate. Based on my hypotheses, I expect that the male candidate will be rated worse than the female candidate when the factor is emotional perception, and vice versa when the factor is compassionate perception.

Finally, this paper concludes by discussing the implications of this experiment’s findings, first if my hypotheses hold true, and then if they do not. If the crying double standard truly exists, this work will have confirmed a long-contested issue of gender and politics and narrowed the scope of Deborah Jordan Brooks’ previous work. Politicians can learn how to use crying to
their advantage, and society as a whole can work towards eliminating this political disadvantage.

I also propose an alternative explanation for the continued discussion and controversy surrounding crying, gender, and politics, even if my hypotheses are incorrect, based on misperceptions in media coverage.

**Literature Review**

*Crying in Adults – the Psychological and Gender Implications*

Crying, a physical response most associated with infancy and childhood, is not commonly thought of as a typical reaction among adults and is therefore noteworthy whether or not one is running for political office. But why do adults cry, and how do people react to mature tears? We must take a step back and answer this question before we can continue on to an examination of crying in politics.

Crying in adults serves as another mode of communicating with others non-verbally. Crying is conventionally associated with negative emotions, though it can be a sign of positive ones, and is, according to psychotherapist Judith Kay Nelson, a method of “[asking] for, and [knowing] when to give, love and care” (2005, pp 6). Just as people are drawn to care for a bawling infant, adult crying evokes a caregiving response in others; it is an attachment behavior “aimed at recharging and rebalancing internal equilibrium through human connection” (Nelson, 2005, pp 23). By triggering this attachment response, the crier seeks comfort and support, as well as empathy, from those around him or her (Nelson, 2005). Crying can also “inhibit the aggressive impulses of potential attackers,” meaning that those around someone who is crying may become less angry or critical when faced with tears (Kottler & Montgomery in Hendriks et al., 2008, pp 22).
When interacting with a crying person, people are more likely to offer “emotional support” than they would to “a noncrying person,” but there is a lot more besides sympathy going on beneath the surface (Hendriks et al., 2008, pp 35). Hendriks, Croon, and Vingerhoets’ study of human reactions to descriptions of crying in six different situations revealed that people are likely to assign negative characteristics to a crying person and help them for “egoistic rather than altruistic reasons” (2008, pp 36). Because our natural response to an attachment behavior is to provide that person with care, people become upset and uncomfortable and will help so as to alleviate the “increased personal sadness” and discomfort resulting from seeing someone else cry (Henriks et al., 2008, pp 36). Their research also “found that the valence of the situation determines how people react to a crying person,” and that participants were more likely to “[react] favorably to a crying person in unpleasant situations than in pleasant situations” (Henriks et al., 2008, pp 36). This finding indicates that crying context does play a role in human response, and while the study did not find any statistically significant differences between the “effects of participants’ sex or the sex of the person [in the experiment situation],” the scholars point out that they used interest in crying as a means of attracting participants, so “the sample may have contained a relatively high proportion of individuals – especially men – who cry easily,” so it is possible that the sample would have more positive reactions to tears than the population at large (Henriks et al., 2008, pp 36-37).

Other studies, such as the work of Warner and Shields, have taken the issue of context and the discussion on gender perception of tears even further to address the “paradoxical nature of manly tears,” a particular subset of male emotional stereotypes that comes from contemporary “heterosexual masculinity” and emphasizes “the expression of rationality and self-control” in male tears (2007, pp 110, 98-99). Their study, also a series of vignettes depicting different
crying scenarios, demonstrated a difference between the evaluation of sad tears and angry tears when displayed by men and women because of the manly tear phenomenon (Warner & Shields, 2007). While the reactions to both men and women crying angrily were perceived as equally negative, “men [were] evaluated most positively in the sad, moist-eye context” (Warner & Shields, 2007, 110). Warner and Shields relate this dichotomy back to manly tears and the concurrent idea that men display their emotions more effectively and competently than women (2007). Reinforcing this explanation was a significant amount of speculation among some participants that read about the woman crying in the sad context – many seemed to believe her tears were insincere or “‘manipulated’” (Warner & Shields, 2007, pp 111). Again, the psychological evidence of Warner and Shields points strongly to the relevance of context in examining instances of political crying with regards to gender, and there are parallels to be drawn between the scholars’ examination of angry tears versus sad tears and gender and the different political contexts the following study will investigate.

**Gender Stereotypes on Emotion and Gender Stereotype Theories**

Since it is clear from the previous examination of crying and its gendered and societal implications that part of people’s responses is linked to gender stereotypes, I will now examine those stereotypes and how they are used, also known as stereotype theory.

The work of psychologist Sandra Bem in the 1970s and 1980s established a scale of masculinity, femininity, and androgyny still in use today based on the “[internalization of] society’s sex-typed standards of desired behavior for men and women” (1974, pp 155). The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) was created by taking the input and ratings of one hundred participants on the social desirability for a man or a woman on two hundred traits and determining the difference in desirability between sexes (1974). Traits found to have a large
difference between the desirability for men and the desirability for women earned a spot on the masculine list, visa versa for the feminine list, and traits for which there was no real difference for gender were considered neutral (Bem, 1974). These gender-desirable traits are so coveted in the different sexes that they end up being viewed as prescribed traits, elements that make someone masculine or feminine.

Many of the traits identified on the BSRI as desirably feminine imply emotional tendencies (“compassionate,” “eager to soothe hurt feelings,” “sensitive to the needs of others,” “tender,” “sympathetic”), yet the traits prescribed to men are either unrelated to emotion or seem to imply an anger-through-competition kind of mentality (“independent,” “aggressive,” “assertive,” “strong personality,” “defends his own beliefs,” “competitive”) (Bem, 1974, pp 156). While this research is close to forty years old, recent reevaluation of the scale has confirmed “the continued centrality of traditional definitions of femininity and masculinity” and has been expanded upon by Deborah Prentice and Erica Carranza in their version of prescriptive stereotype theory to include socially undesirable, or proscriptive, traits (2002, pp 270).

Prentice and Carranza have classified the stereotype that women are more emotional as a gender-relaxed proscriptive stereotype (2002). This means emotionality is a characteristic “generally low in social desirability but significantly higher in desirability in the target gender […] [a flaw women] are allowed to have by virtue of their gender” (Prentice & Carranza, 2002, pp 271). This type of stereotype is one corner of Prentice & Carranza’s four-sided prescriptive stereotype system designed to classify where men and women are supposed to fall relative to the general desirability of a trait (2002). The opposite of a gender-relaxed proscriptive stereotype is a gender-intensified proscriptive stereotype, whose desirability is low in general “and even lower […] for the target gender;” for men, “emotional” falls into this category (Prentice & Carranza,
The scholars also reexamine and modify socially desirable traits as defined by the BSRI, dividing the desirable into gender-intensified prescriptive stereotypes and gender-relaxed prescriptive (2002). Gender-intensified prescriptive stereotypes are those where the trait in question is valued universally but even more so for that gender – in women an example would be “interest in children,” while “business sense” would be an intensified prescription for men (2002, pp 271, 273-274). When a stereotype is categorized as gender-relaxed prescriptive, the trait is regarded highly in general but is either not valued or simply not expected in that gender (2002, pp 271). Whereas “interest in children” is a gender-intensified prescription for women, it is gender-relaxed for men, just as “business sense” is relaxed for women. Although not all traits are relaxed in one gender and intensified in the other, many of them are. According to these scholars’ theory, there is a greater penalty for stepping outside of one’s prescriptive stereotype than there is for following such a societal expectation, an explanation to consider as we examine the reasons why male politicians are sometimes greatly penalized for crying stints (2002).

Unlike prescriptive stereotypes, which seek to tell us how men and women should or should not behave within the framework of cultural values, descriptive stereotypes make assumptions about the characteristics of a man or woman based on gender alone (López-Sáez & Lisbona, 2009). The difference between prescriptive or proscriptive and descriptive stereotypes is subtle but distinct, and can be best characterized with an example: according to a descriptive stereotype, women are inherently emotional; according to a prescriptive stereotype, women should be (or are allowed to be) more emotional than men. After a thorough evaluation of the relationship between prescriptive and descriptive stereotypes, scholars Mercedes López-Sáez and Ana Lisbona determined that the difference between these two types of stereotypes makes descriptive stereotypes harder to shake than prescriptive ones – while “repeated exposure to
behaviors that do not match the stereotypes is an important source of modification for […]

prescriptive” stereotypes, people are still compelled “to classify men and women as belonging to
two social groups, and for that purpose they will be forced to resort to differentiating descriptive
traits” (2009, pp 371). When dealing with descriptive stereotypes, an example of someone
contradicting the assumed trait would more likely lead to subtyping, or viewing the person
contradicting the trait as an exception brought about by the circumstance, as “too atypical of the
category” to be included (Rothbart & John, 1993, pp 44). The interaction of descriptive
stereotypes and subtyping illustrates how women candidates, who are expected to be emotional
due their gender, could suffer more from showing tears than a male counterpart, whose crying
could be situationally subtyped.

**Gender and Politics**

So how do these general stereotypes of women and men transfer over to politics? Many
of the traits that are generally ascribed to women are just as readily assigned to women
candidates in a descriptive manner. According to Kathleen Dolan, “the public sees women
candidates as warm, compassionate, kind and passive, whereas men are perceived as strong,
knowledgeable, tough, direct, and assertive” (2004, pp 64). Most of the traits Americans
consider important in a leader are automatically associated with men, and some research
“suggests that women candidates are evaluated as warm and tender even when the messages they
are sending to the public are more tough and ‘masculine,’” meaning it is that much harder for
viable women candidates to showcase their leadership skills (Dolan, 2004, pp 64).

Besides being seen as less effective leaders, women politicians are often also perceived as
more liberal than men, as well as “more liberal than they actually are” (Dolan, 2004, pp 64). The
traits ascribed to women also impact the areas in which female candidates are expected to have
interest or knowledge – issues like “poverty, health care, the elderly, education, children and family issues, and the environment,” along with, unsurprisingly, women’s issues, are considered the woman politician’s strong fields, while men are believed to be better versed in “economics, defense, business, crime, and agriculture” (Dolan, 2004, pp 64-65). But while these assumptions can prove challenging to women in some respects, it is clear that female candidates can sometimes use them to their advantage. Women can play up their interest in social and family issues or take a “Washington outsider” stance that can effectively appeal to certain voters (Dolan, 2004, pp 65).

On the other hand, differences in issue salience between state and federal level elections can counteract this advantage. Topics like “foreign policy and national security,” areas in which women are presumed to be uninformed or lacking in skill, come up on the national level, making a woman’s quest for federal seat, especially in the Senate, that much harder (Khan, 1996, pp 14). Kim Kahn’s analysis of senatorial versus gubernatorial campaigns by women showed that women had a leg up for gubernatorial elections because of their assumed expertise in “education and health care,” but a similar message could easily get lost in media coverage for Senate races because it generally focuses more on foreign policy and the economy (1996, pp 15). Gender stereotypes therefore become more potent to the voter and the media as the office sought becomes higher and higher.

*Deborah Jordan Brooks, “Testing the Double Standard for Emotionality: Voter Reactions to the Tears and Anger of Male and Female Politicians”*

While the aforementioned research in the world of politics and gender is important to understand as we move forward into talking about crying’s gender-based effects on voter affect, the recent work of political scientist Deborah Jordan Brooks on voter response to candidate
crying is the most directly relevant academic literature available. Brooks set out to “analyze possible barriers to the success of female candidates,” because they are underrepresented in American politics, by studying the effect of tears and anger on male and female candidates (2011, pp 597). Because her data on voter response to anger is not relevant to the following study, I will focus only on the results Brooks found for crying.

Brooks tested the effect of crying in male and female candidates on voter affect through an experiment where participants read an article about a fictional congressperson running for Senate (2011). With no identifiers to indicate party or policy preferences, those in the experimental group read about either a male or female candidate crying when talking about “the rigors of campaigning” and then tearing up and shutting down in front of reporters asking questions about a failed bill, while those in the control read the same article with no mention of emotionality (Brooks, 2011, Appendix A). Participants were then asked a series of questions in order to evaluate three measures of affect: “overall likeability, likely effectiveness in the Senate, and likely effectiveness as U.S. president about 10 years from now,” as well as on several personality traits (Brooks, 2011, pp 602). Brooks found that candidates that cried were rated more negatively overall than those that did not and were deemed more emotional, but that women were no more penalized than men for waterworks (2011). Only when the data was divided by respondent gender did Brooks find any difference in affect; according to female responses, “women seem to hold female candidates to a higher standard than male candidates” when it comes to crying (2011, pp 605, 609). This reaction, according to Brooks, shows how women distance themselves from a fellow woman who plays into a negative stereotype, believing that this conformity is a “collective threat” (2011, pp 605). However, the same
collective threat reaction seems to exist to a lesser extent for men towards male politicians, and the two cancel each other out in the sample as a whole (Brooks, 2011).

Brooks does make some compelling arguments as to why her study proves there is no double standard on crying in politics. She cites the fact that her control group showed no baseline advantage for male candidates “on the relevant measures of strength in general, strong leadership, emotionality, or anger,” and says this means the American public no longer holds on to gender stereotypes the way they may have in the past and therefore are not there to be “activated” by teary officials (Brooks, 2011, pp 609). Brooks also refers to psychological research on business leaders showing that “stereotypes about emotionality are reduced for high-status individuals,” and suggests this immunity could also exist in politics (2011, pp 609). As for where the misperception of a double standard comes from, Brooks suggests that “the conventional wisdom applies only to journalists rather than to the public at large,” that media coverage is the true source of what she considers a misconception (2011, pp 610).

The examples of crying used in Brooks’ experimental trials – when talking about the trials of a campaign and when responding to criticism – only address crying as a symptom of what can objectively be labeled as frustration or cracking under pressure. However, the recent resurgence of discussion over the crying double standard are not about moments where male politicians faltered and cried, but where they used a moment of compassion to their advantage. For example, one of the quotations Brooks uses in the very beginning of her article to indicate the relevance of her work is from Sarah Palin talking about John Boehner, the Speaker of the House who is known for crying when talking about children or reminiscing with friends, not in discussing his own shortcomings (Brooks, 2011; Steinhauer, 2010). The study does not consider that sometimes crying can be a boon or seem to have no impact on a man’s campaign while
complicating a woman’s. Her experiment is designed around the assumption that “hypotheses derived from the conventional wisdom and stereotype theories are generalizable,” and that no matter the situation, all instances of crying are equal (Brooks, 2011, pp 602). But the data provided by the psychology research mentioned earlier, specifically the work on angry tears versus sad tears in relation to gender conducted by Warner and Shields, says otherwise (2007). Therefore, there remain gaps about crying and candidate gender that can be filled in with the research discussed later on.

*Crying Politicians in Contemporary US Politics*

Part of the reason that research into crying, gender, and context in politics is so needed is because “tears seem commonplace in today’s politics” (Hu, 2011, pp 1). To understand what that means as well as identify trends in public and media reactions to tears, I will now review some of the memorable political tears of the past forty years.

A logical person to start with is 1972 Democrat primary candidate Edmund Muskie, an accomplished Maine governor and Senator who had years of experience and seemed like a logical and likely choice for the nomination (Michener, 1972). But during the New Hampshire primary, an arena he was expected to win, Muskie did something campaign employee James Michener described as “that terrible first blow, the one from which we would never recover” – Muskie cried as he defended his wife against claims in a New Hampshire newspaper that she was “unladylike” (1972; Hu, 2011). The reaction was swift and immediate, even though Muskie came out of the primary with forty-six percent of the vote (Michener, 1972). Men and women alike began to refer to him as a “weeper,” and Michener was repeatedly asked if he really wanted someone that emotional in the position of president or with “‘his finger on the nuclear button?’”
(1972). None of his defenses or denials could salvage his poor start, and by the end of April he was out of the race, a testament to the potential crying has to ruin a career (Michener, 1972).

About fifteen years later, another Democratic primary candidate, this time then-Colorado Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder, cried while announcing her withdrawal from the upcoming 1988 primary (Weinraub, 1987). But the reaction to Schroeder’s tears was far more mixed than the overwhelmingly negative response to Muskie’s sobs – women’s reactions ranged from “angry” to “embarrassed,” from “sympathetic” to “disturbed,” and the possibility of a crying double standard was mentioned by several (Weinraub, 1987). In fact, several of the women interviewed in a *New York Times* article by Bernard Weinraub mentioned other politicians like Ronald Reagan and Joe Biden who had cried in similar situations without reprimand (1987). The candidate herself described her tears as a reaction to an unexpected, audible reaction from the crowd, and the discussion surrounding the incident was less vicious and more understanding than what Muskie encountered (Weinraub, 1987). While both were Democratic primary candidates, one was male and the other was not, and Muskie cried in a situation that was more negatively charged.

Recent Presidents also have a track record for crying. Clinton had some teary, compassionate moments during his time in the Oval office that reportedly “tracked well with women,” so much so that 1996 challenger Bob Dole suddenly became frequently weepy trying to emulate him (Hu, 2011). Obama’s teary moment came just before he actually became president; “the grandmother who raised him” passed away the night before the 2008 election, and in front of a crowd in North Carolina he celebrated her memory with wet cheeks (Hu, 2011). Both of these positively-rated moments showed a strong male figure crying for a relatable and caring reason.
Mrs. Clinton, at the time Senator and Democratic primary candidate Hillary Clinton, broke her notoriously stoic façade and had her own teary moment in 2008 on the campaign trail (Healy, 2008). While discussing “the rigors of the campaign” in New Hampshire, Clinton became to tear up, and the episode was televised many times over (Healy, 2008). Her advisors were unsure how voters would react, but the incident was well-received, and several women cited it as part of their motivation to vote for Clinton (Healy, 2008). What in some politicians would be perceived as a sign of incompetence was taken as a sign of her humanity and contributed to Hillary’s win in the New Hampshire primary (Healy, 2008).

But Democrats are not the only politicians who shed tears. The official whose name is currently the most synonymous with tears is Republican Speaker of the House John Boehner, a Congressman from Ohio. Boehner had been known to cry before taking on a role of leadership, but his acceptance speech and “60 Minutes” interview alerted the country to his tearful habits (Steinhauer, 2010; Goldman, 2010). Many topics send him reaching for a handkerchief, but top contenders include children, his past and personal challenges, and the American dream (Steinhauer, 2010). None of this, however, seems to have a negative impact on him or his actions as Speaker, something that both former Alaska governor Sarah Palin and previous Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi have commented on (Brooks, 2011; Goldman, 2010)

**Hypotheses and Experimental Design**

If Brooks’ work does not adequately address the question posed by gender stereotypes, crying, and context in the real-life examples we encounter, how can we fill in the gaps, and what might we find having done so? In the next section, I will outline my hypotheses and ground them in the material covered in the literature review before going on to explain an experiment
modeled after the one Brooks used that I believed will adequately address the shortcomings of her study.

Hypotheses

The work of psychologists Hendriks, Croonm and Vingerhoets, and Warner and Shields has made it clear that crying is a behavior to which observers feel obligated to respond, and that their response can be tempered by the situation as well as the emotion perceived to motivate the crying (2008, 2007). The evaluation of crying is also linked to gender stereotypes, judging by the different responses to men and women “sad-crying” in Warner and Shields’ experiment, as well as the diverse responses the male and female politicians previously discussed received as a result of their tears (2007). A trend that comes across in these examples, as well as the Warner and Shields experiment, is the importance of perception of the emotional motives for crying in making a judgment. Two common emotional explanations in politics thus rise to the surface: emotionality and compassion.

Let’s take a moment to look at these perceptions through the lens of stereotype theories and in the world of politics. Emotionality, according to Prentice and Carranza, is a gender-relaxed prescriptive stereotype, and since prescriptive stereotype theory holds that there is a greater penalty for stepping outside of one’s stereotype than for conforming to it, women would come out on top consistently in the political crying game because, while negative, displaying emotion is an acceptable feminine trait (2002). According to this theory alone, the same thing could be said about compassion, which logically corresponds to the trait Prentice and Carranza identify as “warm & kind,” a gender-relaxed prescriptive for men, meaning a positive characteristic on which they are allowed to fall short (2002, pp 274). But looking back to the real-life record of male politicians who cry relatively compassionately, from Boehner to
Presidents Obama and Clinton, the media and public reaction does not agree (Hu, 2011). These accounts indicate that men who show compassion are subtyped rather than admonished for not being tough and stoic. If the public would rather subtype these men than change the conventional wisdom, the belief that men are tough and emotionless while women are compassionate must be a descriptive stereotype. Because of this, a female politician compassionately crying may end up looking worse than a male who does the same. This study therefore hypothesizes that in scenarios where the voter perceives the source of a candidate’s tears as emotional instability, a male candidate will be more penalized for crying than a female candidate. However, when compassion is used to explain candidate crying, a female candidate will be more chastised.

**Experiment Design**

Because this study is building off of the recent work of Deborah Jordan Brooks, the experimental design will be very similar to her study of gender and emotion so as to strengthen the validity of any qualifications of or conflicts with her results. The experiment will have a three factor, two level design, with two experimental factors and one control factor on each level, one being a male candidate and the other a female. All participants will read a newspaper article about a fictional congressman or congresswoman who is currently running for Senate because, as previously discussed, gender stereotypes in politics become more salient for women as they move from local to national elections (Kahn, 1996). A newspaper article is a realistic lens for the scope of this experiment and precludes other variables like race from impacting the results. Like Brooks’ experiment, “the candidate [will be] described as moderate and bipartisan” (Brooks, 2011, pp 602). While party affiliation will be omitted, third-person pronouns (“he, she”) and the word “Congressman” or “Congresswoman” will be used to clearly indicate gender
(Brooks, 2011). The six articles themselves will be identical except for a short section in the four experimental conditions that will describe the congressperson crying in a certain situation. These situations, the experiment’s two factors, will be based on real-life instances in which male politicians’ tears were perceived as emotional instability, identified from here onward as the “weeper” candidate condition, or compassion, known from now on as the compassionate candidate condition. The emotionality example, to imitate the case of Ed Muskie, who cried while defending his wife from media criticism and was then painted as a “weeper,” will describe the candidate as tearing up while responding to a personal attack (Michener, 1972). The other experimental section, based on the many instances in which John Boehner’s crying were said to illustrate his compassion, will recount how the candidate became teary when talking about his or her work to help children achieve the American Dream (Goldman, 2010). Both experimental sections will include a brief description of the moment of tears and a quick quotation from the candidate. Neither experimental section will be too specific in terms of policy to avoid treading on territory that might call up other factors that could influence participants’ opinions. In contrast, the control article will not include any mention of an emotional episode, but will be otherwise indistinguishable from the experimental article, and the base article will be the same one used in Brooks’ experiment. The following table visually illustrates the different conditions, the experimental treatments identified with letters for clarity later on:

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<th>Control</th>
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<td>Female Candidate</td>
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</table>

**Evaluation**
Following Brooks’ lead again, the results of the experiment will be collected and evaluated through a post-experiment, close-ended questionnaire testing the explicit bias of participants (Brooks, 2011). I will also rely on Brooks’ three outcome measures: “overall favorability, likely effectiveness in the Senate, and likely effectiveness as U.S. president about 10 years from now,” all rated on a positively increasing scale from 1 to 7 (Brooks, 2011, pp 602). Overall favorability will give participants an opportunity to demonstrate initial approval of the potential senator in his or her current position as well as affect, and Senate effectiveness will similarly indicate voter preference (Brooks, 2011). While the imaginary candidate in question is not running for president, Brooks includes this question because evidence from other scholars indicates that, like in the transition from state to federal elections, presidential races once again up the ante for a woman’s leadership qualities to be questions as a result of stereotypes, and makes the study applicable to more levels of office (2011).

To evaluate what specific stereotypes played a hand in the results and how, Brooks included several questions on personality traits, and I plan to do the same. Again using scales of 7, participants will be asked to rate the candidate on five dichotomies of traits: “‘emotional versus unemotional,’ ‘angry versus calm,’ ‘acts inappropriately versus acts appropriately,’ ‘strong versus weak,’” and “‘caring versus uncaring’” (Brooks, 2011, pp 602). In order to test whether participants are using descriptive stereotypes or subtyping a specific gender, a question particularly relevant to the compassionate candidate condition, I will also include Brooks’ question that asks participants to complete the statement, “‘I think the behavior of the candidate in the article can probably best be explained by …,’ ‘the personal characteristics of the candidate’ (1) versus ‘the difficulty of the situation’ (7)” (Brooks, 2011, pp 602). Finally, three questions will ask participants how well a particular phrase describes the imaginary candidate on
a scale of 1 to 7 for the following: “provides STRONG LEADERSHIP […] HONEST […] SOMEONE YOU WOULD PROBABLY ENJOY TALKING TO” (Brooks, 2011, Appendix B). The first trait evaluation will determine whether or not the participants are using male political stereotypes in their evaluation, while the question about honesty will help indicate women’s tears are seen as less sincere than men’s, as was found in the Warner and Shields experiment (Brooks, 2011; 2007). In keeping with Brooks’ findings, I will include the question about “someone you would probably enjoy talking to” in order to measure any sort of collective threat reaction from men or women (2011, pp 609).

To ensure the results are as comparable as possible to those of Brooks, the original question order of her experiment will be preserved (see Appendix B). The data collected will be analyzed for the group as a whole, as well as separated by gender to catch and male- or female-specific participant reactions.

Recruitment

Again, I will copy Brooks’ methods for gathering a participant body in using an online forum for gathering experiment participants (2011). Unlike using college students, an online recruiting service like Polimetrix, the service Brooks used, can more easily gather a large variety of ages, geographic locations, and ideologies (2011). The website has nearly 2 million American volunteers who are registered to take surveys, and it hosts both political and non-political experiments to avoid selection bias (Brooks, 2011). Members pick the survey they would like to complete, usually for a small monetary incentive, as will be offered in this study (Brooks, 2011). In order to have sufficient data to stand up to the previous experiment, I will aim to have around one thousand voting-age participants, with about three hundred randomly assigned to each factor,
and participants will read one article each so that they do not pick up on the study’s focus on
gender or crying (Brooks, 2011).

**Ethical Considerations**

This experiment should not cause the participants any real discomfort or harm, but
because revealing to the participants beforehand that the experiment was studying the
intersection crying and gender on voter affect might prime the subjects and taint the findings
some minor and temporary deception of participants will be necessary. Participants instead will
be told beforehand that the experiment is examining how media impacts voter choice, which
should not lead them to believe the study is related in any way to gender or tears. After
completing the questionnaire, participants will read a debriefing explaining the true nature of the
experiment. This deception is no more damaging than what is done in most studies today, and
will in no way mentally affect the participants. Of course, participants will be able to leave the
experiment at any time, which will be easy to do from the comfort of their own homes.

**External Validity**

While this experiment successfully isolates the independent variables of perception of
candidate crying and gender that I would like to observe, there exist still some issues of external
validity that may limit the applicability of its findings. The biggest issue comes from the fact
that the candidates presented in the articles are imaginary and lack party affiliation or other
typical identifiers, so all participants know about them will come from the experiment. While
this allows me to see if there is a direct correlation between perception of crying and gender
stereotyping, it is not a realistic set-up – knowledge about a candidate, his or her track record,
and beliefs might temper or exacerbate a voter’s response to a candidate crying based on the
level of prior affect, just as prior affect for President Clinton minimized voter reaction to the
Monica Lewinsky scandal in Mark Fischle’s study (2000). When analyzing the data from this experiment, it will be important to keep the effects of this motivated reasoning in mind as the effects of perception of crying on gender in real life may therefore be skewed (Fischle, 2000).

The other external validity concern comes from the possibility of a selection bias. While using an online recruitment service increases the variety of participants significantly, the means through which participants are attracted, a monetary incentive, might make the group less random. While the incentive for completing the experiment will not be a large sum, it is still important to keep in mind when looking at this study’s findings.

Likely Results

If my hypotheses prove accurate, there will be a number of indicators in each experimental condition relative to the controls as well as the other experimental conditions. In condition A (male “weeper” candidate), the candidate will get relatively lower scores compared to the control as well as condition B (female “weeper” candidate) in overall favorability, U.S. Senate effectiveness, and U.S. President potential. The candidate will score poorly when participants are asked if the phrases “provides strong leadership” or “someone you would probably enjoy talking to” apply, but will probably score no worse than the control when participants evaluate if the word “honest” describes him because of Warner and Shields’ research showing that women’s tears are seen as more insincere than men’s (2007). There may be a small collective threat reaction from male participants, so it is possible that men will say this candidate is not someone they would enjoy talking to relative to the response of women (Brooks, 2011). Participants’ evaluations of condition A will probably label him as relatively more emotional, angry, weak, and acting inappropriately, but he will most likely be perceived as more caring

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1 Please refer to Appendix B to follow along as I refer to the experiment questionnaire.
because crying is an attachment behavior (Nelson, 2007). If the candidate is being punished for stepping outside of his prescribed behaviors, participants in condition A will probably decide that his behavior is better explained by “the personal characteristics of the candidate” than “the difficulty of the situation.”

If the hypotheses are correct, I would expect the data from condition B (female “weeper” candidate) to look almost similar to that of condition A but less severe. While my hypothesis states that in the “weeper” perception, men will be more penalized than women, this is a relative measure – I do not expect that a woman candidate would get a positive evaluation for this behavior, simply that her evaluation will be less worse. For most of the questions, participant responses in condition B should fall between those of condition A and the control group. The first possible exception might come when participants evaluate whether the word “honest” applies to the candidate. Just as the candidate in condition A might be considered no less honest than the control because of Warner and Shields’ findings, the female candidate in condition B might come across as relatively less honest than the control for the same reasons, and we could see some collective threat responses from women participants when asked if the condition B candidate is someone they would enjoy talking to (2007; Brooks, 2011). I also predict that the candidate in condition B will be described more as reacting to the difficulty of the situation than her acting out her personal characteristics.

Between the two levels in the compassionate candidate factor, my hypotheses predict that the candidate in condition D, the female compassionate candidate, will do worse overall in voter approval. Because this is the arena where the most cries of “double standard” are currently heard, I believe the difference between genders will be greater here than that in the “weeper” factor. The condition D candidate will most likely get a somewhat unfavorable overall rating, but
definitely lower than the control and condition C (male compassionate candidate) rating. I expect she will also do relatively worse when participants are asked about her effectiveness as a U.S. Senator, but that candidate D will score particularly low on effectiveness as a future U.S. President because of the increased salience of gender stereotypes as the elected position becomes higher and enters the executive branch (Kahn, 1996; Brooks, 2011). Similarly, this condition should stir up stereotypic questions about condition D candidate’s leadership skills, so she will score relatively lower when participants are asked if the phrase “provides strong leadership” applies to her. Participants will rate this candidate as lower in honesty, and women will probably experience a collective threat reaction to this candidate and say that they would probably not enjoy talking to her (Warner & Shields, 2007; Brooks, 2011). The condition D candidate will probably be seen as more emotional, angry, inappropriate, and weak than the controls or condition C candidate, but will probably still get a higher rating for caring than the control for emoting. Finally, if compassion is seen as a descriptive trait, as I predict, participants will attribute condition D candidate’s behavior to her personal characteristics.

According to my hypotheses, the compassionate or condition C candidate will have the most positive ratings of all the conditions. He will probably score the highest of all when participants are asked about overall favorability, Senate and presidential viability, strong leadership, honesty, and being someone the participant would like to talk to, regardless of gender. The condition C candidate will probably be rated as more emotional than the control conditions, but less so than all other experimental conditions, and he will be seen as calmer than the other experimental groups as well. In the participants’ eyes, the compassionate male candidate will be more caring than the other conditions, but he will also be judged as acting appropriately and relatively strong. Since I predict that participants will subtype compassionate
male politicians rather than contradict the descriptive stereotype that women are emotional and
men are not, the participants will more often describe the condition C candidate as reacting to the
difficulty of the situation than they describe him as displaying an aspect of his personality.

Should these results appear, they will confirm a longtime criticism by politicians and
pundits alike that American society still uses gender stereotypes rather than political knowledge
to inform its decisions. Strong data that conforms to my hypotheses will qualify, but completely
refute, Brooks’ previous work – because she tested a particular kind of context and perception
that is different than the elements in my experiment, the scope of her findings will be narrowed.
This type of result could help expand some of the psychology work previously discussed about
crying and gender as well. The next step in this research if my predictions come to fruition
might be to try the experiment with examples of politicians and see how prior affect plays into
this phenomenon. In the real world, candidates might use the trends found in the data to target or
rein in their tears to a more voter-friendly balance depending on gender.

Conclusion

Regardless of whether or not my hypotheses are direct, this experiment is designed to test
only a small portion of the many contexts in which politicians cry, and how voter perceive said
crying can often be a very situational and unique thought process. Our emotions and reactions to
emotion can difficult to understand and very personal, and we have not yet developed the
methods and technology necessary to fully understand that complex puzzle. Bring politics into
the mix and it becomes all the more complicated. Even still, this study can help change
American society for the better, making it a more equal place. If a crying double standard exists,
this experiment will help identify why and how it works so that we as a people can go about
changing it. But if Brooks is right and men and women are already treating male and female
candidates as equals, we then need to turn our focus in another direction: the media. If, as Brooks posits, journalists are perpetuating outdated stereotypes through their language or choice of story topics, the political science community needs to sound the alarm and set the record straight. By publicizing these findings, whatever they are, we can help pave the way for future viable, passionate, emotional candidates regardless of gender.
### Treatment & Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Newspaper Article Title &amp; Subtitle</th>
<th>Treatment Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Weeper” Condition</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Congresswoman Karen Bailey Tears Up on Campaign Trail: Cries over attacks from the media</td>
<td>The announcement has been overshadowed by other events, however. In an incident earlier this week, Representative Bailey cried while responding to a personal attack from a newspaper in her district at a press conference. With tears in her eyes, she admonished the reporter, saying, “You should be ashamed of what you did.” The congresswoman’s office declined to comment on the incident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Weeper” Condition</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Congressman Kevin Bailey Tears Up on Campaign Trail: Cries over attacks from the media</td>
<td>The announcement has been overshadowed by other events, however. In an incident earlier this week, Representative Bailey cried while responding to a personal attack from a newspaper in his district at a press conference. With tears in his eyes, he admonished the reporter, saying, “You should be ashamed of what you did.” The congressman’s office declined to comment on the incident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Congresswoman Karen Bailey Tears Up on Campaign Trail: Cries over belief in American Dream</td>
<td>The announcement has been overshadowed by other events, however. In an incident earlier this week, Representative Bailey cried while giving a speech at a press conference in her district. With tears in her eyes, she stated that her motivation for running came from “a desire to see future generations achieve the American Dream like I did.” The congresswoman’s office declined to comment on the incident.</td>
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Appendix B – Post-Condition Questions

Question Wording

Q1. How favorable or unfavorable do you feel toward the candidate? (Extremely Unfavorable = 1, Extremely Favorable = 7)

Q2. How good of a job do you think that the candidate would probably do with the following…
   A) Be an effective U.S. Senator (A poor job = 1, An excellent job = 7)
   B) Be an effective U.S. President about 10 years from now (A poor job = 1, An excellent job = 7)

Q3. How well do you think this word describes the candidate? (provides STRONG LEADERSHIP) (Not well at all = 1, Extremely Well = 7)

Q4. How well do you think this word describes the candidate? (HONEST) (Not well at all = 1, Extremely Well = 7)

Q5. How well do you think this word describes the candidate? (SOMEONE YOU WOULD PROBABLY ENJOY TALKING TO) (Not well at all = 1, Extremely Well = 7)

Q6. Please rate the candidate on the following characteristics…
   A) Emotional = 1 Unemotional=7
   B) Angry = 1 Calm =7
   C) Uncaring = 1 Caring = 7
   D) Acts inappropriately = 1 Acts appropriately = 7
   E) Weak = 1 Strong = 7

Q7. I think the behavior of the candidate in the article can probably best be explained by (the personal characteristics of the candidate=1, the difficulty of the situation = 7)

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\(^2\) Taken from Deborah Jordan Brooks, “Testing the Double Standard for Candidate Emotionality: Voter Reactions to the Tears and Anger of Male and Female Politicians”


