THE NEW GIRLS' CLUBS: CANDIDATE TRAINING PROGRAMS AND THE WOMEN CHANGING THE FACE OF U.S. POLITICS

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For everyone navigating an environment that wasn't built for them.

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ABSTRACT

THE NEW GIRLS' CLUBS: CANDIDATE TRAINING PROGRAMS AND THE WOMEN CHANGING THE FACE OF U.S. POLITICS

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How does women's political leadership training advance gender parity in public office? This project takes an ethnographic approach involving extensive participant observation and interviews to analyze and compare Republican and Democratic practitioners' strategies and understandings of how to propel women into leadership. I use a discourse analytic framework to study candidate training programs as part of complex networks of political action and examine constructions of women's leadership to explore broad questions about gender and power. What does it mean to lead as a woman? Interlocutors' attitudes illuminate how entrenched sociocultural norms come to bear and at the same time become reimagined at this time of rapid social change in understandings of women's place in U.S. politics. How do training programs and aspiring women candidates go about the transformational process of developing leadership qualities, in light of the gender ideologies and political party cultural values surrounding them? I find that partisan differences in ideological orientations to gender and leadership run contrary to what may be expected based on historical partisan commitments to the gender binary, indicating how advocates' gender ideologies cannot be assumed based on their political ideologies. While rightwing gender-related political movements have tended to mobilize

around understandings of the distinctive values of masculine and feminine in the past, leftwing groups today mobilize around gender difference and the perceived benefits of feminine leadership while simultaneously navigating the growing movement to break down sex and gender binarism.

Considering political representation as a semiotic process allows for an investigation of democratic representation and electability as linked to semiotic representation, and reflective of surrounding sociocultural norms and ideologies. I intend for this dissertation to have both scholarly value and practical utility for advocates working to broaden democratic participation. I find that longer-term, cohort-based candidate training programs have the potential to build powerful social networks that serve as avenues for fundraising and mentorship and can help mitigate some external barriers to candidacy, a function that has been overlooked by other scholars.

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PREFACE

Research Timeline

I learned of the existence of gendered political training organizations from my advisor, political scientist Dr. Dawn Teele, who studied data from such programs as part of her research on women's candidacies. In 2017, I served as graduate student coordinator for a women's candidacies conference at the University of Pennsylvania that aimed to connect academics and women's candidate training organization practitioners from across the political spectrum. Meeting these program representatives helped me gain initial access to begin observing trainings.

In 2018, I developed an ethnographic research plan involving multiple field sites that would incorporate two frameworks of comparison – gendered and non-gendered spaces and Republican, Democrat, and nonpartisan spaces. Between 2018 and 2020, I spent a total of about 16 months conducting participant observation research with two women's political candidate training programs, one focused on Republican women and one focused on Democratic women. My field sites were chosen not for their geographic location but for their willingness and ability to provide research access. As an anthropologist studying women in U.S. politics, I am interested in how leadership training endeavors to advance gender parity in public office and how political party orientation intersects with understandings of women's leadership in training program and participant discourses and practices. Throughout the research period, I participated in, observed, and at times facilitated candidate trainings as well as performing additional

volunteer and paid work for the training organizations. I analyzed program marketing material and literature, and interviewed trainers and trainees about their attitudes and experiences relating to topics including gender roles, leadership, and why and how to elect women.

In addition to my longer-term ethnographic research with these two organizations, I observed in-person and virtual one-day training sessions and brief workshops held by nonpartisan women's candidate training programs Ready to Run, developed by the Center for American Women and Politics, Elect Her, hosted by Running Start and developed with the American Association of University Women, and The Campaign School at Yale University (formerly the Women's Campaign School at Yale). I also attended in-person and virtual partisan candidate trainings open to any gender, including seven held by the conservative organization the Leadership Institute and three by the National Democratic Training Center.

While this project has a comparative framework and my two main field sites were chosen for their similar cohort-based structures – both organizations hold weekend trainings once a month for several months for a yearly cohort of women – my research experiences at each organization were not commensurate. With the Republican organization, which is smaller and does not have dedicated office space, I helped set up the training workshops, performed some additional computer-based volunteer tasks, and had frequent meetings with the President of the organization, but my primary role was an observer of the trainings. At the Democratic organization, which is larger and had

dedicated office space available, I was first a full-time volunteer and later was hired as a part-time staff member in addition to being an observer of the trainings.

Training Observations

I attended in-person training sessions prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and observed additional virtual training sessions when in-person training was no longer possible. As a participant observer at training sessions and through text analysis of training materials, I collected discourse data to compare the strategies used by different groups and assess how programs understand and promote women's leadership. I assisted in facilitating training sessions and worked alongside training program advocates between sessions in an effort to develop ethnographic understandings of everyday practices at my field sites through informal interaction and observation. The data collected while observing the programs' operations forms the foundation for my argument, detailed in chapter five, that training not only provides assistance by imparting nuts and bolts campaign skills but also can provide social, emotional, and material support to members of groups who have been historically underrepresented in political office. They can help offset a lack of access to traditional fundraising and mentorship "boys' club" networks employed by those who are members of more privileged elite communities. This boost is especially needed for women who are members of historically underrepresented and under-resourced groups. As Sanbonmatsu and Dittmar (2020) find in their research with a nonpartisan women's candidate training organization, for example, providing networking receptions benefitting women of color helped diversify

program participants and therefore ultimately propel women with a greater variety of backgrounds into politics.

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 50 training program participants and leaders. In interviews, I aimed to gather biographical information and include some standardized questions (see list of questions in the Appendix) as well as open up the conversation to additional topics the interviewee wanted to pursue. The interviews were designed to elicit discourse about participants' attitudes towards women leaders, challenges, goals, and observations, as well as related topics such as gender roles. I asked interviewees to introduce themselves and about how they became interested and involved in politics and the training program, their observations about the program, and their opinions and observations about women in politics more broadly. I included specific questions about their preferred news sources, their opinion of President Donald Trump, and their opinion of the terms "feminist" and "safe space," which emerged as topics of interest early in my research.

The qualitative interviews were an inductive strategy. Rather than striving to include a representative sample of interviewees and asking them all exactly the same questions, I instead attempted to be flexible and follow interviewees' leads to generate ideas and explanations. Stance-taking and tone (Goffman 1981), evident in speech content and also gesture, prosody, and invocation of certain identities (e.g. "feminist"), helps indicate how interviewees position themselves in relation to gender norms as they

understand them. Their attitudes illuminate how entrenched cultural norms come to bear and at the same time become reimagined at this time of rapid social change in understandings of women's place in U.S. politics.

My interviews were conducted both in-person and via phone, with most conducted over the phone (especially after the COVID-19 epidemic began). To recruit interview participants, I sent general calls out to all training program participants via email asking for anyone interested in speaking with me to contact me. I followed that up with in-person reminders and requests at training sessions. My sample was a snowball sample in the sense that interviewees would suggest additional interviewees for me to follow up with. The current program members and program leadership connected me with others whom they thought I would benefit from speaking to. I followed up with participants who expressed interest in conducting an interview and received permission to audio record all interviews as well as some training sessions.

I spoke with women about their experiences in elected office and campaigning, challenges they faced, and how and why they were interested in elected office. Participants' demographics, including their ages, racial and class background, and political ideologies, varied widely. But all interviewees were gracious and generous with their time. Interviewees sometimes recounted upsetting experiences, such as racist and sexist treatment on the campaign trail. One participant exclaimed during our interview that discussing the challenges for women in politics and her family's political background felt like therapy. I asked about challenges involved in running for office as well as the

inspiration and reasons for doing so in an attempt to understand how practitioners and those on the ground running for office understand barriers and how candidate training program strategies may or may not address them. As discussed in greater detail in the introduction and in chapter five, scholars have identified various barriers to women's political involvement, including institutional factors like the type of electoral system, social norms that favor men in positions of power, and psychological predispositions such as women's relatively lower political ambition. Candidate training strategies such as network-building and personal empowerment seek to address some of these challenges, but inherent limitations of individualized training and partisan differences in attitudes toward identity politics complicate their efforts. One goal of this research is practical – by examining what continues to hold participants back and what parts of existing training programs work and do not work, organizations can learn ways to adapt and grow more successful at propelling women into elected office.

Research Access and Researcher Positionality

When I began this project, gaining access to field sites – especially Republican organizations, since political scientists in my academic network had existing connections to Democratic and nonpartisan women's candidate training organizations – was a concern. If I was open about studying both Democratic and Republican groups, would each side think I was some kind of spy for the other?

Prior to beginning fieldwork, I removed my party affiliation from my state voter file on the suggestion of my advisor. I am not registered as a member of any political

party, although a cursory examination of my public social media profiles reveals some political leanings (e.g. participation in the Women's March and airport protests against President Trump's 2017 Muslim travel ban, celebration of pro-LGBTQ+ rights policy, etc.). As an anthropology graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, I may also certainly be considered a "coastal elite" ensconced in a "liberal bubble." I planned to emphasize to interlocutors my position as a neutral student and researcher rather than a political actor.

My position as a scholar and researcher afforded me access to observe trainings and connect with advocates in the women's candidacies space. I was able to draw on existing connections between academic researchers and nonpartisan and Democratic organizations for introductions. Making inroads with a Republican women's candidate training program was a greater challenge due to their relatively fewer numbers and my dearth of existing academic connections to conservative political advocates. As Xydias (2018) writes, women in politics scholarship focuses more on women in left-leaning parties than women on the right, both because there are more left-leaning women in office and because scholars often define women's interests in left-leaning feminist terms. It is no secret that academic faculty, especially in the humanities and social sciences, tend to lean to the political left – something that has drawn criticism from conservative leaders (Jaschik 2017). Rather than draw on my academic network for existing connections, I cold emailed and called several conservative organizations.

As it turned out, my position as an Ivy League doctoral student may have mattered less than my position as a Midwesterner when it came to connecting with a conservative group. I was born, raised, and attended college in southeast Michigan before moving to Philadelphia for graduate school. When I approached the organization I pseudonymously refer to in this dissertation as the Midwest Public Leadership Series (MPLS), I framed my request to volunteer for them as a form of coming home. In many ways, it was. Many MPLS participants reminded me of my family, friends, and Michigan neighbors. I remain very grateful for the trust and openness of these women who welcomed a scholar from a "liberal bubble" into their midst.

Contrary to my assumptions at the onset of fieldwork, when I strategized about how to avoid discussing my own political ideologies in order to avoid alienating any interlocutors with whom I personally disagreed, I was very seldom asked about my political leanings. When the subject was brought up, I tried to sidestep it by emphasizing my role as an observer and student who was there to learn. But I was open with all interlocutors about my home of West Philadelphia being a "liberal bubble" and the vast majority of my classmates and neighbors being leftists. I did not think I was misrepresenting my political ideologies until my second fieldwork season with MPLS in the Fall of 2019. A MPLS leader introduced me to another woman as someone who did not talk about my political leanings but was "one of them." I was surprised – I did not see myself as "one of them" but as an observer conducting research with a group of women I respected but did not necessarily agree with politically. Why did they see me as one of

them despite my never discussing my own political views and my open acknowledgement that my university and neighborhood, and academia itself, is left-leaning? Despite the fact that I attended university in Detroit and then in Philadelphia – two very blue urban areas – and study anthropology – a field definitely not known for conservatism – I remain a white, cisgender, reserved woman from Saint Clair County Michigan who blended in with the MPLS women. It should not have been a surprise that interlocutor activists with whom I attended political candidate trainings on either side of the aisle would assume that I was sympathetic whether I personally agreed with them or not – Avanza (2020), for example, describes a similar morally ambiguous situation of assumed agreement in her fieldwork with pro-life activists in Italy, which caused her some distress but made her fieldwork easier and deepened her access. Indeed most field researchers' feelings toward their interlocutors and the groups they study, as Lofland et al. (2005) argue in their guide to qualitative field research, vacillate between extremes of distance and identification. The study of groups with which the ethnographer may have an "awkward relationship" (Snow 2006) should not be avoided. Indeed it is critical if we are to understand the range of social movements and avoid skewing our empirical generalizations.

My whiteness and cisgender femininity allowed for relative comfort among people from across the political spectrum. I began fieldwork as a 25-year-old woman, and appeared young enough to fit the student intern roles I was assigned. I dressed in business casual and did not dye my (previously occasionally purple or pink) hair. Anthropologists

recognize that who we are hugely affects our research at every level – from our personal theoretical interests to the field sites and interlocutors we are able to connect with and how they respond to us. Were my race or gender expression different, or my bodily comportment, style of clothing, manner of speaking, expression of sexual orientation or religious identity etc. farther from WASP-y norms, I would likely have gained a different level of access and interviewee openness, especially with the relatively more homogenous (in race, class, gender, etc.) Republican groups I observed. I certainly would not have been able to remain relatively visually inconspicuous in the conservative spaces I inhabited, which were almost entirely white. But one's particular positionality and the ease of access it may afford with some groups comes, of course, with blind spots and at the cost of more difficult access and a more limited understanding of communities one does not identify with. A Black woman researcher would likely have gained different and deeper insight from my Black women interlocutors, for example.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND, AND RESEARCH METHODS

In her testimonial for a women's political leadership training program, a former state party official and national political appointee attests to the benefits of training: "Women are just as politically ambitious and motivated as men."

In her promotional video for a women's political leadership training program, a state-level elected official discusses women's paths to office: "Many women are raising young children… and you question whether you can be involved in the public sphere and still do right by your loved ones."

Which of these women would you guess is the Democrat, and which the Republican? If you were like me before I began my anthropological fieldwork among aspiring women political leaders and women's leadership advocates, perhaps you associate understandings emphasizing gender difference and distinctive gender roles with the right side of the political spectrum and Phyllis Schlafly, and gender similarity and equality discourses with the Gloria Steinems of the left.

For many people, this characterization is accurate. But in the case of the women quoted above, you would be mistaken. The first is Kelly Mitchell, a Republican leader and Trump administration appointee, and the second is Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin, a Democrat. Their statements illustrate the curious mix of gender ideologies that occurs in public-facing discourses at elite levels of women's political involvement among leaders and advocates who share the goal of propelling more women into elected

office but differ in their political values and party commitments to notions of identity politics and meritocracy.

This dissertation qualitatively examines and compares strategies and discourses about gender, partisanship, leadership, and barriers to elected office that circulate within and around women's candidate training organizations on both sides of the aisle to explore how political party culture affects the ways women understand the quest for public power. I explore how Democratic women's leadership movements today mobilize around an ideology of gender difference, publicly justifying their quest for increasing the descriptive political representation of women with the substantive representation-based argument that women lead differently, and better, than men. Republican women's leadership advocacy movements, in contrast, do not publicly assert that women are better leaders simply because they are women, but contend that they should be judged on their individual merit as candidates.

This is an empirical ethnographic work that explores big questions about gender and politics in America through a grounded investigation of the particular context of women's candidate training organizations and the individuals involved in them. Not all of my interlocutors define their experiences in gendered political training programs in terms of "sisterhood" or "feminism," or contend that "women" bring something unique to the political decision-making table. Their policy priorities and goals differ. Yet candidate training program participants are all – whether they characterize it as such or not – part of a movement to shift a status quo that has historically excluded those farthest from

masculinity, whiteness, and wealth from political leadership. Through in-depth participant observation research and interviews with Republican and Democratic practitioners, this project examines and compares the practices, strategies, and discourses about gender and leadership employed by those on the ground working to elect more women. All women's candidate training organizations share the goal of increasing women's representation in elected office through similar methods of building trainees' skills, confidence, and networks, but political party culture and friendliness towards identity politics affects their gender ideologies and reasons for electing women as well as the effectiveness of their strategies.

This project explores how women's political candidate training programs function and how they fit into the broader space of political action. It takes a deep dive into how groups of like-minded women are working to make change in their communities, and the powerful results that emerge from them being in a space together. Women's political organization leaders discuss candidates in Zoom rooms rather than the cigar smoke-filled back rooms of the political power brokers of old – times, after all, have changed. They are not queenmakers. But their networks are growing increasingly influential, and practitioners are busily recruiting, training, and funding women political candidates in hopes of propelling them to victory and changing the face of elected leadership.

Why Study Women's Candidate Training Programs?

I joked while completing this project that remaining in the United States, while perhaps not the stereotypical route for an anthropologist, allowed for the study of

mysterious peoples who are often characterized as "tribal" – Republicans and Democrats. For about 16 months between 2018 and 2020, I conducted ethnographic research with political organizations on both sides of the aisle that train women to run for office. Political training and support programs specifically for women are increasingly popular and have proliferated greatly in the last decade. The goal of this dissertation is to analyze and compare their strategies and how they discuss gender and leadership in order to understand how these organizations endeavor to advance equality in politics within the ideological bounds of their respective political party cultures.

Women's candidate training programs provide a useful lens through which to explore questions related to gender and political representation because they make processes and ideologies involved in shaping women candidates conveniently explicit, illuminating social norms at play in how women political actors are understood. Political scientists have considered how candidate training programs may influence women's political ambition and interest in seeking office, often focusing on quantitative outcomes such as how many trainees ultimately run (Sanbonmatsu 2015; Piscopo 2019; Sweet-Cushman 2019; Sanbonmatsu and Dittmar 2020). But scholars continue to question "what [women's training programs] do," (Kreitzer and Osborn 2019) and how these networks of potential women candidates connect to other aspects of U.S. politics, such as party nomination systems. I build on the largely quantitative political research outlining the importance, function, and effect of training programs to qualitatively examine "what they do" in terms of their strategies and the discourses about gender, partisanship,

leadership, and barriers to elected office that circulate within and around them. In ethnographically comparing a Democratic program with a Republican program, this research brings an anthropologist's focus on culture – in this case, political party culture – to the fore of the political scientist-dominated study of women's candidate training programs, through an empirically rigorous discourse analytic lens.

In the years following the 2016 election, widespread social movements like the #MeToo campaign and Women's March indicated a growing concern with gender inequality writ large. Public interest in women in politics specifically remains high, as indicated by extensive news coverage of the 2018 and 2020 elections' "pink waves" of women candidates, the success of women leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic, and popular (if polarizing) figures including Vice President Kamala Harris and "The Squad" of U.S. Representatives Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Rashida Tlaib of Michigan and Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts. While President Donald Trump's election motivated both Democratic and Republican women to run for office (Menendez 2018), there is a partisan gender divide: most women candidates and officeholders are Democrats, as are the majority of women voters in the U.S. (Igielnik 2020). This unevenness brings up questions about how political orientation interacts with attitudes about gender and leadership. In hopes of exploring the nexus of culture and political representation, this project has a twofold comparative framework involving anthropological research with organizations that vary by political party leaning as well as by whether they are for women only or open to any gender.

Conceptual Approach

Throughout this dissertation, I explore sociocultural questions about gender and power, and continuity and change. I begin with a broad scope in considering understandings of what difference, if any, gender makes in political leadership. I then narrow the lens of investigation to compare how political party culture and communication styles affect these understandings, and finally examine representations of leadership circulating among practitioners and at organization field sites specifically as well as the significance of limiting the programs to women only. In chapters two through four, I use three central conceptual approaches to illuminate similarities and differences in the discourses and strategies used across two types of organizations, a Republican and a Democratic organization that train women to become political leaders.

First, in chapter two I examine the programs in light of political scholarship on gender and leadership, including "female boosterism" (Alexander and Andersen 1993), a notion based on an ideology of gender difference that justifies descriptive representation by positing that women are different and better leaders than men. Next, chapter three compares the programs in terms of political party cultural values and Lakoff's (1996) political metaphor framework that characterizes liberal and conservative approaches to the relationship of the state to its citizens as a "nurturant parent model" and "strict father model," respectively. Then, in chapter four I consider the metasemiotics of women's candidate training programs' discourses and practices and how they reflect the broader fetishization of skills as Foucauldian "technologies of self" (1988), drawing on Urciuoli's

(2008) work on the centrality of skills communication under neoliberal capitalism. Together, these conceptual devices contribute to a more thorough understanding of sociocultural attitudes about gender and power at play in these spaces, and how women's leadership advocates and activists who share similar goals approach them in ways that differ along party lines, but not in the ways one might assume. Traditionally, rightwing movements have tended to mobilize around understandings of the distinctive values of masculine and feminine (Butler 2021) while leftwing movements emphasized gender similarity. However, Democratic women's candidate training program discourses evidence how leftwing movements today also mobilize around gender difference and the perceived benefits of a feminine approach to power, in contrast with Republican program public discourses that exhibit a gender neutral approach that is careful not to promote women simply on the basis of being women. I expand on these points in chapter six.

It is my hope that this project has practical utility for women's leadership advocates as well as scholarly value. Chapter five examines barriers that continue to hold participants back and the training program practices that work to support them most effectively, with the ultimate goal of helping organizations adapt and grow more successful at propelling women into elected office. I find that while political scholars including Piscopo (2019) assert that candidate training cannot effectively address external systemic institutional and structural barriers to women's candidacies due to its focus on individual skill-building and addressing internal psychological barriers, this characterization does not take into account the potential for long-term, cohort-based

women's candidate training programs to build powerful social networks that serve as alternatives to the elite fundraising and mentorship networks enjoyed by (wealthy, white) men.

A Note on the Gender Categories Used in this Dissertation

This dissertation discusses gender within a binary framework, following the underlying logical structure of the gendered training organization model, which distinguishes "women's" candidate training from generalized candidate training open to participants of any gender. In doing so, the project risks reinforcing normative ideas of gender categories and eliding alternate viewpoints. It is important to keep in mind the stance held by critical theorists (see Rich 1980 on sexuality and McRuer 2006 on disability) who argue for a fundamental rethinking of the categories involved when studying power structures rather than maintaining hegemonic norms' underlying logics. This project is limited in its focus on, instead, illuminating how activist interlocutors steeped in systems of binary oppositions including gender categories as well as U.S. two-party politics themselves discuss and strategize about how to succeed within these systems. More research is needed on nonbinary political candidates' experiences and to critically examine the fundamental gender ideologies at play in candidate training, and I look forward to reading it.

Background on Women's Political Representation

A brief overview of gender (race, class etc.) disparity in the U.S. political system

This project and the organizations with which I conducted my primary research focus on women and gendered barriers to elected office. Of course, gender is only one aspect of identity. The farther a candidate is from the wealthy, older, white, cisgender, heterosexual man that traditionally represents the American norm of "a politician" and continues to be overrepresented in our political leadership (consider Evers-Hillstrom at the Center for Responsive Politics' 2020 finding that more than half of U.S Congressmembers were millionaires), the less legible they are as a leader and the more difficulties they may face. As Tweeted by Amanda Litman, co-founder of political recruitment and training organization Run For Something that seeks to propel young progressive candidates into local office, "'Electability' is not a real attribute but rather a description of our society's sexist, racist, classist ideas about what a politician should be" (2019). While a wider array of candidates are emerging in recent elections, hegemonic ideologies about who belongs in power remain influential for voters and commentators who question the "electability" of candidates who do not align with the status quo.

Gender is the central analytic lens of this project, but "women" are not a monolithic group (despite gendered training program marketing materials that tend to discuss them as such). I do not seek to analyze gender in isolation from other aspects of identity such as race, class, sexuality, etc. but instead to recognize and examine how all of these factors and demographic differences among women come into play – whether

they are recognized or elided – at my research field sites and among interlocutors. Women of color I spoke with throughout this project recounted how racism and attitudes centering whiteness provided additional barriers to their candidacies, for example, and some interlocutors described feeling out of place in political spaces due to their lack of elite education. The Democratic program I conducted fieldwork with specifically recruits women from historically politically underrepresented groups, including Black, Brown and Indigenous women, women of color, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) women, and young and unmarried women. They emphasize the need to fight for racial justice and equity as a candidate and elected leader and discuss specific concerns that members of underrepresented communities may have about running for office. The Republican program I conducted fieldwork with is a much smaller operation that trains far fewer women and has no paid staff, and their recruitment process is not targeted or as robust. They do not offer training on social justice topics or address specific concerns for women of color (the vast majority of program participants are white, reflecting the racial composition of Republican Party voters per 2020 Pew Research Center findings), but some Republican interlocutors expressed concerns about topics like racial inequality and police violence. In general, Republican program members contended that their party, as one interviewee put it, "should be more open to bringing other people in besides the typical 65-year-old white male." While my main Democratic research field site actively works toward the goal of "bringing other people in" by intentionally recruiting women who reflect the demographic diversity of the

communities they serve, recognition of the need for new leadership in terms of not only gender but race, age, etc. is evidenced by interlocutors on both sides of the aisle. Overt identity politics may be anathema to Republican Party culture, but as one Republican interlocutor joked at a training session, "old white men" incumbents "need to just realize it's time for them to step aside. Step aside."

Representative inequality by the numbers

While the number of women elected to political office is increasing, gender disparity within the United States' political system remains. As of 2022, women held 27.1 percent of seats in the U.S. Congress, and just over 30 percent of statewide executive and state legislature positions. While there is a long-held belief that women are more equally represented in local-level politics, a 2021 report from the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) drawing on national data on incorporated cities and towns with populations greater than 10,000 proves that is not the case. Women, they find, hold 30.5 percent of municipal offices in the U.S., a number nearly identical to the percent of women who hold state-level office (Center for American Women and Politics 2022a).

There are stark partisan differences in gender representation. For example, despite there being a record-breaking number of Republican women elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2020, they still make up only about one-third of the total women in the House. Data from CAWP shows that the numbers look similar for state legislatures – as of 2022, the number of Republican women legislators (766) was only about half of the

number of Democratic women legislators (1511) (Center for American Women and Politics 2022b).

Per CAWP's Women of Color in Elective Office 2021 fact sheet, 34.5 percent of the women serving in the 117th U.S. Congress are women of color, making them 9.2 percent of the total 535 members of Congress. Women of color are more underrepresented in statewide office, representing 19.1 percent of the 94 total women serving in statewide elective executive office (5.8 percent of the total of all genders) and 25.5 percent of the 2,162 total women state legislators (7.5 percent of the total of all genders) (Center for American Women and Politics 2022c). For comparison, as of 2019 women of color represented 40 percent of all women in the U.S., meaning that approximately one in five Americans is a woman of color (U.S. Census Bureau 2020). Their numbers in elected office are less than half of what would be needed to achieve proportional representation. Only one woman of color currently serves as governor – New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, a Latina. There have been zero Black woman governors in the history of the United States.

Finally, we might further break down women's representation in high-level office by sexuality. While the number of openly lesbian, gay, and bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) officeholders has increased in recent years, including Wisconsin Senator Tammy Baldwin quoted at the outset of this chapter, they remain relatively few. Per the Wikipedia entry "List of LGBT members of the United States Congress," for example, only six total openly LGBT women (one, Barbara Jordan, was only identified as LGBT

posthumously in her obituary) have ever been elected to the U.S. Congress, out of 26 total known members of the LGBTQ community who have ever held congressional office.

Why fewer women? Barriers to women's political representation

Much academic work focuses on the general issue of gender disparity among elected officeholders. Various aspects of the multilayered, complex system of representational politics are considered and implicated in scholars' examinations of women's relative lack of political involvement. Current political research emphasizes several types of barriers to women's political leadership, both internal or "supply" issues (having to do with women themselves deciding not to run for office) and external or "demand" issues (such as voters being less willing to vote for a woman candidate or other outside factors making it more difficult for them to run and win). While the literature described below and candidate training programs marketed to "women" tend to focus solely on gender in their analyses and generalize findings, women of color candidates often face unique challenges and opportunities as compared to non-Hispanic white women (see Shah, Scott and Gonzalez Juenke 2019).

Internal psychological barriers to women's political leadership outlined by scholars include women's relative lack of political ambition (Lawless and Fox 2010), lack of self-efficacy (Preece 2016), and the lack of visible women leader role models (Atkeson 2003; Bos and Schneider 2017). Structural barriers include "pipeline issues" or difficulties in acquiring the kind of credentials that are traditionally valued in political

figures (Conway, Steuernagel, and Ahern 2005), as well as incumbency advantage that benefits those currently in positions of power who are statistically more likely to be (wealthy, older, white, cisgender, heterosexual) men (Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994). Cultural barriers include patriarchal social norms that influence voters' understandings of who is a legible and acceptable leader (Conway 2001), and negative gendered stereotypes (Schneider and Bos 2014). Finally, institutional barriers may include the type of electoral system, some of which are more friendly to nontraditional candidates than others (Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian, and Trounstine 2015), or political gatekeepers' lack of support for women (Niven 1998; Sanbonmatsu 2006; Crowder-Meyer 2013). The women's candidate training programs I focus on in this study represent one strategy that has developed to combat women's underrepresentation that focuses primarily on addressing the internal "supply" issue by increasing individual women's motivation and preparation to run.

Compounding barriers for women of color

Of course, women who are members of other groups historically underrepresented in politics, including women of color, LGBTQ+ women, and working class women face additional compounded obstacles. Women of color have been found to be less likely to be recruited by political parties and more likely to be discouraged from running, for example (Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, and Walsh 2009). One report on campaign contributions to women of color found that "female candidates of color received an average of around $330,000, compared to around $450,000 for men of color, and almost $700,000 for White

candidates of both genders" (Center for Responsive Politics, Common Cause and Representation2020 2016). However, whether women's intersecting identities ultimately advantage or disadvantage their ambition about running for office is unclear, nuanced, and varies depending on context (Scott, Dickinson, and Dowe 2020). The combination of their race and gender may put women of color at an electoral disadvantage (Githens and Prestage 1977), but in some cases and electoral contexts it may give them broader appeal and even provide an electoral advantage (Darcy, Hadley and Kirksey 1993; Smooth 2006; Philpot and Walton 2007; Bejarano 2014).

Background on (Women's) Candidate Training

How do you run for office? Unless you are a political scion with family connections to pave your way, have knowledgeable mentors, or are able to devote considerable time and energy into investigating the process, the act of running for office and its associated paperwork can be daunting. Luckily, numerous resources, guides, and training organizations have been developed to assist those who want to run. Scholars have considered the influence of political campaign training (Scott 2018), with many focusing on the benefits and limitations of gendered training for women and women of color both within the United States (Rozell 2000; Hennings 2011; Sanbonmatsu 2015; Hodgson 2017; Sweet-Cushman 2019; Schneider and Sweet-Cushman 2020; Shames et al. 2020; Bernhard, Shames, and Teele 2021) and around the world (Maillé 2015; Piscopo 2019). Candidate training programs exist to promote and support general leadership development, specifically prepare potential and current candidates for fronting a

campaign, and provide others interested in getting more involved in the political realm the necessary background knowledge and skills to be successful (according to their marketing materials, at least).

Generally, the political field may be understood as a cooperative network involving countless actors and moving pieces beyond the candidate and the electorate. Constituents may be voters and/or donors, influential political elites or ordinary citizens. Professional fundraisers, political action committee members and donors, volunteers, campaign consultants, managers, organizers, analysts, speechwriters, and myriad other political support staff work behind the scenes to get certain individuals elected, advance certain political agendas, or simply help maintain the electoral system's functions, as in the case of polling place workers. As Wattenberg (1990) explains in his analysis of the major political parties' decline in the U.S. over the second half of the twentieth century, parties are no longer always the primary drivers behind campaigns. This "era of candidate-centered campaigns" (Panagopoulos 2006: 867) means that candidates must seek to appeal to the electorate on an individual level. Candidates' increased need to market themselves has led to specialization and professionalization of the political consulting industry in the second half of the twentieth century, as well as the proliferation of candidate training and support organizations. The candidate training organizations highlighted in this study are one aspect of this complex field that have arisen in response to changing campaign norms that have increased the onus on individuals to conduct

outreach for their campaigns themselves rather than relying on political parties' influence.

A brief overview of candidate training programs

United States-based candidate training groups include both partisan and nonpartisan programs. Some conduct brief hours-long workshops or one or two-day trainings, while others involve months-long training commitments. Workshops range widely in cost, from free of charge to hundreds of dollars. Some candidate training and support programs focus on specific groups such as Black, Latino, or Asian Pacific American candidates, LGBTQ+ candidates, candidates under age 35, those who have served in the military or a national service program, or immigrants. They are unevenly distributed geographically and ideologically – there are more programs available in populous areas and more left-leaning than right-leaning ones – but wherever you are in the U.S. and whatever your political leanings, there is likely at least one online or in-person candidate training option available to help prepare you to run for office. Programs often connect with each other in this vast network through formal organizational partnerships or shared trainers or board members. For example, trainers from Democratic political action committee EMILY's List also train women in the Democratic candidate training program Emerge. The mixed-gender, nonpartisan Veterans Campaign program was developed because its founder attended a workshop conducted by nonpartisan women's candidate training program Ready to Run (the only man to do so), and he was so impressed that he created a veterans-specific program with similar goals of

encouraging “bipartisanship, cooperation, and better government” (Veterans Campaign 2021).

Topics covered by candidate training programs can include campaign messaging (developing a clear and consistent core message to appeal to voters), fundraising (how to effectively ask for money through various channels), communicating on camera, and more. The first women’s candidate training I ever observed, for example, was a nonpartisan one-day workshop that included a breakfast panel targeted specifically to women of color, a keynote by a government official, and training workshop sessions on campaign plan development, community engagement, media training, navigating political parties, and fundraising. In additional to specific skill-building, training program speakers often seek more nebulous goals of motivating and inspiring participants to run and galvanizing them into taking action in support of their ideals. The organizations also provide an opportunity for participants to network with like-minded politically-involved people. Hennings (2011) describes how individuals benefit from U.S. candidate training programs and how their experiences shape future political behavior, contending that training helps individuals craft self-views as candidates and decide to run for office as part of collaborative processes. She focuses on training organizations as sites of political participation that influence how individuals develop and process their civic identities. In addition to skill-building, the programs can provide a space for individuals to reflect on and build their own political identity.

The notion of a candidate training program in which individuals seek to gain particular knowledge that will enable and qualify them for a political position may be seen as an extension of the broader fetishization of skills as "technologies of self," in Foucauldian terms (1988). The idea of a worker-self as a bundle of skills – one's person definable by the summation of commodifiable bits that can be written as action verbs on a resume – has led to the proliferation of self-help and skill-building industries. Linguistic anthropologist Bonnie Urciuoli (2008) describes this neoliberal shift towards workers' employment value being dependent on their skills (e.g. communication, leadership), and their ability to communicate those skills, as a product of contemporary capitalism. Similarly to workers who aim to develop skills in order to be valued as employees, political candidates can seek out skills training to succeed in their industry and win over constituents. I expand on these points in chapter four.

The field of women's political training programs

Globally, the number of political training programs specifically for women has increased greatly since the 1980s, when only a few existed (Krook and Norris 2014). Comparative studies discuss international approaches to women's political training programs. Htun and Piscopo (2014), for example, outline the steps Brazil has taken with electoral law to enforce gender quotas as well as require political parties to train and promote women candidates. Political parties in Anglophone Caribbean nations including Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica have also provided training specifically for women

leaders (Vassell 2006). Similarly, Mexico and Panama require political parties to use a portion of their public funding to train women (Krook and Norris 2014).

The U.S. does not have electoral laws mandating gender quota systems for candidates or campaign training for women (or members of certain racial or ethnic groups, political parties, or any other politically underrepresented group). But more than 600 political support and training programs specifically for women candidates have emerged in the U.S. Many of these organizations were developed within the last decade or two (Kreitzer and Osborn 2020), although earlier examples may be found. For example, the Women's History collections in the Rutgers University Libraries archives include flyers for political leadership and campaign skills trainings for women hosted in the 1970s and 1980s by organizations including the Maryland National Organization for Women and the Summer Institute for Union Women.

Nonprofit organizations and programs dedicated to training women to run for office were developed because of a perceived failure of political party networks to adequately bring women into politics on their own. Training programs may be affiliated with a political party, but they are "informal" in the sense that they exist outside of the party's official candidate nominating structure. These independent organizations offer an alternative strategy than the parties themselves adopting (or being forced by electoral law to adopt) policies like gender quotas for their nominees. As Kreitzer and Osborn explain, primary election candidates in the U.S. "emerge through an informal and/or invisible process of local and state political party recruitment. Party chairs look for potential

candidates and try to convince them to run, and, in some cases, they might convince candidates not to run by gatekeeping them from office. The women's candidate group structure operates as a parallel set of groups that encourage, train, and support potential women candidates. This parallel operation means groups may interact with parties, but they are independent from them" (2020: 184). Many women's candidate training organizations are nonpartisan, and even the explicitly partisan or partisan-leaning ones are not part of the decision-making apparatus of their party. They prepare women candidates to succeed in their campaigns but do not control whether those women receive party endorsements or nominations.

Women's candidate training and support groups are unevenly distributed both geographically and ideologically. In their overview of the landscape of these programs in the U.S., Kreitzer and Osborn (2020) find that some women who may otherwise be interested in running for office lack access to support and training. This may be for ideological reasons. They find, for example, that nearly 75 percent of women's training organizations have an abortion opinion litmus test, the vast majority of which require women to be pro-choice. This greatly limits the options for women who are not pro-choice. In addition to partisan restrictions, access to training is also geographically uneven. Some larger states have dozens of groups candidates can choose from, and some have only a few. The growing availability of online candidate training may help bridge some of this divide, but training that is not rooted in the candidates' specific geographic

region is unable to address particular concerns that may exist in that area. The level and quality of training provided also varies considerably.

While they are aimed at increasing representational equity, training programs' cost, the time commitment required, and the networks they recruit from all limit who participates and receives their benefits. The kind of women these programs support – wealthy enough to pay for them, a flexible enough schedule to participate, already politically involved enough to be aware of them – may, in many ways, serve to reinforce existing inequalities in political representation and further marginalize those farthest from power. Some programs specifically seek to recruit participants from historically underrepresented demographic groups and offer scholarships or other assistance in attempt to level the playing field. Programming decisions by the organizations also affect what kinds of women benefit from them. Sanbonmatsu and Dittmar (2020), for example, find in their work with a nonpartisan women's candidate training program that holding networking receptions benefitting women of color, who have been historically marginalized in their candidacies for elected office and are therefore especially in need of resources, is a key best practice to diversify program participants. But not all training programs take such steps, and none of these measures are perfect. Because parties rely on informal nonprofit-run recruitment and training of women candidates rather than more standardized and formal party-led approaches, the political support landscape for women is uneven across the U.S.

There are training programs geared towards specific intersectional groups of women (e.g. Black women, Latina women, Asian American women) who have particular concerns and challenges in regard to the accessibility of political participation. For example, Higher Heights works to elect Black women, groups including Latinas Represent and Latinas United for Political Empowerment work to propel Latin American women, and there are multiple targeted diversity initiative programs for women of color connected to the Ready to Run women's campaign training organization: Run Sister Run (for Black women), Eleccion Latina, and Rising Stars (for Asian American women). While the attention (or lack of attention) paid to race and ethnicity in candidate training program discourses will be analyzed throughout these chapters, these separate racialized programs are not a central focus of this project.

U.S. women's candidate training program strategies in perspective

American women's movements to improve gender equity in political representation have tended to focus on strategies targeted at individual women, especially training programs (Maillé 2015), rather than institutional reform like campaigning for parties to adopt gender quota systems (see Dahlerup 2006 for an explanation of how policy strategies such as gender quota laws that require a certain number of women on the ballot have led to major gains in percentages of elected women around the world). These groups' strategies of preparing women candidates one-on-one for success through skill-building reflects an individualistic rather than structural approach to lessening inequality. Women in politics scholars' opinions vary on whether this approach is the

most effective choice. Political scientist Mark Rozell has described training programs as "the most viable strategy for increasing female representation in public offices at all levels" (2000: 102) in light of scholarship contending that a dearth of women candidates explains their underrepresentation more than external barriers such as voters' gender biases or structural biases of political organizations (Mezey 1994). But others point out that individualized training does not address external systemic barriers faced by women candidates that are arguably more significant (see Piscopo 2019).

Research on the significance of U.S.-based women's candidate training generally considers its effects on women's political ambition, confidence, and interest in seeking office (Sanbonmatsu 2015; Sanbonmatsu and Dittmar 2020; Schneider and Sweet-Cushman 2020). But while women gain skills through these programs, candidate training is limited in the kinds of barriers to elected office it can address. Brinkman (2017) finds that in some cases political training may actually decrease women's confidence about running for office, perhaps because learning about just how much is involved in the process is intimidating. In their study of the likelihood of women's candidate training program graduates to actually run for office, Bernhard, Shames, and Teele (2021) find that decisions to run or not may ultimately be most affected by financial constraints and a woman's position as the family breadwinner, factors entirely unrelated to the amount of skills or confidence gained through the training itself. And in a study of campaign trainings specifically for women of color, Sanbonmatsu (2015) found that participants cited structural barriers most often. As these findings show, women's candidate training

is only equipped to address some of the barriers to elected office that women may face and is by no means a panacea.

Research Field Sites and Methods

Methodological approach

This project takes an ethnographic approach involving extensive volunteering and interviews. I use a discourse analytic framework to study candidate training programs as part of complex networks of political action and examine constructions of gender and leadership expressed by practitioners and participants. In keeping with the work of linguistic anthropologists such as Naomi Quinn, "discourse" here may be considered interchangeable with "talk," meaning "language in use, either spoken or written" (2005: 4-5). I have investigated ethnographic interactions, interviews, promotional and training materials, and historical texts using this analytical frame. By examining practical interventions made by gender equality advocates and comparing the strategies used by practitioners at two field sites on opposing sides of the political spectrum, I aim to assess how programs affiliated with different political parties understand and promote women's leadership and illuminate how women in politics differentially experience inequality. Ultimately, this project aims to explore sociocultural attitudes about gender and power. As psychological anthropologist Claudia Strauss writes, "person-centered research cannot replace the vitally important study of structural conditions, public culture, and history, but it complements it by focusing on the personal meanings of those conditions, messages, and events" (2018: 5). Ethnographic studies of how individuals experience and

discuss political and social movements enrich our understandings of changing political climates by providing a more tangible understanding of the complexities and various possibilities involved in how they play out on the ground, for actual people, in relation to all of the other factors in their complicated real lives.

Introduction to the Midwest Public Leadership Series

In the summer of 2018, I began cold calling and emailing Republican women's political candidate training organizations, most of which did not respond or did not have any interest in a PhD student researcher seeking to observe and volunteer at their training sessions. I eventually connected with a program that I will refer to in this dissertation pseudonymously as the Midwest Public Leadership Series (MPLS). For a total of about eight months in the Fall of 2018 and Fall of 2019, I lived in Michigan, observed and helped set up MPLS training sessions, participated in MPLS leadership conference calls and applicant interview calls, interviewed program participants, alumnae, and leaders, and did some additional volunteer work for the organization.

MPLS was founded in 2007 by a group of women who were active in Republican politics with the goal of providing the tools and training Republican women need to run and be successful in public office as well as "to form an effective and diverse statewide political network" for Republican women in the state, per the organization's website. As one co-founder described to me, the organization was formed out of a sense of frustration that Republican women were being used as "window dressing" without substantive power in the Party. Since its founding, MPLS has hosted an intensive series of trainings

one weekend a month for seven months that serve a cohort of five to fifteen women every year. The fee for the program, which includes food and materials, was $600 as of 2020. MPLS is entirely volunteer-led. The program leaders are unpaid, and manage to facilitate the Series every year in addition to their other paid job responsibilities. The organization does not have dedicated office space but is run out of the President's home and office.

The entire operation of MPLS effectively rests on the organization's impressively well-organized President. She books trainers, recruits trainees, keeps track of program contacts and emails, and generally performs almost all of the incredible amount of planning and labor associated with keeping the program running. She is in charge of recruitment, reads all applications, conducts all applicant interviews over the phone along with the Vice President, and even cooks breakfasts and lunches for each training session at her home and transports it to the training locations. A master networker, she often refers to her "sticky web" of contacts built from past and present professional experiences as a political staffer, lobbyist, trainer, leader and board member for multiple political training groups. She follows the motto, often repeated at trainings, that "bridges are meant to be crossed, not burned" in collecting these diverse contacts. Training sessions are held in spaces owned by supportive partner organizations who donate the use of their buildings on training weekends, including the state Republican Party and housing and transportation trade associations.

Training topics covered by MPLS include understanding how state legislative priorities are set, lobbying, the state constitution, Republican Party organization, the

political appointment process, the importance of Republican women's voices, leadership strategies, developing a campaign plan, social media and media relations, public speaking and messaging, organizing and outreach tactics, fundraising, and on-camera communications. Trainers and presenters include elected officials, consultants, lobbyists, and other political and leadership industry professionals who volunteer their time and expertise.

In an effort to appeal to more women, the President of MPLS characterizes the program as leadership training rather than specifically candidate training. While the program members learn about political matters like current policy debates and the state constitution, it is not expected that all of them will necessarily go on to run for elected office. MPLS training, the President hopes, is useful for women preparing for leadership positions in business or their communities as well as those program members who go on to work for public officials as political staffers or for policy organizations.

Introduction to Step Up

I connected with the Democratic organization that I will refer to in this dissertation pseudonymously as Step Up (SU) through political scientists in my academic network who had previously conducted research with the program. After an email introduction to staff members, I relocated to California in late December 2018 to volunteer in the SU office, observe and volunteer at training sessions, participate in the applicant interview process, and interview program participants, alumnae, and leadership. I left in April 2019, and returned in late December 2019 to once again volunteer full-

time. When the coronavirus pandemic began in 2020, SU began holding training sessions virtually, and I continued to work for the organization remotely. In sum, I spent a total of about seven months volunteering and conducting in-person research with SU in early 2019 and early 2020, and I continued to observe and work part-time for the organization remotely in between fieldwork sessions and after they pivoted to virtual training.

SU was founded by a small group of women in the Bay Area who were working on political campaigns and wanted to provide more women candidates with the tools to run and win. The organization now trains two to three regional cohorts each year across California. Each region accepts a maximum of 25 participants to attend weekend training workshops once a month from January through June. In their applications, applicants must identify a specific political office they plan to run for within the next three years. The tuition fee for the program as of 2022 was $1,500, with available scholarships of up to $750. Unlike MPLS, SU also requires each participant to meet an additional $1,000 fundraising goal for the program during the training period. Also unlike the volunteer-led MPLS, SU is run by several full-time and part-time staff members who work remotely from different areas of the state. Staff include former political staffers and policy advocates. Similarly to MPLS, training sessions are held in spaces owned by supportive partner organizations who donate the use of their buildings on training weekends, including the state Democratic Party and various labor and community organizations. Training topics include fundraising, public speaking, messaging and campaign communications, campaign strategy and networking, field operations, and racial justice

and equity. Trainers and presenters include elected officials, labor and Democratic Party representatives, and an array of consultants who work in the political, communications and leadership, and diversity, equity, and inclusion fields.

Data overview

The discourse and ethnographic data used in this dissertation is drawn from observing 27 full-day in-person women's candidate trainings (14 MPLS trainings, 11 SU trainings, and 2 nonpartisan trainings), additional partisan and nonpartisan shorter in-person and virtual candidate training workshops (SU pivoted to conducting their training virtually after the onset of COVID-19), and in-depth interviews with 50 women's candidate training program participants and leaders of varying races, sexualities, and class backgrounds. As with much anthropological research that uses qualitative methods, the goal of this research was not an exhaustive overview of the candidate training industry or a massive or representative sample size of interviewees. Detailed conversations with practitioners and immersion in political candidate training workshops provide a depth rather than breadth of knowledge and, hopefully, a richer understanding of interlocutors' experiences. I collected training discourse data in the form of recorded audio data and extensive field notes, and have been able to compare the strategies used by practitioners at my two main field sites in order to assess how programs affiliated with different political parties understand and promote women's leadership. I obtained a total of ~100 hours of recorded audio data from my two main field sites (2905 minutes or 48.4 hours from MPLS and 3104 minutes or 51.7 hours from SU). I observed many more

hours of trainings at these field sites and with other partisan and nonpartisan training programs for which I have copious field notes but not audio recordings. In interviews, I aimed to gather explicit instances of gendered discourse, such as references to stereotypical leadership formulations (e.g. "women leaders tend to…") and barriers to political involvement (e.g. "it is harder for women to succeed because…") along with implicitly gendered discourse, such as the association of women with traits like "nurturing." My training observation and interview data is discussed in greater detail in the preface.

Fieldwork and "Real Life"

As is the experience of many anthropologists, at some point in the fieldwork process my research blended together with my sense of self and purpose until advocating for women to get elected became something I was doing with my life in addition to something I studied as an outside observer. During my fieldwork stints from 2018 to 2020, I volunteered as an unpaid intern with MPLS and SU and was financially supported by funding from the University of Pennsylvania and the National Science Foundation. Shortly after I left the field, SU offered to hire me for a paid part-time remote position. I accepted. The extra earnings were helpful for a graduate student with tenuous funding, although I wondered at the time how formally joining myself to one of the programs as a staff member would both affect my access to the other program and potentially change how open interviewees were with their opinions about the organization that was now cutting me a paycheck. The move certainly lessened whatever scholarly objectivity I can

claim, but by becoming a member of the SU team I gained a far deeper insider's understanding of all aspects of the training organization as well as an invaluable community of kind and supportive coworkers. Over the last few years I have also attended political candidate rallies and participated in protests, including Women's Marches, sometimes alongside others involved in SU and sometimes on my own behalf.

As the anthropologist and musician Aaron Fox writes in his ethnography of music and working-class culture in Texas, "'fieldwork' and 'real life' have become mixed up for me. And that makes for some problems applying a rhetorical filter called 'ethnography'" (2004: 62). Theory and praxis, and my ethnographic and "real life" engagement in the world of women's candidacy training organizations and political advocacy, are indelibly intertwined. Scholarly analysis from this position is trickier, and my blind spots undoubtedly larger. But my subjective understanding and the depth of my relationships with interlocutors-turned-friends is greater too. By reflecting on and acknowledging my position as a women's candidate training organization staff member as well as a researcher and my personal commitment to the cause of gender equity in political representation, I hope to help lift the veil from ethnographic research and its potential shortcomings and biases while still demonstrating its power for developing nuanced and contextualized understandings of people, groups, and social movements.

Overview of Chapters

In the chapters that follow, I examine training program strategies as well as outline, illustrate, analyze, compare and contextualize discourses expressed by political

training program participants, with the goal of connecting this research to broader questions about gender and power. Chapter two centers on fundamental understandings of the differences – if any – women bring to leadership. I provide background information on political leadership literature and theoretical approaches to gender, and then explore ethnographic findings and gendered discourses about leadership and representation in women's candidate training programs. In examining various understandings of gender identity and what it means to be a woman and woman leader, I consider how advocates for women's political representation across the political spectrum envision a future with more women in power. Relating to this dissertation's broad theme of continuity and change, do they envision women leading similarly to men who have historically been in power, or do they advocate for different ways of wielding power? I find that while individual interlocutors' approaches to this question vary, the Democratic program publicly espouses a "female boosterism" (Alexander and Andersen 1993) stance claiming that women's leadership is different and will improve government, while the Republican program makes no specific public claims about women leading differently or changing how government operates.

Chapter three builds on these findings to consider in greater detail how political party cultural values and communication frames bear on how women's candidate training programs operate as well as how practitioners' discuss gender and leadership. Partisan commitments to identity politics materially affect how much support women candidates and their training organizations receive, and party cultural values also shape how

programs and participants rhetorically position themselves as outsider change-makers or establishment insiders, relating to the theme of continuity and change. I find that the Democratic program's public discourses reflect their party's traditions of bottom-up change and protest, while the Republican program's public discourses – despite the fact that Republican women tend to receive less robust support from party elites and institutions – reflect their party's conservatism and pragmatic maintaining of existing systems. A surprising finding is that in some cases, interlocutors' discourses about leadership styles depart from and even reverse the approaches to leadership typically associated with their party per Lakoff (1996), complicating theories of leadership that focus solely on party without regard to leaders' gender.

Chapter four delves more deeply into the semiotics of women's candidate training programs and practitioners' metarepresentations of leadership. It examines how assumptions inherent in training topics and discussions of women's leadership reflect sociocultural norms, including tensions between trainers' strategies for success in the political world as they understand it to exist currently and their ideals and hopes for change in the future. What "signs" are associated with successful (women) candidates? Considering political representation as a semiotic process allows for an investigation of democratic representation and electability as linked to semiotic representation, and reflective of surrounding sociocultural norms and ideologies. I examine how training programs and aspiring women candidates go about the transformational process of developing leadership qualities, in light of the gender ideologies and political party

cultural values surrounding them discussed in chapters one and two. I find that while many representations of leadership skills and qualities are consistent across political party lines, some are distinctive – such as Democrats' greater emphasis on using emotion as a messaging tool, a strategy that reflects their party's more stereotypically "feminized" approach to leadership that represents a shift from more traditional styles.

I intend for this dissertation to have both scholarly value and practical utility for advocates working to broaden democratic participation. Chapter five addresses the latter concern. It continues the preceding chapter's situated, close focus on women's candidate training program and practitioners' discourses, but explores specifically how the programs' gendered nature affects the benefits participants receive, with special attention paid to the programs' network-building function. I analyze discourses about "sisterhood" and "safe spaces" to assess how participants gender the process of training and its transformative process and draw out dimensions of contrast between political parties. I examine the importance of this gendering of the training space in relation to the effectiveness of the programs' strategies of confidence-building and network-building, consider what barriers to candidacy the programs ameliorate, and compare and unpack the similarities and differences in trainees' experiences. I find that while candidate training, as argued by some political scholars, does not address systemic and structural barriers to candidacy due to its focus on individual skill-building (see Piscopo 2019), longer-term, cohort-based programs have the potential to build powerful social networks that serve as avenues for fundraising and mentorship and can help mitigate some external

barriers to candidacy. This network-building aspect promotes broader participation in the democratic process by expanding a more egalitarian alternative to elite insider networks.

Finally, chapter six concludes the dissertation by considering the findings about gender ideologies and political ideologies at play in women's candidate training from the preceding chapters in light of historical partisan commitments to the gender binary. I argue that the difference in ideological orientations to gender and leadership across the two partisan groups is surprising, because while rightwing gender-related movements have historically tended to mobilize around understandings of the distinctive values of masculine and feminine (Butler 2021), it is the leftwing group that mobilizes around gender difference and the perceived benefits of feminine leadership today. This indicates how advocates' gender ideologies cannot always be assumed based on their political ideologies. I consider what factors may have led to this shift and the difficulties of navigating an overtly gendered space that arise for members of each political party. While Republicans must square a desire to provide women with special assistance with a desire for meritocracy in politics, Democrats face tensions between supporting and promoting women on the basis of women's unique qualities and the movement away from gender binarism and essentialism.

CHAPTER 2: WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN UNITED STATES POLITICS: DESCRIPTIVE VS. SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION

Why Women? Perceived Benefits of Women's Leadership

Before turning to analyses of women's candidate training programs as part of the broader social space of political action and as sites of metarepresentational processes, it is valuable to consider scholarly and sociocultural understandings of how political leadership is gendered more broadly. This context lays the terrain for analysis of how contemporary activists' formulations of women's leadership reflect, or depart from, established norms and stereotypes and adds richness to analyses of partisanship and semiotic leadership formulations in later chapters. In this chapter, I will examine program leaders' and participants' discourses and strategies in light of political scholarship on gender and leadership, including "female boosterism" (Alexander and Andersen 1993), a notion based on an ideology of gender difference that justifies descriptive representation by positing that women are different and better leaders than men.

Men have long occupied most positions of authority and power in United States politics (although it should be noted that this may not have been the case in the pre-colonial Americas – see Velez 2014 for a discussion of matriarchy and women's leadership among Native Americans). However, there is a growing movement to elect more women to office spearheaded by support organizations like political action committees (PACs), candidate training programs, and other research and advocacy initiatives. In her discussion of new directions in the anthropology of critique, resistance,

and activism, Sherry Ortner (2016) describes how the ethnographic study of social movements helps us explore the range of ways individuals challenge the existing order and envision the future. Following this, *why* do those involved in women's support organizations challenge the existing order to promote women's leadership? Do those who are active in this movement believe women lead substantively differently from men, or is their aim in electing women to put a new face on existing institutions and styles of leadership? In other words, do support and training programs aim to propel women into office by helping them be more like the men who have historically been in power and adopt masculine leadership strategies, or do women's leadership organizations advocate for different ways of wielding power?

After an overview of political leadership literature and theories about gender to establish context, this chapter explores gendered discourses about leadership and representation in women's candidate training programs and what, if anything, women in particular are believed to bring to the table. Klar (2018) finds in one experimental survey that political women do not tend to show gender solidarity across party lines because Republican and Democratic women have differing understandings of gender identity and what it means to be a woman. Without this common understanding, they fail to perceive themselves as members of one superordinate category of common identity that might overcome partisan differences. How, then, do advocates for women's political representation across the political spectrum envision a future in which more women serve in office, and how do they think the government will change?

Gender and Political Leadership in Scholarship and Media

Before considering gendered leadership discourses that circulate in candidate training programs and among practitioners, it is important to understand the broader cultural context the organizations and interlocutors operate in. What is the significance of gender to leadership according to scholars, and what sociocultural understandings of women's leadership circulate in the U.S.?

Perceptions of women's leadership

Many political and social psychological studies over the past several decades have focused on gender as a factor in the attribution of leadership traits (Alexander and Andersen 1993), the rating of elected officials' job performance (Mend, Bell, and Bath 1976), and broader related topics including how academic competence is perceived (Fidell 1970; Simpson 1970), how emotional maturity and social competence is perceived (Broverman et al. 1972), the attribution of success (Deaux and Emswiller 1974), and the rating of artistic performance (Goldberg 1968; Pheterson, Kiesler, and Goldberg 1971), among many other gender-related investigations. For political candidates specifically, the attribution of different issue expertise for men and women candidates (Sapiro 1981) and different perceptions of candidate strength and power based on gender (Gitelson and Gitelson 1981) have long been studied.

In 1993, political researchers Alexander and Andersen found that gender role beliefs may predispose people to view women politicians more or less favorably. Voters with more egalitarian gender role attitudes were more likely to favorably evaluate actual

female candidates both in traditional "feminine" and "masculine" terms, whereas those with traditional sex role beliefs tended to have a less positive view of women candidates' attributes. These attitudes about gender roles may help explain the partisan disparities found by researchers that show how Democratic women candidates are more likely to receive support from their party members (especially men in the party), political elites, and donors than Republican women candidates (Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018), whose party is more associated with traditional understandings of gender and family roles. Alexander and Andersen explain the egalitarians' seemingly "stereotypical" perception of female candidates as potentially a form of "female boosterism," where those "who espouse egalitarian sex roles at the same time view the skills and traits of women candidates as both 'different' and 'better'" (1993: 540). The "female boosterism" gender-essentializing stance that men and women lead differently but women's styles can be better is apparent in Democratic women's candidate training program discourses highlighting the benefits women leaders bring, and contrasts with the more "gender neutral" (in quotes because gender neutrality corresponds to a masculine standard) approach found in Republican program discourses, which emphasize meritocratic ideals and support for the most qualified candidate. This contrast is discussed in greater detail below.

We can also connect Alexander and Andersen's (1993) notion of "female boosterism" to the ideology that scholars in the 1980s and 1990s dubbed "difference feminism," or the belief that men and women may deserve equal treatment but are

fundamentally different. This approach contrasts with "equality feminism," which focuses instead on similarities between men and women as the basis for equal treatment. The notion of women's leadership being different (and better!) than men's is apparent in interviews with interlocutors, including one Democratic political candidate and SU participant who explained, "whether [women] are Republican or Democrat, they work together better," reflecting the common association of women leaders with collaboration and cooperation, as discussed more below.

Women leaders, violence and polarization

Do scholars contend that women lead and govern differently in regard to collaboration and civility – potential antidotes to the polarization and violence inherent in the contemporary political climate? It is often cited as a problem in media, and polls show that polarization and violent political rhetoric in the U.S. is indeed increasing. Pew research on political polarization from 2014 and 2017 shows that ideological overlap between the two major political parties has diminished since the 1990s, and partisan animosity has greatly increased, with the percentage of those in each party viewing the other party "very unfavorably" more than doubling from 1994 to 2017 (Pew Research Center 2014, 2017). A 2019 survey showed that negative sentiments toward members of the opposing party had deepened even more, with majorities in both parties asserting that they do not even share *nonpolitical* values and goals with members of the opposing party, and 73 percent of respondents agreeing that voters in both parties "not only disagree over plans and policies, but also cannot agree on basic facts" (Pew Research Center 2019).

These are concerning figures for those who wish for a functional democracy, and indeed, about half of respondents in each party said they are "very concerned" about increasing partisan division. Majorities in both parties describe both parties as at least somewhat "too extreme" (Ibid.).

As Heltzel and Laurin (2020) describe, polarization can be helpful, as citizens become increasingly engaged and help disrupt undesirable status quos, paving the way for pluralistic policy alternatives. Yet polarized citizens who refuse to engage with each other make constructive policy debate impossible, leading to the breakdown of democracy. As Engels (2015) describes, the current "politics of resentment," in which people feel morally validated when they hate their "evil" political enemies, leads to inherent violence in much political talk. The symbolic violence of casting people you disagree with as your enemy and dehumanizing them, as often occurs with the extreme partisan polarization of today, has the dangerous potential to turn into physical violence. Engels cites the 2011 shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords as an example of physical political violence, but we may point to the more recent example of the right-wing insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, which was fueled by President Trump's rhetoric.

Might increasing the numbers of women leaders somehow improve collaboration and civility or diminish polarization and violent rhetoric? Stereotypical understandings of femininity characterize women as less aggressive and more communally-minded and likely to compromise. This notion is evident in discourses about women's more

collaborative leadership style and/or willingness to work across the aisle expressed by interlocutors at both MPLS and SU, and the claim is supported by research including Blankenship and Robson (1995) and Thomas and Wineinger (2020). See below for a more in-depth discussion of collaboration and community-related discourse and scholarship in regard to women's leadership.

Despite some evidence and ubiquitous conventional wisdom that women are more collaboratively-minded than men, valuing consensus-building and inclusion rather than aggressively considering the political opposition to be a hated enemy, individual women leaders certainly have contributed to violent political rhetoric and a climate of polarization. For example, Engels describes former "mama grizzly" Vice Presidential nominee and Alaska Governor Sarah Palin as "a central figure in the deterioration of American public discourse" (2015: 103) because her rhetoric's symbolic efficacy is drawn from appeals to violence. "Palin's persona," he explains, "has been tied from the beginning to the violent side of the American psyche, the side that goes rogue, the side that calls for a duel at high noon and justice with a shotgun, the side that says don't tread on me; liberty or death; take no prisoners; full speed ahead; let's roll; bring it on," and this style and rhetoric "taps into a long American tradition of violent talk and metaphor, a tradition built on the centrality of violence to the American experience" (Ibid.). As Sarah Palin illustrates, women can certainly participate in the glorification of traditionally-masculine violence. The double bind of balancing seeming tough enough without seeming too harsh may be difficult for women to navigate (see chapter four for a more in-

depth discussion of women candidates' leadership double bind). As one SU participant and candidate for state-level office explained, "there's an expression I know for women candidates that you're supposed to be 'tough as nails and warm as toast.'"

Rather than a women-led government necessarily leading to a less polarized political climate, the shape of future power wielded by women will no doubt vary greatly depending on the individual woman's approach and the political party culture that surrounds her. At one MPLS training, a public speaking trainer played a music video from Mongolian folk rock band The HU for their song "Wolf Totem" during a lunch break, describing them with appreciation as "a *man* band," as opposed to the "boy bands" of the day. The stark video, featuring horseback and motorcycle riders in the desert dressed in biker leather, combines heavy metal with Mongolian throat singing. The HU's overt masculinity and hearkening to cowboy culture appealed to a woman weary of Top 40 American boy bands. They are not American, but the band's persona of toughness and ruggedness being celebrated by a Republican consultant indicates the continued centrality of Palin's brand of "justice with a shotgun, don't tread on me" conservative rhetoric.

Policy focus and the perception of gendered issue expertise

Are there commonalities among women leaders in terms of their policy focuses? Studies point to women leaders' increased emphasis on policy relating to domestic issues such as education, health, welfare, women's rights, and family life (see Thomas 1994; Taylor-Robinson and Heath 2008) – areas viewed as "women's issues." This focus, and the perception of it, may be coming under increased scrutiny by women leaders

themselves. Vice President Kamala Harris has stated that when people ask her about "women's issues," her go-to response is, "I'm so glad you want to talk about the economy!" (2019). Yet a broadly-held perception that women are more equipped to deal with domestic issues remains. As Goddard (2019) points out, for example, women government officials in European democracies remain less likely to be appointed to ministries farther from domestic issues, such as defense, finance, and foreign affairs.

Ideologies rooted in gender difference that hold that women are fundamentally different from men versus those that emphasize gender sameness and that women and men are fundamentally similar and equally capable may be considered in relation to the policy focuses of elected leaders. As political scientist Sue Thomas (1994) describes, in a context where some areas are viewed as "women's issues," women politicians must carefully navigate their perceived issue expertise on domestic matters. If they play into the popular perception of women's superior knowledge and skills regarding domestic issues like education and social welfare, it may be beneficial at times when the electorate desires leaders who focus on improving the lives of average Americans. One can imagine how this would be a particularly powerful strategy for Democratic candidates, considering their party's greater focus on feminized social welfare issues. But playing into perceived issue expertise also risks pigeonholing women elected leaders into domestic policy roles, limiting their political input in other areas, and ultimately hurting their chances of success in situations where the electorate is more concerned with, for example, foreign policy. This may be particularly harmful to Republican women

candidates, considering their party's relatively greater focus on masculinized defense and security issues.

Nearly thirty years ago, Thomas (1994) predicted that those seeking to increase the numbers of women in political office would disagree on which approach to take in regard to perceived gendered issue expertise. She anticipated that "some strategists will opt to portray women as no different from men, and others, with a variety of justifications, will highlight their differences from them," and continued, "the broadest view shows [women] to be interested and active in the full range of legislative issues and activities and competent across the board. …Only when the public is given the opportunity to promote women based on their individual strengths and weaknesses and their evolving collective proclivities will they be true equals in the political world" (Thomas 1994: 158). In other words, Thomas argues that while some strategies to promote women's leadership will emphasize their similarities to men and some will emphasize their differences, any individual leader's competencies of course can involve any of the full range of all issues. True political equality, therefore, will emerge only when voters are free of gendered assumptions and view individual women candidates on their own merits and expertise.

Aspects of Thomas' prediction have proven prescient. Interlocutors' and women's candidate training programs' public-facing discourses and strategies indeed vary on how they emphasize women's collective difference from or similarity to men. Many claim that women bring a fundamentally different and better leadership style and values to elected

office, aligning with Alexander and Andersen's "female boosterism" (1993) notion, while others focus more on simple representational fairness and women's ability to be equally as effective as men in elected office. As discussed at greater length in the final chapter of this dissertation, the unexpected aspect to how these two approaches have played out is that while the left side of the political spectrum was associated with "equality feminism" and its associated "politics of sameness" emphasizing men's and women's fundamental similarities and equal capabilities in the 1970s and 1980s, the left-leaning, Democratic SU now firmly embraces a "politics of difference" approach in their public, explicit claims that women bring fundamentally different positive values and qualities to political leadership. Their website states that women have "a value set that prioritizes collaboration, innovation, community and the common good" for example.

These discussions of sameness and difference standards reflect and conceal, in the words of feminist legal scholar Catharine MacKinnon, "the substantive way in which man has become the measure of all things" (1987: 34). Whether women are measured by their correspondence and proximity with man or by their lack of correspondence and distance from him, masculinity is the referent either way. "Approaching sex discrimination in this way—as if sex questions are difference questions and equality questions are sameness questions—provides two ways for the law to hold women to a male standard and call that sex equality" (MacKinnon 1987: 34). Whether political training and support organizations celebrate women's leadership as different (and better) than men's or insist on a "gender neutral" view that women are equally good at leading in

a similar way to men, they reinforce both a binary understanding of gender and masculinity as the baseline from which to measure.

Training Programs' Public-Facing Discourses About Women's Leadership

Turning now from the broader surrounding sociocultural context and theoretical understandings of political leadership and gender, we can explore how candidate training programs for women and their participants frame and navigate gender essentializing generalizations about "women's leadership." Following scholars like Blankenship and Robson (1995), it is important to note that strategies drawn from a spectrum of more "feminine" or "masculine" political leadership styles may be used by candidates of any gender. For example, Tolleson-Rinehart (2001) found in her interviews with mayors of large U.S. cities that men executives may be as likely or more likely than women executives to claim that politics is more about cooperation than conflict and admire "feminine" nurturant qualities like concern for people and listening. Furthermore, the political parties themselves are gendered institutions and the Democratic Party is associated with more stereotypically feminine communication frames and values than the Republican Party, as discussed in more detail below. Candidate training programs for women focus on electing candidates who identify as women and, if the programs are partisan, as members of their respective political party. How is women's leadership discussed, what, if any, implicit value is placed on leading in a "feminine" or "masculine" way, and how does political party factor in?

Democratic female boosterism: women are different (and better!)

The notion that women and men lead in fundamentally, substantively different ways goes beyond claims that having women in office would be a positive step for equality in representation, a benefit to young girls who would gain politician role models, or generally lead to better policy solutions through a greater diversity of perspectives. This embracing of both egalitarianism (women deserve equal rights and opportunities) and gender essentialism that emphasizes how women's qualities are *different* from men's but also *better* reflects what Alexander and Andersen (1993) term "female boosterism." This attitude characterizes discourses expressed by interlocutors on both sides of the aisle, but it is especially prominent among Democratic training program interlocutors and features heavily in public-facing Democratic program marketing materials.

Step Up states on their website, "it has been women leaders… who have been recognized for leading their communities through crisis. Their leadership is based on honesty, compassion, integrity, fact and science, on the desire to protect and serve the most vulnerable among them, and to prioritize what is right and moral above politics." They claim that women leaders prioritize "collaboration, innovation, community and the common good," and argue that, "if we want to live in a world that gives everyone the opportunity to succeed and recognizes the humanity of each and every one of us, we must elect more women." The highlighting of women leaders' positive characteristics and claims that electing more women will improve the world evidence a "female boosterism"

stance that women bring special and beneficial leadership qualities to their roles in elected office.

The SU website contends that "studies have shown women in elected office overwhelmingly support and push forward democratic principles like equality and fairness. When women hold public office they are more actively involved in a variety of gender-salient issue areas, including healthcare, the economy, education and the environment. Women legislators are more responsive to constituents, value cooperation over hierarchical power and find ways to engineer solutions in situations where men have trouble finding common ground." As discussed earlier in this chapter, this stance – that women lead differently and better than men – reflects what scholars in the 1980s dubbed "difference feminism," or the belief that men and women may deserve equal treatment but are fundamentally different, rather than "equality feminism" which focuses on similarities between genders i.e. women can do anything men can do. While the left side of the political spectrum was historically associated with "equality feminism" and its associated "politics of sameness," the left-leaning, overtly Democratic SU now embraces a "politics of difference" approach in their claims that women bring different values and qualities to political leadership.

Republican meritocracy: women are equally capable of being the best candidate

In contrast with the above public statements made by Step Up about how women's leadership is different from men's and will change government for the better, the Midwest Public Leadership Series makes no public claims about what qualities

women in particular may bring to elected office in their marketing materials. While the MPLS website makes it clear that the program seeks to recruit and train Republican women, there is no mention of *why* it is important to elect more of them in terms of gendered leadership qualities. Instead, the emphasis is solely on more equal representation of women in government as well as a more equal representation of conservative women among the women in government (Republican women are vastly outnumbered by Democratic women in elected office and among voters).

As stated on the MPLS website, "MPLS realizes there is a real need to recruit and train Republican women." The program's goal, as stated on the home page, is "to form an effective and diverse statewide political network for Michigan Republican Women." They explain that, "Midwest Public Leadership Series wants to make sure CONSERVATIVE VOICES are heard. MPLS is the ONLY program in the state of Michigan training REPUBLICAN women to be leaders" (emphasis in original). The organization is concerned not only with increasing women's involvement in politics (as the MPLS application states, "Applicants must display a commitment to the process of building a tradition of full participation of women in politics and government") but more specifically with increasing the number of *Republican* women. Of course the converse is also true of SU – these are explicitly partisan programs and trainees must be registered members of the proper party. But unlike SU, MPLS does not make any broader claims implying a universal womanhood, gendered leadership characteristics, or desire to change politics significantly or adopt any specific policies.

Strikingly, the 2021 mission statement included in the MPLS email newsletter stated, “The women who win, win because they are the best candidate on the ballot, NOT because they are a woman,” a position contrasting with SU’s public implications that women (should) win because they are inherently good leaders. This stance reflects the Republican party culture’s general aversion to identity politics, discussed more in chapter three, which leads MPLS to publicly walk a fine line between promoting women as an identity group and maintaining a commitment to gender neutrality. MPLS’ publicly stated focus on the importance of (Republican) women’s participation in politics and government does not include any assertions about what women in particular may bring to the table.

Leadership expectations for applicants

SU publicly asserts that women lead differently and will improve government, while MPLS simply promotes greater participation of women in government without making any specific leadership claims. How are the programs’ understandings of women’s leadership reflected in their application materials and what leadership criteria must applicants fit?

While the length of the programs’ application materials varies greatly (SU’s application is much longer), both MPLS and SU ask applicants about their accomplishments, what they hope to get out of the program, and their plans for the future. As of 2021, neither application asked outright about applicants’ leadership values or styles per se other than confirming their membership in their respective party. But the SU

application does include a question asking applicants to "Describe an example of a time that you brought people from disparate groups together to achieve a common goal," which implies that applicants' ability to collaborate is valued. There is no question that emphasizes cooperation in this vein in the MPLS application, which asks about applicants' life and career achievements in an open-ended manner.

Since 2020, SU has deepened their commitment to racial justice. They released a statement following the murder of George Floyd outlining their commitment to recruit more Black women and improve their social and racial justice training. The SU application for the Class of 2021 and forward included a new question dedicated to racial justice: "Step Up recruits and trains self-identified women interested in promoting racial justice and advocating for anti-racist systems change. Please share your commitment to racial justice and equity with us. If you are just beginning to take an active role in this work, please share ways you are committed to deepening your commitment." So, beyond the understanding that program participants be dedicated to their political party, SU also expects participants to demonstrate their ability to bring people together, reflecting the stereotypically "feminine" leadership quality of collaboration, and to advocate for racial justice – something that the organization considers central to their mission of electing leaders who reflect the diversity of their constituencies and will develop policies centering equity.

Contextualizing Women's Candidate Training in the Contemporary Moment

2020 and racial justice

The surrounding social and political climate affects what candidate training programs focus on. Four years after the pivotal 2016 election, 2020 marked another watershed year as the COVID-19 pandemic, movement for racial justice, and unseating of incumbent President Donald Trump loomed large. The political and social climate in the U.S. and uprising for racial justice following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 spurred SU leadership to revise their marketing materials, application questions, and training curriculum to prioritize racial justice. Equity is emphasized in the program's vision for a future of women in power. As the SU website states, "Our vision is a just and equitable world that has been reimagined and rebuilt by elected leaders who have the experience, passion and resolve to fight. We are intentional about recruiting Democratic self-identified women from groups that have been historically underrepresented in politics because we know they will bring their life experiences into elected office to make institutional change. This is why we train, and this is why we do so with this purpose in mind. Woven throughout the training curriculum for the Class of 2021 will be a focus on how to fight for racial justice and equity as a candidate and elected leader." The decision to expand their "campaigning for justice" training content from one day to a full weekend, plus the addition of ongoing racial justice discussions woven throughout the six months of training sessions, highlights the topic's centrality and SU's move to become an anti-racist organization. In 2021, they adopted new language emphasizing their vision for

the future that focuses on not just Democratic women, but more specifically on propelling Black, Brown and Indigenous women, women under 40, LGBTQ+, and unmarried women, into office.

While MPLS aims to introduce program members to all sides of current political issues (e.g. featuring speakers who are both for and against the legalization of cannabis in Michigan), issues of racism and social justice are, unsurprisingly for a Republican group, absent from training content. The organization does not take specific stances on political issues, other than promoting conservatism. MPLS described the program's goals as "building a tradition of full participation of women in politics and government" in the 2019-2020 class application, and developing a network of Republican women in the state who, in the program President's words, will hold substantive political roles rather than serve as "window dressing" for the party. Beyond general political conservatism, MPLS' public written materials emphasize no specific policies, goals, hopes, or directives for graduates of the program or women leaders more broadly. Participants' discourses, however, reference women's abilities to "build bridges" and hopes for more civility or efficiency in leadership with the election of more women, for example. Rather than expressing hopes that graduates will change existing political institutions, as SU does, MPLS as an organization encourages the inclusion of more Republican women in existing institutions. This reflects the findings of women in politics scholars like Swers (2018) and Wineinger (2018) that Republican women leaders are more likely to provide a

different perspective or serve as a new face for existing party messaging but not change policy focuses or promote substantively different messages.

The COVID-19 pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, several women national executives gained positive global media coverage for effectively and compassionately leading their countries through the disaster. For example, the headline of one Forbes article from April 2020 reads, "What Do Countries With The Best Coronavirus Responses Have In Common? Women Leaders." New Zealand, Germany, and Taiwan feature in the piece as examples where women heads of state led their nations through crisis with "empathy and care," and the author argues that women's leadership styles have proven to be both different from men's and beneficial (Wittenberg-Cox 2020).

Such articles were numerous throughout 2020. However, as political scientist and scholar of women in politics Jennifer Piscopo explains, "the connection between women leaders and superior pandemic performance is likely spurious" (2020). Piscopo points out that this narrative, while offered in good faith, is misleading because women currently govern "precisely the kinds of countries that should mount effective pandemic responses: wealthy democracies with high state capacity," meaning that the states women lead tend to feature wealthy and functional governments that have the means to effectively carry out policies. We would expect these kinds of states to have lower coronavirus mortality regardless of their leaders' gender. Still, Piscopo argues that leaders' gender may affect pandemic performance in that women leaders may be more likely to expand pandemic-

related social spending, and they certainly upend stereotypical associations between effective chief executives and masculinity. “Ardern and Merkel confound gendered expectations about women’s fragility, acting with level-headedness while Bolsonaro and Trump bluster futilely,” explains Piscopo (2020). Combining this level-headed unflappability with empathy may help shift how the public evaluates women heads of state.

While women chief executives’ gender may not have substantively affected their nations’ responses to COVID-19, gender stereotypes of men as competitive and aggressive leaders and women as more communal and compassionate ones remain. The expectation that women are the more communal gender has actually increased over the last several decades, according to public opinion polls (see Eagly et al. 2020). Yet we can quickly point out women leaders who do not fit the “compassionate” mold. Consider “Iron Lady” British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, whose persona is described by political scientist Jennifer Lawless as “certainly not warm and fuzzy” (Metzler 2013). Whether understandings of women in leadership as more empathetic, compassionate, etc. are borne out by empirical studies or are simply entrenched stereotypical perceptions that do not always reflect reality, such gender essentializing notions are broadly shared and feature in discourses from many interlocutors on both sides of the aisle.

Leadership and Candidacy in Interlocutor Discourses

Turning from the candidate training organizations’ public-facing and promotional discourse to incorporate participant interview data, we can examine and compare how

ideologically diverse program participants and leaders understand the significance of gender in relation to leadership. Do women leaders differ from men? How do political party values and communication styles come into play? While MPLS' public discourse does not evince women's difference from or superiority to men as political leaders, in more private conversation some Republican interlocutors expressed how women are different or better – reflecting the tension between their political party's support for gender neutrality ideals and their support for women's leadership.

How do training program participants discuss womanhood and what women bring to the decision-making table? Several Republican women I interviewed discussed how women leaders in general were more likely to collaborate and reach across the aisle, or to really listen to their constituents. Other interlocutors were reluctant to make sweeping statements about the significance of gender identity. When I asked one young woman going through the Republican training program if she thought women brought something different to the table in politics, she replied, "I think that anyone can bring anything to the table. …I guess, yes… but so can men." This stands in contrast to many of the SU trainees' attitudes about women's distinctive leadership and the SU board president's opening remarks at the first training, which included "I have found working in politics and for many years in the state legislature that women legislate differently than men once they got elected. And oftentimes, we campaign differently." Discourses that highlight the shared characteristics of and challenges for women as a group reflect at least some elements of a universal understanding of womanhood.

Does support for women as a group cross ideological boundaries? For some, it does – at least in theory. As one Democratic interlocutor who was participating in SU and planning a run for statewide office in a rural district described, "whether [women] are Republican or Democrat, they work together better… if I could have a moderate woman at the table, who's a Republican with a conservative point of view, versus some of these kind of good ol' boy guys that are going to turn everything into low grade propaganda and stomp their feet, you know, fists and hold everything hostage? Absolutely I'd rather have her at the table. I do think that there's a strong need for women with those points of view." She considered the possibility of working with a Republican woman more desirable than working with a "good ol' boy guy" and acknowledged that Republican women's voices were needed in leadership.

Not every interlocutor agreed that there may be benefits to women's leadership regardless of party or that women as a group shared certain characteristics. One SU trainee, a Black woman running for School Board in a southern California district, explained "I can't even say 'women' in general, because then you get caught into this thing where we have this women purity complex. You know, like 'because this woman is pure' and all this stuff, and then don't even talk to me about white women… this idea that women are pure… I don't think that that is the case, I think the government can be just as cutthroat with women as it is with men, to be totally frank. I think what we need to find is progressive people who will stand by progressive values." This account places more emphasis on political solidarity than gender solidarity.

Women's Governance Discourses

How do women who are interested in running for office imagine a future with more women in power? I asked interlocutors if they thought the government would be different if there were mostly women in charge. If so, how would it change? Individuals presented an array of discourses, from women-as-panacea for the government's ills to skepticism that having mostly women in power would be beneficial, as outlined below.

As mentioned above, Step Up and the Midwest Public Leadership Series' public promotional discourses, unlike individual interlocutors' discourses, are clear and consistent on this topic. The Republican MPLS program application form promotes the "full participation of women in politics and government" and supports conservative women's voices being heard without specifying how or whether women will change how politics and government operate. In contrast, Democratic program SU explicitly states in their promotional materials that the involvement of more women in government will change politics for the better. The SU website states, "when you elect women, you are electing leaders who are bringing their lived experiences to the dais with them as they vote, as well as a value set that prioritizes collaboration, innovation, community and the common good." In the organization's 2020 statement on racial justice, SU Executive Director Melanie V. Ramil specifically calls for justice and equity for Black Americans and the need to elect leaders who will "reimagine and rebuild institutions that have resulted in the inequities we are grappling with today." There is a clearly stated opinion

that (Democratic) women will particularly prioritize these issues and change business as usual.

Although claims that the election of women will lead to particular outcomes are not present in the MPLS program's public-facing promotional or application materials, which instead focus generally on the fairness of more equal representation, many Republican interlocutors expressed understandings of women's leadership that emphasized, for example, their greater focus on and potential for collaboration. "Building bridges" and women's greater capacity for listening and cooperation was a recurring theme in MPLS training discourse (see chapters three and four for further discussion). Reflecting the notion – explicitly and publicly stated by SU and discussed more informally in MPLS training – that *women lead differently,* many interlocutors on both sides of the aisle contend that women would shift government priorities or the way representatives interact with their constituents and each other for the better.

Collaboration and community

SU's website explains, "The outcomes show that when you elect women, you are electing leaders who are bringing their lived experiences to the dais with them as they vote, as well as a value set that prioritizes collaboration, innovation, community and the common good." Their claim that women are more collaborative than men is backed up by scholarship. Political scientists Thomas and Wineinger write, "among the ways women accomplish their goals despite obstacles are their pragmatism and their collaborative styles. Studies of women in office at all levels of government make clear that they are

more likely than men to work across the aisle, attract broad support for policy efforts, and use a consensus style of leadership" (2020: 84). As detailed in chapter three, Republican trainers discussed the importance of "building bridges" to work across the aisle more than Democratic trainers, but discourses about "collaboration" more generally were common among SU interlocutors.

The widespread understanding of women as more collaborative and cooperative than men was expressed by many Democratic interviewees, including a SU participant who worked as an attorney and had young children. When I asked if she thought having more women in office would make a difference in government, she posited that decision-making would be more collective: "imagine we woke up tomorrow and everybody in office was a woman, everybody in office – or not even everyone, but a lot of people – were moms. I think the perspective, the trajectory, the dialogue, the decision-making, would change significantly. I think that a collective approach would become ongoing. But I do feel like women still get things done. And so it's not as though things would just kind of go around and around in circles. Things would get done, but I think there would be a lot more voices heard." She connected women's leadership with more collaboration and dialogue. But she also recognized that these positive leadership qualities were not necessarily linked only to gender, explaining, "I also think that it's not even just about women, but it's about intellect and having emotional intelligence." She did immediately return to gender-based generalizations, however, explaining, "I think women would approach [leadership] from a more authentic perspective than men do. I think women as

leaders tend to hear feedback a lot better than men do." Her assumption that women and those with more "emotional intelligence" would adopt a more collective approach to leadership, effectively navigate relationships, and listen and adapt to feedback reflects the "feminine" consensus style of leadership discussed by scholars.

"Women get shit done"

As a Democratic Mayor and program alumna described at one memorable SU event, "Women are in the party of Get Shit Done!" Similarly, one SU participant stated, "I think we get more stuff done. We can multi-task. And I don't think as far as like, on the professional level, we have stupid fights and try to play games." Another SU program member, a young woman of color running for local office in the Bay Area, described how if the government was run by mostly women, "it would probably just function more efficiently… More would get done! Women just know how to get stuff done. Very goal oriented. So I think, yeah, [government] would [be different], and it would also be working better for our most vulnerable populations."

Another SU program member, a leader in her community and church who is also active in the NAACP, concurred. She contrasted women's leadership with men's greater tendency to bring their ego into it: "We just have a different mindset… when I walk into my church, when it's all women, as officers, at that higher level, we get a lot of work done. And I just believe that when men, it's that superiority factor or that ego... once that ego is gone, and I don't believe that women have ego, I believe that we could follow the leader better. And when men come in, men don't choose to really follow women in

leadership. I don't know if this is something that's been bred in them, or someone's in their ear." She acknowledged that, "You do have men that can follow leadership. And I think that's the extraordinary type of man when we see that." But overall, she posited, "I believe that if it were women in leadership across the board, it would set a different tone and I believe that discussion would move forward faster."

This belief that women have a greater propensity for practicality, efficiency, and accomplishing change in office was shared almost word for word by some Republican interlocutors. One Republican MPLS program member and candidate for office said, "I think women get things done. I think we get more done with less a lot, and I think we can make better use of resources. I just feel like we depend on our intuition more. And it's not so black and white sometimes. So yeah, I definitely think if [the government] was all women or more women, it would definitely be a little bit of a change." The focus of Democratic interlocutors on getting more done and the focus of this Republican interlocutor on getting more done *with less* and making better use of resources hearkens to partisan priorities about the preferred size of government and amount of taxes. Naturally, the *kind* of "shit" interlocutors hope women in office have the propensity to "get done" varies with their political party and values, but as illustrated here, many women across the board envision accomplishing *more,* more efficiently.

It is not just the perception of these interlocutors that women in office get more done – that fact is borne out by research including Anzia and Berry (2011), who find that in the U.S. Congress, congresswomen secure more spending from federal discretionary

programs than congressmen and also sponsor and cosponsor significantly more bills than their male colleagues. The SU program member quoted above's point about ego being less of a factor for women leaders is also backed up by some evidence: in one 2001 survey of U.S. Congressmembers, the number one stated reason to run for office for women legislators was the ability to effect change in society, while the number one reason for men was that they always wanted to be a politician (Rosenthal 2002). This hearkens to the findings of Schneider et al. (2016) that women are more drawn to communal goals rather than power goals when considering political involvement, but also may reflect the double bind faced by women leaders and what Congresswomen think is acceptable to say as a woman without coming off as too ambitious. As Center for American Women in Politics scholar Kelly Dittmar explained in a 2016 *Atlantic* article, "Women just want to get things done. They're not in it for the show" (McGill). Many interlocutors on both sides of the aisle agree with her.

Women focus on different issues

As discussed above, women are often viewed as having relatively greater expertise than men on domestic issues. How do advocates for women's elected leadership speculate about the policy priorities and outcomes of a hypothetical future women-led government? What topics might gain attention?

One Republican interlocutor campaigning for state-level office contended that not only would women prioritize accountability in leadership, they would also care more about humanitarian issues. She explained that if the government was led by mostly

women, it "would be different because there wouldn't be a good old boys' club. So I think women would hold each other a little more accountable and not just say, 'well, that's just Jack,' or 'that's... oh, you know, well, he's been in office forever and that's just him.' I don't think women get that as much. So I think we hold each other more accountable, we'd possibly be more caring about real humanitarian issues and other issues." As illustrated by this interlocutor, women in leadership being relatively more caring than men and concerned with humanitarian issues is not only a consideration of Democratic interlocutors, who we might expect to focus more on humanitarian issues or value a more nurturing, feminized style of leadership (see chapter three for a more in-depth discussion of partisan leadership stereotypes and gendered political communication frames), but some Republicans as well.

A Democratic SU participant discussed how "women's issues" such as reproductive rights would come to the fore, but tempered her predictions for a possible women-led government with the acknowledgement that not all women hold the same views. She told me, "I personally believe if there were more women in power at all levels, at least women's voices would start to get heard and represented." But she continued, "I am not pollyannish, I don't think that all of a sudden governing would be perfect. I think that it would just make life a lot easier for all women. It would help more women's voices get heard and women's issues get heard. I would feel in general more protected by their government, too. I think you would see far less assault on education and health care and reproductive rights… but there are plenty of women who would

happily take away reproductive rights from other women. So I think it's mostly positive but I don't think it's just positive. It's just going to be different. You know, I'd like to find out. If that matters. I would love to see a world where at least half of governance was by women." While she predicts that domestic issues like education and healthcare would gain greater prominence in a women-led government, she is not entirely confident about the issues that a women-led government would champion. But like the Republican interlocutor quoted above, she is confident that government would be substantively *different*. And she thinks a different approach, especially regarding reproductive health policy, would be a good thing. As one SU participant expressed, "particularly around women's issues right, you see these really disturbing pictures of all men sitting around and making decisions related to women's reproductive health, for instance. What the fuck is that? You know, like that shouldn't even be permitted." The current gender makeup of politicians in charge of reproductive health policy is, for some like this interlocutor, disturbing.

Caregiving policies

A prominent example of a political issue that Democratic interlocutors cited as one that women leaders would focus relatively more on was child care. Caregiving responsibilities disproportionately falling on women remains a barrier to gender parity in elected office. Recently, the struggles of working caregivers and candidate caregivers have been in the political spotlight as new policies that allow campaign funds to be spent on child care have been introduced. In California, Assembly Bill 220 was introduced in

2019 to allow state and local candidates and elected officials to use campaign funds to cover child care expenses in an effort to reduce barriers for parents – particularly women. Of course, working parents' struggle to access child care is not new. Consider, for example, the workplace-sponsored daycare put in place by the women in leadership after they stage a coup and take charge of their office in the 1980 feminist comedy film *9 to 5*.

Some Democratic interlocutors posit that more women in government would make child care more accessible for working parents. One SU interlocutor with small children predicted how family-friendly policies and motherhood would be a greater topic of consideration for a women-dominated government, explaining, "imagine we woke up tomorrow and everybody in office was a woman, everybody in office – or not even everyone, but a lot of people – were moms. I think the perspective, the trajectory, the dialogue, the decision-making, would change significantly… I also think that from a societal perspective, we would have a lot more productivity, and even an economic benefit, because women wouldn't have to be struggling about daycare and the cost of daycare or the cost of school, and how it is that you have to navigate your entire life around your school-aged children. There would be plans in place to help women be able to maintain their ongoing career path. They wouldn't have as much of a juggling act that it came down to having to decide, do I become a wife and mom or do I follow my career path? I think over time that because more women have gotten into office, that that is getting better. But that's only because of having women in office that those messages are even being heard, much less implemented. So I think it would be a lot less of a struggle

for families in general." According to this interlocutor, being a woman, and especially being a mother, equips lawmakers to make different policy decisions about the public provision of child care that would enable women to remain in the workforce.

Another SU participant agreed that women in elected office would consider caregiving in their policy making, explaining, "for the most part when you have women involved in decision-making, because we are providers to our elders, we take care of our parents, because we're often caregivers to our children, and because we are the bearers of children, we think about those things. Whereas men don't necessarily have to think about those things. So in making policy decisions, considering elder care, considering child care, considering reproductive justice, I think that that would come up. Simply because women are present. And I think that it does not come up when women are not present." With women in charge, these interlocutors envision a world where child and elder care is recognized as a major issue and made more accessible. This stance and the push for publicly provided childcare was not discussed by Republican women interlocutors, something that is not surprising considering that Republican partisan values include preferring a more limited role of government in social services and family life.

Peace, community, listening

The notion that women's leadership would lead to less war and that more voices would be heard to develop collaborative solutions to problems was expressed by several interlocutors. As discussed more in chapter four, many interlocutors on both sides of the

aisle describe how listening to one's constituents is critical for elected representatives. And women, many contend, are often better at listening.

Specifically in relation to foreign policy and war, one Democratic interviewee explained, "I think we'd be in a lot more peace times with women in office, because I don't think that women would be inclined to just want to pop off whenever they didn't like what somebody said or did." She clarified that this point depended on leaders "being able to know, how do you navigate this versus that, the politics of it all and stuff, who to piss off and who not to piss off." The importance of interpersonal skills also related to women being more likely to take in feedback, and she explained, "I think women as leaders tend to hear feedback a lot better than men do. [Men] may sit there and listen to it but what they do with it is different." In general, she envisioned that in a women-led future, "Things would get done, but I think there would be a lot more voices heard." Rather than a my-way-or-the-highway approach, this interlocutor contended that women would take a collective approach to governance. This point that women are more likely to listen to others than position themselves as the singular supreme figure in charge links to the view described above that women tend to be less influenced by ego, and to the "building bridges" discourses prominent at Republican trainings discussed more in chapter three. While statements specifically about women leaders' propensity to go to war or not were not made by my Republican interlocutors, MPLS participants did discuss the need for civility and women's capacity to "calm the waters," as one program leader put it.

In contrast to the interlocutor quoted above who posited that women leaders would be less likely to go to war, another SU participant explained, "there are lots of women who are generally hawkish and are just as willing to rush to war as men. And I think because there's this idea around women that you know, we can be weaker, I think that there are some women out there in leadership who feel like they have to go for the strong man, for lack of a better term, solution when solving a problem because to not do that would be falling into this trap." Some women may (over)compensate for the perception that women are less aggressive by being more aggressive, she reasons. She continued, however, "I think women tend to be – or at least studies show – we're more collaborative. And think through a collaborative solution together as opposed to just kind of rushing to judgment... these are some of the things I see that would change with women at the table as opposed to all men." While this interlocutor at first allowed for the fact that different women's approaches to policy and leadership vary on an individual level, she also described how women as a gender have a greater tendency to find collaborative solutions, which she views as a positive characteristic.

Women may not be better

It may seem inherently absurd to universalize gender to the point of predicting how the entire gender of "women" – half of the world's population – is destined to act in elected office when hundreds of years of mostly men in charge has resulted in countless ways of being a leader. While a pattern of "female boosterism" (Alexander and Andersen 1993) discourses outlining how women lead differently and better than men is prominent

at SU, not all interlocutors on either side of the aisle expressed a belief that women would change how the government functions. Several, like the SU interlocutor quoted above who referenced how some women are just as willing to go to war as men, discussed how leaders vary on an individual level.

Some MPLS participants disagreed with the premise that a women-led government would be beneficial in some way, and even posited that it would be disadvantageous. When asked if and how the government would be different if mostly women were in charge, one interviewee replied, "no, not if mostly women were in charge, because I've sat with a lot of very smart men that I've admired as well and respected… But [women] for the majority? No, I think that would totally change things because the dynamic is such that I still think we still need some men empowerment to help us, because we can't do everything. And they would know something more too." Unlike the Democratic interlocutor who described an all-women government future as her "ideal utopia," this MPLS participant expressed how men were also needed in positions of power. However, she recognized that some men were not effective leaders, going on to say, "But I do know that when you get certain men in a room an hour, they think they're the greatest thing on earth, so nothing else matters. And you won't leave anywhere!" Meaning that no progress would be made.

Another MPLS participant rejected the idea of a women-led government because of her negative opinion of many women currently in office. She explained that a government of mostly women "would be a disaster, because look at the women in there. I

mean, there's some good women in there, but all you hear about right now are these women that are – they are not leaders. All they're doing is screaming and yelling, blame, trying to accuse people of wrong things instead of where they came from, what they're doing, and trying to take our country down." She expressed firm opposition to Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi, whom she described as "a horrible leader, she's awful. I mean, she's a leader! Women like her. But she doesn't have the best intentions in her heart at all." This interlocutor's relatively farther right views, evidenced also by her main news sources including *Breitbart* and *Drudge* as well as *Fox*, negatively dispose her to the Democratic women leaders in the national spotlight. When asked again if it would make any sort of difference if the vast majority of our leaders were women, she responded, "No, I think checks and balances, I think both men and women. I think, instead of the sex, race, whatever else – I'm not going gender because they only have two – that we need checks and balances, it just depends on the character. Content of their character." Her preference would be not to elect anyone based on their gender or other demographics, but focus on that individuals' characteristics and ultimately have a variety of leaders who provide "checks and balances" to each other. This "gender neutral" stance reflects the broader Republican Party culture's rejection of identity politics.

Another MPLS participant at first expressed how a women-led government might be beneficial and increase communication and discussion, but she ultimately hoped for a mixed gender makeup. She explained, "I kind of like to think that maybe there would be more discussion, I think for sure women are talkers, so there would be more discussion.

Would it be positive? I hope so. It is kind of just hard to know. I like to think it would be better for sure. More communicative. …I just feel like sometimes women kind of dig a little bit at each other. So I'm not sure if you would hear more of that kind of a thing or not, which makes me think that maybe it would be great if there could be a mix, but, that there's no real control over that." The idea that women are more likely to have "mean girl" tendencies towards other women or "dig at each other" came up more than once among interlocutors on both sides of the aisle.

An SU interlocutor said about a future where mostly women are in power, "I do believe there needs to be balance. I'm not saying that it needs to be strictly women. But I do think that there should be an equal balance. I mean, we represent 51% of the population. We should be representing 51% of our representation in government, whether it's the Supreme Court, whether it's the legislature, President." She described how a gender-balanced government would lead to "a lot more balanced perspective as to the approaches that we're taking." For this interlocutor, an *all*-women government was not the dream, but one where the balance of elected leaders' genders reflected the balance of gender in the broader U.S. population.

Another SU participant, a woman of color who lived in the Bay Area, agreed that the government would be different if it was mostly women in charge but was not supportive of *white* women being in charge. She noted that, "I would be a little scared, if we're being completely honest, if it's just all white women. They are one of the large reasons why Trump is in office. And so yes, it would be different and generally, I want to

say that there would be improved policies for women in general, but I still think, again, that intersectionality… I would love for it to be women of color. Because when you lift up those who are most marginalized, then you lift everyone up. That's the targeted universalism theory and I very much believe in it. So, yes, it would be different. I'd be scared if it was all white women. I would love to see like more women in general and more women of color specifically." She went on to explain her reasoning about targeted universalism and having those who have personally faced the most barriers in charge of finding solutions, positing that if mostly women of color were in charge, "we'd have policies that work better for everyone… so, you know on the sidewalk, like the little ramp part? So that was originally created for folks in wheelchairs, that was the sole purpose because they are a specifically vulnerable and marginalized population. But when you look at curb cuts and who uses them, it's not just people in wheelchairs. It's women with strollers. It's attorneys with their little rollie bag. It's the older people getting the cart for recycling bottles. It helps the whole society. And so if we have women and women of color, who have had experiences of being in marginalized spaces, and knowing I'm someone who firmly believes that the solutions to our problems come from the people with the closest lived experiences – nothing about us without us, that kind of thing – and so if we have people in charge with those lived experiences, we lift them up and we end up lifting everyone up." For this interlocutor, a women-led government is not sufficient for meaningful change – instead, she asserts that women of color whose lives

have been negatively affected by barriers like white supremacy are more equipped to develop effective and widely beneficial policy solutions.

It depends on party

As evidenced by the Republican interlocutor above who expressed strong opposition to women leaders in the Democratic party, of course not all women hold the same political views. Interviewees recognized the difficulty of determining whether a women-led government would be different because "women" do not all act similarly in positions of power. When considering whether it would be beneficial to have more women in office regardless of party affiliation, the answer, for many, was unclear.

As one SU participant described, "Not all women are created equal, and so we still have a large number of women who support and vote for people and policies that disenfranchise women, and that remove women's reproductive rights, and that can leave zero access to, not just abortion, like preventative health care, for those who are poor and marginalized." The opinion that more women in power would not necessarily lead to a better future because of the vast differences between women ideologically was also expressed by another SU participant, who said, "this relates more to race, but I think can be transferred to gender: 'skin folk aren't always kinfolk.' And so just because someone is the same racial identity as you doesn't mean that they will always advocate on your behalf. And I feel like the same thing is true of women. Yes, in theory, I think it would be helpful to have more women in office regardless of their party. But I don't know if I fully agree with that. Just because you are a woman doesn't mean that you're going to

advocate for policies and issues that matter to most women. And that's where I think the Democratic piece is important, and ideally more left." This interlocutor hoped for a future with more leftist women in office, but did not think more Republican women in office would change or improve the government.

As another SU participant put it, "the patriarchy couldn't exist if there weren't a lot of women willing to prop it up. And I think that this happens more often on the Republican side than it does on the Democrat side, but not that you don't get that on the Democrat side from time to time. But I think that we as Democratic women are more willing to question the quote unquote, wisdom of the system. We know the system isn't working. It's not working for us as women, it's not working for people of color, it's not working for low income folks. Whereas I would say most republican women that I've seen either profiled in the media, or who I've talked to… I don't want to characterize them as selfish, but they're very focused on maintaining the system as it is. And, you know, more deference to corporations, more deference to industries that really are squeezing the middle and working class. So I think it's really imperative that we elect Democrats, the focus can't be on women exclusively, because it's a party connection. And progressive Democrats need to take the wheel. I don't think Republicans or even centrists at this time are going to make a large enough impact for people on the ground are receiving the benefits that they need, the resources and the support they need to not only survive, but thrive. Can't count on Republicans for that." Her stance that the government system is not working and that big change is needed, rather than maintaining

the system as it is, reflects basic Democratic Party principles including bottom-up approaches to power and friendliness to protest and change. For these interlocutors, similarly to the Republican interlocutors quoted above who vehemently oppose Democratic women currently in power, a future where women lead the government is less of a priority than a future where members of their political party lead. In the next chapter, we will turn to a deeper investigation of political party values and culture and their significance for women's candidate training.

CHAPTER 3: THE NATION AS FAMILY: POLITICAL PARTY CULTURE AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

The Significance of Political Parties

This chapter examines how political parties, political party culture, and partisan communication styles play a part in understandings of leadership that circulate in women's candidate training. Political parties and party culture play a role in shaping both the training's practical and material aspects, such as the financial support they receive and who they recruit, and their ideological and discursive aspects, such as how programs and participants rhetorically position themselves as outsider change-makers or establishment insiders. As Strauss (2012) discusses in her research on public opinion, individuals gather a wide mix of conventional political discourses from the different opinion communities that they belong to and they may bring up various discourses in different situations. One's opinion discourses do not always fall along rigid left/right lines, but partisan groups and media sources are important opinion communities that shape individuals' opinions, and the candidate training organizations themselves also function as opinion communities.

I compare the programs and the discourses circulating amongst practitioners in terms of political party cultural values, women in politics scholars such as Wineinger's (2018) explanation of Republican women leaders' roles as new messengers rather than changers of the party's message, and Lakoff's (1996) political metaphor framework that characterizes liberal and conservative approaches to the relationship of the state to its

citizens as a "nurturant parent model" and "strict father model," respectively. The Democratic program's public discourse, following the penchant of their party for bottom-up change and protest, emphasizes how women leaders will spur revolution, new policies, and systemic change that, following the "nurturant parent" model, promote social welfare, while the Republican program – despite the fact that Republican women receive relatively less robust support from their party leaders and institutions – focuses on including women in leadership but within a more conservative and tradition-focused overarching framework that emphasizes maintaining existing systems of power through pragmatism and moderation, emphasizing the "strict father" focus on personal responsibility.

While interlocutors' policy positions and values generally align with their respective political parties, I outline how in certain cases, interlocutors' discourses about leadership styles depart from and even reverse Lakoff's (1996) central partisan leadership communication metaphors of the Republican "strict father" as singular moral authority whose word is law and the "nurturant parent" who values cooperation and open communication with all parties to understand different points of view, as discourses specifically emphasizing cooperation and bipartisanship were much more common among Republican interlocutors than Democrats. This finding illustrates the importance of person-centered ethnographic research for illuminating the various complex ways individuals experience and discuss political and social movements in relation to all of the other aspects in their lives, including their gender (Strauss 2018).

As Xydias (2018) points out, studies of women in politics tell us more about women in left-leaning parties than women on the right both because there are more of them in office and because scholars often define women's interests in left-leaning feminist terms. Analyzing and comparing efforts to increase women's representation occurring on both sides of the aisle allows for a deeper investigation of not only the gendered challenges and concerns experienced by all women when they run for office, but also how expectations and circumstances vary with political orientation. Furthermore, as Winter (2010) explains, political parties are themselves gendered institutions, and the very categories of gender and party are defined and given meaning in part through their relationship with one another. A comparative anthropological approach that departs from typical political science studies of women's candidate training by focusing on culture – in this case, political party culture – illuminates how partisan norms, and especially attitudes toward identity politics and "the establishment," shape the strategies and discourses employed by candidate training leaders and participants.

Both organizations I conducted ethnographic research with exist because of women's frustration with the state of politics and their political party as they are and their attempts to change them. But approaches to the role of the state in citizens' lives, identity politics, and the stereotypical attitudinal difference that "Republicans perceive themselves as insiders even when they are out of power and Democrats perceive themselves as outsiders even when they are in power" (Freeman 1986: 328) are reflected in partisan activists' reasonings, ultimate goals, and how they frame the movement for

gender parity. In this chapter, I will discuss the significance of political parties in terms of how they influence candidates and affect movements to elect women before moving on to explore how partisan attitudes about identity politics and women's leadership affect women's candidate training programs generally, and finally the relationships between the interlocutors and organizations I studied, their respective state and local parties, and how they position themselves in relation to the "establishment" more specifically.

How important are political parties for women candidates?

Before considering how party culture and partisan approaches to leadership shape the women's candidate training programs and participants I conducted research with, it is important to understand how the U.S. political parties support (or do not support) women more generally. Historically speaking, political parties in the U.S. have less direct control over candidates and campaigns since the mid-twentieth century (see Wattenberg 1990). But they continue to loom large over U.S. politics and have central importance in the candidate nomination process, and a partisan divide continues to structure women's political representation and the development of women's candidate training programs. Beyond the importance of partisan fundraising and recruitment networks like Democratic EMILY's List and Emerge and the Republican Richard G. Lugar Series, many state-level (and county-level) political parties devote resources to campaign trainings. For example, both the Tennessee Republican and Democratic Parties hold campaign training schools throughout the year. Additionally, party organizations remain "a major training ground for political consultants" (Thurber and Nelson 2001), who often serve as trainers for

candidate training organizations. Thus, traditional parties continue to be an institutional force shaping the political process, if increasingly indirectly – through their influence on individual candidates rather than more generally being in charge of campaigns.

How much do party leaders support *women* candidates, specifically? For many Women and Leadership 2018 Pew research survey respondents, the answer seems to be: not enough. The second most-cited barrier to women's representation in high political offices in the survey responses was that women receive less support from party leaders; 70 percent of Democratic women and 60 percent of Democratic men agreed with this point, while 45 percent of Republican women versus 27 percent of their male counterparts did (Parker, Horowitz, and Igielnik 2018). When party leaders *do* express support for women candidates, does it make a difference? In one field experiment, Karpowitz, Monson and Preece (2017) tested whether messages from party leaders affected women's electoral success. They found that when State Republican Party Chairs sent messages to precinct-level caucus leaders about voters' subconscious biases about women and increasing their numbers of women candidates, the number of women delegates elected increased. This indicates that party leader intervention on behalf of women's representation in elected office can be an important tool. Unfortunately, it does not always happen. One MPLS interlocutor and local Republican Party leader expressed frustration with the lack of party support she had experienced, "I would like to see the Republican Party trying to recruit more women to run and then support them. I never got a call from the Republican Party [when I ran for office]."

Even when party leaders do recruit women, some survey research has shown that women remain skeptical about how much strategic and financial support party leaders will provide. Butler and Preece (2016) explore why women respond less than men to recruitment efforts from political elites. Their survey of municipal officeholders found that women had less faith that party leaders would support them if they ran than men respondents did. More nascent movements closer to the ideological fringes of the political party establishment may provide increased opportunities for women, however. Rosen (2012) argues, for example, that the Tea Party provided a voice for women in the Republican Party or who support conservative politics, who otherwise had been long been excluded from those arenas.

So, do political parties overall tend to be a positive or negative force for women's participation? In nation-states with party-centered politics (i.e. when voters tend to vote for their preferred party regardless of what candidate is put forward rather than voting for an individual candidate they like), parties act as gatekeepers and women's representation depends on the willingness of parties to nominate women, and perhaps even adopt candidate gender quotas (Funk, Hinojosa, and Piscopo 2019). Various international approaches to achieving gender parity in politics through political party-based interventions such as training programs, quotas, and other strategies are discussed by Htun and Piscopo (2014). They outline the steps Brazil has taken with electoral law to enforce gender quotas as well as require political parties to train and promote women candidates, for example. Political parties in Anglophone Caribbean nations including

Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica have also provided training specifically for women leaders (Vassell 2006). Similarly, Mexico and Panama require political parties to use a portion of their public funding to train women (Krook and Norris 2014).

Yet the willingness of parties to nominate and support women candidates is not the only factor affecting gender representation. Crowder-Meyer (2013) found that candidate recruitment by party leaders is an important factor in getting people to run for office, but in the case of women, recruitment does not necessarily increase participation. Furthermore, she and others (see Niven 2006; Stambough and O'Regan 2007; Thomas and Bodet 2013; Luhiste 2015; Lee 2019; Ouellet and Shiab 2019) find that when parties recruit women, they are more likely to run women in hard-to-win elections as "sacrificial lamb" candidates than men. In this way, women candidates are more likely to be set up for failure. Parties simply nominating more women is not sufficient to ensure women's equal political representation – women must be nominated for seats they have a chance of winning.

Party differences in women's leadership

Turning from this background on political parties' institutional support (or lack thereof) for women candidates, what are the quantitative and qualitative results in terms of women's representation in each party? In general, women are more poorly represented in the Republican Party than in the Democratic Party, which affects the relative strength of their networks and the numbers of women who participate in candidate trainings. While Republican women made historic gains in the U.S. House in the 2020 election,

they remain only 26 percent of the total women in the 117th Congress. At the state level, the percentage of Republican state legislators that are women stayed stagnant at 15 to 20 percent nationally from 1985-2016, while the percentage of Democratic state legislators that are women more than doubled over the same period from 14 to nearly 35 percent (see Elder 2018 for further discussion about this partisan disparity in the numbers of women in state legislatures).

Scholars find that women's leadership differs qualitatively as well as quantitatively between the parties. In her analysis of gender and Republican Party culture, Wineinger (2018) draws from interviews with legislators to explain how the role of Republican women leaders is often to change the party's *messengers* rather than the party's *message* by putting a new feminine face on existing talking points rather than introducing new talking points. GOP women are less likely than Democratic women to bring up women-specific issues or invoke their motherhood status while campaigning (Schreiber 2012). As Swers (2018) puts it, "while they may believe that women bring a different perspective to the debate, many conservative Republican women do not embrace the concept of women's issues and prefer to focus on policies that are more central to the Republican brand and important to their constituents, such as cutting taxes and reducing regulations on business" (210). This approach reflects central differences in party culture, discussed in greater detail below: the Republican Party is relatively more hierarchical and the Democratic Party more decentralized, and power flows downward to those who prioritize party loyalty in the Republican Party whereas power flows upward

as different constituencies compete in the Democratic Party (Freeman 1986). Rather than emphasizing their identity as women and bringing issues specific to that constituency to the party's attention, Republican women are more likely to prioritize party loyalty by serving as a new face to espouse the existing concerns of the Republican Party. It should be noted that the concept of "women's issues" has been problematized by Democratic elected officials as well – as Vice President Kamala Harris has stated that when people ask her about so-called "women's issues," her response is, "I'm so glad you want to talk about the economy!" (2019).

Inter- and intra-party opinions on women's underrepresentation

Pew survey research has found significant differences in how women's underrepresentation in leadership is viewed by men and women and between and within the political parties in the U.S. These opinions have ramifications for how much support organizations aimed at propelling women into power can expect to receive. Democrats are much more likely to be concerned about women's representation – while 79 percent of Democratic and Democratic-leaning respondents agreed that there are too few women in high political offices, only 33 percent of Republican and Republican-leaning respondents did (Parker, Horowitz and Igielnik 2018). Democratic respondents were also much more likely to recognize barriers like gender discrimination as negatively affecting women's representation. Further illustrating how these views translate into support (or lack thereof) for women candidates, political science research shows that Democratic women candidates are more likely to receive support from their party members

(especially men in the party), political elites, and donors, than Republican women candidates are (Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018). This disparity relates to the significant partisan divergence in the funding and scope of the women's candidate training programs I studied. With the robust support of Democratic donors, the SU network has expanded to include affiliates in more than 20 states that provide intensive campaign training. In contrast, many Republican women's training programs, according to two of my Republican interlocutors in Michigan, are more akin to social luncheons than training – they feature political speakers but lack intensive hands-on workshops. As of March 2022, there were affiliates of the Republican National Service Series, which includes MPLS, in 11 states.

Within the Republican party, Pew research finds significant gender differences in opinion in regard to women's lack of positions of power (Parker, Horowitz and Igielnik 2018). While similarly high percentages of Democratic men and Democratic women agree that it is easier for men to get top leadership positions and that there are too few women in top leadership positions, significantly more Republican women than Republican men agree with those points. 44 percent of Republican women compared to 24 percent of men agree that there are too few women in high political offices. The gender gap in opinions about *why* women are underrepresented are even more pronounced – 64 percent of GOP women versus 28 percent of GOP men say women having to do more to prove themselves is a major reason why there are fewer women than men in high political offices, and 48 percent versus 14 percent cite gender discrimination,

for example. This relative lack of recognition of gendered barriers from men within their party illustrates how Republican women often face more of an uphill battle as they seek to increase their representation in elected office. This point is reflected in conversations from my own research. In our first in-person meeting, one MPLS leader described how Republican Party officials do not always support women or understand why MPLS is necessary. She recounted how one local official responded to her recruitment efforts by questioning the need for women-specific training and asking why the training couldn't be for everybody. He simply did not recognize that, in her words, women need a "safe space." Opposition to the notion of helping women as an identity group get ahead reflects the meritocratic values inherent to Republican Party culture that reject affirmative action and identity politics. Another Republican woman who is a local party leader explained how Republican men in power sometimes oppose women's leadership in her experience as, "these [political] elites as you put it, they just don't want a skirt. They're not ready for it. And they're being pushed into a corner and they're going to fight every inch of the way." While some Democratic interlocutors also expressed frustration with "boys' clubs" and political elite men's lack of support or mentorship for women, per the Pew opinion research above, this issue is especially salient for those in the Republican Party.

Political parties and racialization

Politics has not only been historically dominated by men, but dominated specifically by *white* men, compounding barriers for women of color who seek elected office. The Republican Party is especially racially homogenous. Surveys show that in

2016, 86 percent of Republican and Republican-leaning voters were white, versus 57 percent of Democratic and Democratic-leaning voters (Pew Research Center 2016). Women of color are making strides in elected office – the numbers of women of color who ran for Congress in 2020 was an all-time high, for example (Sairam 2020) – but there are *extremely* few Republican women of color in high level elected office. As of 2020, just one of the 48 women of color who served in the 116th U.S. Congress was a Republican, three of the 16 serving in statewide elective executive offices were Republicans, and just 19 of the 548 total women of color state legislators were Republicans (Center for American Women and Politics 2020). More than half of the women SU trains are women of color, and the organization purposefully ensures this through targeted recruitment of women from historically excluded groups, but only a handful of non-white women have graduated from MPLS, which relies on word of mouth and Republican Party networks for recruitment and typically struggles to gain applicants.

Along with values and ideological leanings, this racial makeup of the parties (along with racial rhetoric that party leaders and platforms espouse) doubtless affects where women of color feel welcome and comfortable, and likely their partisan affiliations. This factor – that individuals gravitate towards the party they see themselves in – was discussed by one of the two MPLS women of color alumnae I interviewed. She told me that her father, an immigrant from India, "was a Democrat. I really had to think about whether I was Democratic or Republican. Everything that he taught me, that I stood for, I knew was Republican. But he could never view himself as a Republican. He didn't

see himself in that party, right? And they didn't invite him to come in." She continued, "I'm not so much for quotas. But if you don't encourage the diverse populations to join in your fight, you're never going to get there. And I sat down and said, 'well these are my values, these are what I think, they're very Republican.' …But every Indian I know, every other nationality that I know just says 'yeah, of course I'm a Democrat, because they are the party of everybody.' So even though someone may feel really strongly about the kinds of policies or social welfare that they want, that are very Republican, they don't see themselves as being part of that." As she explains, people of color may gravitate to the Democratic Party by default regardless of how well their values and preferred policies line up with the Democratic platform because they cannot see themselves reflected in the GOP.

While the prevalence of "old white men" in their party and in politics in general was noted in casual conversation by many MPLS participants, the whiteness of the group went largely unremarked upon. Even the sole Black alumna of the program did not bring up how race might have affected her experiences in politics until I asked her about it directly. She described how she had never experienced racism in the Republican Party, but she has faced criticism from members of the Black community. "My criticism," she explained, "never came from whites, it always came from other Blacks. [They] couldn't understand how I was a Black Republican. But through it all I remained steadfast and stayed firm on my values, and I've never once belonged to any other party but the Republican Party." She continued, "back then, you know 30 years [ago], it wasn't

popular to be a Black Republican or Black conservative. And it still isn't, but there are more of us now. Back when I was coming up, I would walk into a room and I was the only Black… I have never ever, over my decades of activism with the party, I've never walked into a room where I've been the only Black person in the room, and I've never had one person come to me and say 'you don't belong here' or 'we don't want you here.' …People always say that the Republican Party's racist, and I have a totally different perspective. And I'm talking about like three decades of experience with the party, and I've never experienced any racism. Ever." Unlike the above account from a South Asian MPLS alumna, she did not necessarily think that it was the party or organization's responsibility to reach out to members of underrepresented groups. She told me, "I don't think we always have to do the reaching. I just don't think that the party as a whole or even organizations like MPLS has a duty to… I mean you can only do so much. And because I'm the type of person like, I'm not gonna beg anyone… you can have open arms, but you can't force someone to do something." Still, she continued, "I guess everyone can do better, sure. So yes it's true, maybe they could do a little better with their outreach efforts towards minorities. I don't know if that's an area of focus for them."

These accounts indicate that women of color whose values align with the Republican Party face additional hurdles on multiple fronts. It may be difficult for them to see themselves in the overwhelmingly white GOP, which may not "invite them to come in." If they do join the Republican Party, they may face criticism on another front from largely-Democratic communities of color. These challenges compound with those

faced by all Republican women discussed above – including less support from men in their party, party leaders, and PACs relative to Democratic women, and a party culture generally averse to identity politics, discussed more below.

Party differences in leadership and communication styles – Nation as Family

A central question in this research is whether politically liberal and conservative training program discourses express differing approaches to what a woman politician should be like or offer differing strategies about how to succeed in politics as a woman. How does political party orientation interact with gendered notions of leadership? Are the "masculine" traits like assertiveness and rationality that Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) found voters preferred still preferred across the board? Not necessarily. The Democratic Party's relatively greater concern with social welfare issues is more aligned with stereotypical "feminine" traits such as compassion.

Cognitive linguist George Lakoff's work with political metaphors provides a framework for how to interpret liberal and conservative (or feminine and masculine) communication styles – what he calls a "Nation-as-Family" metaphor (1996: 13). Both Democrats and Republicans, he argues, view the government as a parental figure that must teach, punish, and reward its children/citizens, but each party puts their own "frame" on the metaphor (Lakoff 2004). The conservative frame of communication includes a "strict father" moral authority figure who rules and disciplines, valuing individual responsibility, self-reliance, obedience, and prosperity through low taxes. Lakoff does not account much for the mother in this scenario, who he argues "cannot do

the job of the father, because women are seen as less strong. The duty of the mother is to support her husband in his authority. This model has gender-based parental roles" (Lakoff and Wehling 2016: 46). In considering how Republican *women* leaders discuss their party and their approaches to leadership, this project expands on Lakoff's work to explore whether Republican women leaders are also "strict fathers," following scholars like Swers (2018) and Wineinger (2018) who find that they may be new messengers but not introducers of new messages or policy priorities, or if they understand their leadership role differently.

Lakoff's liberal frame includes a family with two parents who are nurturing and supportive, providing social assistance and valuing sharing (higher taxes) and responsibility for others and the environment. There are frames within these frames, depending on the specific way a political figure talks about issues – whether in an authoritative, motherly, heroic, etc. way (Lakoff 2004). Candidates must balance how they frame debates to appeal to their audience. The semiotic idea of register provides another way of theorizing how individual communicative practices are socioculturally patterned (Agha 1998, 2005a, 2005b). Specific ways of speaking and acting become associated with social categories of persons (e.g. Democratic politician, Republican politician), and speakers may draw on various registers in order to assume certain "cultural images of persons" (Irvine 1990: 130) known from sociohistorical experience, creating as well as reflecting social relations.

Identity politics and political party culture

As described above, there are quantitative and qualitative differences in women's leadership between political parties in the U.S. The extent to which party members recognize and care about women's underrepresentation varies significantly between the parties and between men and women within the Republican Party. Understanding these patterned differences in attitude is critical when considering the approaches taken by women's candidate training programs and the barriers women face. Partisanship and party culture is part of the broader space of political action surrounding the programs and a significant aspect of their social dimension that plays an important role in shaping the programs' and participants' strategies and discourses.

So, how can we understand political party culture? One important difference between the parties in the U.S. that ties into their communication frames and general approaches to leadership is their relationship to identity politics. Identity politics, or political movements and alliances built around an identifying social factor such as race, class, religion, or gender, is an approach associated with the more decentralized Democratic Party that does not align with the more hierarchically-structured, "strict father"-led Republican Party that emphasizes how anyone can be successful with hard work. As Freeman (1986) contends, there are fundamental differences in party culture: the Democratic Party is more decentralized and power flows upward as different constituencies compete, and the Republican Party is more hierarchical and power flows downward to those who prioritize party loyalty. The Republican Party's relative

reluctance to engage in group interest politics – or the propensity of the "strict father" conservative leader to emphasize how anyone who is self-disciplined can be successful and therefore you should not receive special treatment based on your background (Lakoff and Wehling 2016) – means that GOP women candidates are less likely to receive gender-specific structural support. As Schreiber writes, "Republican opposition to identity politics and anything that smacks of affirmative action has had a negative effect on GOP women's political fortunes" (2018, 249). For example, while there are political action committees (PACs) that support women candidates aligned with both the Democratic and Republican Parties, the Republican groups do not provide as robust support, do not raise as much money, and do not hold nearly as much power or recognition within the party (Cooperman and Crowder-Meyer 2018). This disparity is recognized by my Republican interlocutors. One MPLS leader, during a discussion about women's relationships with political networks, mentioned how while Democratic women are supported by powerful groups like EMILY's List, the Republican side has not built a similar support structure for women. For "Right to Life, you have to pay for your own endorsement postcards!" She pointed out.

The Training Programs' Political and Geographic Contexts

California

In addition to establishing the changing significance of political parties in the U.S., how parties affect women candidates, and the major differences in political party culture and approaches to leadership and communication, it is important to consider more

specifically the geographic and political context of each training program field site and how that affects candidates. The state of California is regarded as a coastal liberal bubble, and Democratic presidential nominees have won every election since 1992, surpassing 60 percent of the vote in the last three elections. The state legislature also leans heavily Democratic, with a whopping 60 to 19 Democratic majority in the Assembly (State House) and 31 to 9 majority in the Senate as of March 2022. San Francisco, where SU was founded in 2002, is a center of liberal activism dominated by Democrats and progressives.

The inland Central Valley area of California stretching from Sacramento down to Bakersfield is more Republican-leaning, however. The city of Fresno in the Central Valley, for example, has had Republican mayors for the last 20 years. SU has a much more difficult time recruiting Democratic women for the program in that region. In 2020, SU accepted 32 applicants from the Bay Area for their Northern California cohort – several over their ideal class size of 25 – and additional qualified applicants had to be turned away due to a lack of capacity. Yet there were only 15 women accepted into the 2020 Central Valley cohort despite efforts to hold targeted recruitment events around the region and develop a Central Valley Advisory Team focused on making inroads with women in the area. The perception of California as a very blue state where Democratic elected officials hold such a majority that they have no need to reach across the aisle to pass laws may indeed ring true in coastal areas, where interlocutors were more likely to discuss political tension between more moderate and more progressive Democrats. Yet in

some inland regions of the state, Democratic SU candidates face significant Republican opposition.

Michigan

Michigan voted Democratic in presidential elections from 1992 until Donald Trump's victory in 2016. But electoral maps show that the state mostly leans red everywhere except the Detroit area. Most of the MPLS participants I interviewed were from Republican-leaning central and western parts of the state or lived in wealthy, primarily Republican Detroit suburbs.

Democrats in Michigan selected a woman for every statewide office on the ballot in the 2018 election: governor, U.S. senator, attorney general, and secretary of state. All of them won, although Republicans maintained their majority in both houses of the state legislature – an outcome some news sources and Democratic leaders blamed on gerrymandering (Wilkinson 2018). At an October 2018 training, MPLS women discussed their apprehension about the imminent election and predicted a "blue wave." Yet the recent rise of far-right Tea Party or Tea Party-adjacent political actors in Michigan was also of concern for several involved women, who felt that their party was being taken over by a faction of "crazy" interlopers who both did not understand the political process and held extreme views.

An issue specific to the Michigan context that came up repeatedly was the implementation of term limits for state-level legislators in the 1990s. MPLS leaders who had been involved in state politics for decades lamented the fact that term limits meant

the steep learning curve for new legislators led them to be less effective, that those with specialized knowledge were ousted and their expertise lost, and that collegiality with colleagues stemming from long familiarity, both within parties and across the aisle, was no longer as possible. This attitude stands in contrast to SU leaders' positive opinions about recently-instated state legislature term limits in California, which they celebrated as a great opportunity for more Democratic women to be elected into the newly open seats.

In discussions about the upcoming 2018 election, many MPLS participants agreed that Republican nominee for governor Bill Schuette was not the best choice. His candidacy came up in conversation often in meetings and workshop discussions leading up to the election. One MPLS participant was a strong Schuette supporter and had interned for his campaign, yet others (including program leadership) expressed disappointment in his primary victory over former Republican Lieutenant Governor Brian Calley. One participant vehemently critiqued Schuette for not showing his family in any of his television ads and claimed he lacked "personability," arguing, "he's going to get killed [in the election]. Not because he's not the more qualified candidate, which he probably is, but because we haven't seen a single picture of him with his wife. …I'm not going to vote for a guy who isn't shown with his family or seems to put his job way before his family." As discussed at length in chapter four, notions about the semiotics of representation circulated among interlocutors regarding what "signs" or qualities leaders should possess. For this interlocutor, being family-minded is a quality that leaders should evince, and Schuette did not. Another Republican interlocutor explained, "I know a lot of

women who have been Republicans for a really long time who have [Democratic 2018 nominee for Governor] Gretchen Whitmer bumper stickers on their car. Like, they cannot vote for Bill Schuette. They won't do it." This voting based on a lack of enthusiasm for or even animosity towards a specific candidate rather than falling in line with their party evidences that there are limits to Republican women's tendency towards party loyalty and provide further evidence for analyses by scholars like Wattenberg (1990) and Panagopoulos (2006) about the politics of the contemporary U.S. being candidate-centered rather than party-centered, discussed above.

Training Programs' Material Relationships to Their Parties

Program contexts and structures

Having established necessary background information on the broad political party differences affecting women candidates and the geographical contexts of the two main research field sites, let us turn to a more detailed discussion of the training programs' organizational structures and relationships with their respective party institutions. As discussed above, there are fewer Republican than Democratic women in the U.S. overall. Additionally, the state of Michigan has a quarter of the population of the state of California, and a more ideologically mixed political makeup with more equal numbers of Republicans and Democrats, whereas California is dominated by Democrats in most areas. These basic facts greatly affect the numbers of women SU and MPLS are able to recruit and ultimately propel into elected office. Additionally, the different structures of the two programs' networks and how they relate to their respective political parties,

which in turn shape their funding and recruitment strategies, affects their scope and effectiveness as solutions to women's underrepresentation in public office.

On paper, the MPLS and SU organizations appear akin to politically opposed mirror images of one another. Both political nonprofit organizations have explicit partisan leanings, although neither is run directly by a political party. Both have 6 to 7-month cohort-based training models during which a group of women who are interested in running for political office meet together one weekend per month to learn campaign skills and develop a supportive bond of "sisterhood." The two programs train recruits on many of the same topics and skills, including public speaking, interacting with media, fundraising, and navigating state politics, although SU includes a significant training component on racial and social justice education that MPLS does not, reflecting the Democratic Party's greater emphasis on identity politics and addressing social inequality. MPLS, in turn, includes educational components on current hot topic political issues (e.g. cannabis legalization) and a deep dive into understanding the state constitution, which do not have analogous trainings at SU.

There are significant differences in how the MPLS and SU organizations are structured and run that lead to increased reliance on the Republican Party for recruitment efforts on the part of MPLS. The executive director and development director of SU both work full-time to secure funding for SU and its initiatives, which has allowed them to travel around the state to host recruitment events and meet with individual and corporate donors, work with partner organizations to create a political pipeline for Democratic

women in California that does not rely on existing party structures such as Democratic clubs and committees, pay trainers (although most are volunteers), coordinate formal volunteer campaign advisory teams for program alumnae, plan large and small-scale fundraising events, and hire interns and administrators to do outreach and bookkeeping. Even with multiple paid staff members, a board of directors, and volunteers, SU still occasionally struggles with program funding and logistics. In contrast, MPLS is led entirely by part-time volunteers, and thus does not have nearly the same capacity as SU to recruit or support program members. Their recruitment is conducted mostly through word of mouth and existing alumnae, at Republican Party events, and by soliciting state and county-level Republican Party leaders.

During Donald Trump's presidency, SU drew heavily on anti-Trump sentiment and identity politics to seek donations from the public and recruit applicants (for example, one appeal referenced Trump's derogatory Tweets about "The Squad" of freshmen congresswomen of color). After his presidency, the organization continued to occasionally draw on anti-Trumpian sentiment in their messaging to spur support for their mission to "change the face of politics." MPLS leaders, in contrast, do not have the capacity to work full-time soliciting and keeping track of donations and applicants, planning events, or coordinating email campaigns. They do what they can to recruit women alongside their day jobs, rely on volunteer trainers, encourage alumnae to ask for campaign guidance on an ad hoc basis, and bring home-cooked meals to workshops. While SU works with both the Democratic Party establishment and outside of it to recruit

women, MPLS' recruitment efforts are largely limited to the Republican Party establishment and do not result in as many applicants. The size of MPLS cohorts hovers around 10 participants every year, whereas SU has the capacity to train 75 women in three 25-person geographically-based cohorts around the state of California every year and typically receives more applicants than they can accept. This disparity in applicant numbers may be due simply to the relative dearth of women involved in the Republican Party, the smaller population in Michigan, or, in part, to the basic message of women being an identity group requiring special treatment via women-specific candidate training being less palatable to Republicans. Despite its smaller size and total reliance on part-time volunteer labor, MPLS has an impressive track record. As of 2021, there have been more MPLS alumnae elected to statewide office than SU alumnae. One can imagine how MPLS' reach might increase even further should the Koch family, GOP, or other Republican donor decide to prioritize training Republican women and fund a full-time staff member or two for the program.

The differences in the program's track records may be due in part to partisan differences in the numbers of support organizations available to women in politics, a disparity stemming from fundamental party culture differences in support for identity politics. There are several groups in California (e.g. Fund Her, Close The Gap) and nationally (e.g. EMILY'S List, Vote Run Lead, She Should Run) that support (e.g. fund, recruit, train) Democratic women or are nominally nonpartisan but in actuality serve

mostly Democratic women. Women in California who want to run for office may skip applying to the time-intensive SU in favor of one of their several other options.

MPLS, on the other hand, touts itself as the *only* program that trains Republican women in-person in the state of Michigan. The dearth of other options for training and funding for Republican women may contribute to MPLS' impressive track record because Republican women who are hopeful state-level politicians may seek affiliation with MPLS by default. There are simply no other state-based options for support specifically for GOP women. It should also be pointed out that SU, prior to the launch of their inaugural Legislative Boot Camp training for state-level candidates in 2021, has been primarily focused on building a broad bench of Democratic women leaders in local-level office. They tend to specifically target their recruitment efforts on women who plan to run local races rather than those at a higher level. Still, considering SU was founded in 2002, it is surprising how few alumnae have reached state-level office in comparison with MPLS, which was founded in 2007 and trains far fewer candidates each year. With SU's new focus on hosting bi-yearly Legislative Boot Camp trainings tailored for state-level candidates, however, it appears likely that SU will soon catch up to MPLS' numbers.

State parties' support

Both the Republican Midwest Public Leadership Series (MPLS) and Democratic Step Up (SU) have beneficial relationships with their respective state-level parties. Both groups are provided access to training space by their state parties, for example. I attended MPLS' 2019 on-camera communications and interview training at the Michigan

Republican Party headquarters in Lansing. While there, trainees were assisted and coached by a Michigan Republican Party staff member. Similarly, SU held their 2019 Boot Camp at the California Democratic Party headquarters in Sacramento. In addition, some training program alumnae hold leadership roles within their state parties. As of March 2022, four SU alumnae served as California Democratic Party Caucus Chairs. Several MPLS alumnae have also served on the Michigan Republican Party's Executive Board and committees.

In addition to providing training space, state party representatives have joined both training programs to serve as trainers and speakers. For example, California Democratic Party Chair Rusty Hicks and Asian Pacific Islander Caucus Chair Melissa Ramoso spoke with the SU Class of 2020 for their virtual "Sacramento Day" training centering around state-level politics. A former Vice Chair of the Michigan Republican Party who is also an alumna of the MPLS program spoke as part of a roundtable at a 2018 training. SU includes training on how the state party works and its significance, especially for endorsements. Similarly, MPLS features a training session focusing on the structure and function of the GOP. The former Executive Director of the Michigan Republican Party served as a trainer at the 2019 MPLS Boot Camp and discussed the tools and data the state party can provide to candidates, for example.

Local parties' support

Both MPLS and SU have close relationships with county-level parties and party clubs and encourage program members to be active in their local party. Indeed, women in

both organizations are very active in local party politics. Many alumnae of both programs participate in or serve as leaders of county committees and local clubs or are entrenched in party politics as delegates. For example, in March 2020, at least 39 SU program members and alumnae ran for seats on Democratic County Committees across the state. Many MPLS alumnae also serve or have served as County Chairs or in other local party leadership positions. One MPLS participant described how she was recruited to join MPLS in 2018 by the Oakland County Republican Party Chair, herself a MPLS alumna, after connecting with her through their involvement in the Greater Oakland Republican Club (GOGOP), for example.

Party-based recruitment

For MPLS, the state and county Republican Parties are a central avenue for recruiting women into the program. As described above, unlike SU, MPLS is an entirely volunteer-led organization with no paid staff. Program recruitment takes place through the MPLS President and Vice President, who advertise MPLS to women they meet through Republican organizations and events they attend in the course of their own political activism. They maintain a contact list of Republican committee and organization officials from around the state. In addition to in-person outreach through events and informal snowball recruitment through the alumnae network, MPLS primarily recruits from within the Republican Party network. For example, the program Vice President serves as a GOP county chair and has sent MPLS recruitment emails to other GOP leaders for them to forward to potentially interested women in their networks. In this

way, MPLS tends to recruit women who are already members of the Republican Party infrastructure rather than, for example, seeking to recruit community activist outsiders who may hold conservative views but are not involved in local party politics.

SU also involves county parties in their recruitment efforts – they have used local party headquarters to hold recruitment events, for example. They value applicants' involvement in local Democratic Party politics and include a question asking applicants to describe their party involvement in the program application. Similarly to MPLS, this indicates a tendency to recruit women who are entrenched in their local party politics. However, they also hold many recruitment webinars and events unconnected to local party structures and in recent years, the organization has worked to broaden the questions on their application to encourage applicants who may not already be involved in Democratic Party politics. For example, the Democratic Party involvement question on SU's Class of 2022 application read, "Describe your role, if any, in CA Democratic Party politics (e.g. attend democratic club meetings, attend Convention, serve as delegate). If you are just beginning to take an active role in this work please share ways you are committed to deepening your commitment as you go forward." They are explicit that applicants may not yet be active in the party. In this way, their recruitment efforts include local party organizations but also make some efforts to recruit beyond them.

The involvement of local parties in recruitment efforts and the consideration of program applicants' previous party involvement indicates the kind of partisan gatekeeping one would expect from explicitly partisan organizations. Both SU and MPLS

are working to elect women to office under the banner of their respective political party rather than training women to, for example, be community activists or proponents of major electoral change such as ranked choice voting, gender quotas, or third parties. Fundamentally, the organizations work to propel women into leadership positions within the bounds of formal political activity in the existing U.S. two-party electoral system – these are not revolutionaries with pitchforks. Despite this fundamental alignment with existing political structures, however, program leaders and participants sometimes experience tension with their parties, do not necessarily see themselves as aligned with their parties in every way, and some even see themselves as outsiders or part of a (potential or current) revolution.

Organizational leadership structure

MPLS mirrors the Republican Party in its top-down, concentrated leadership structure. Decision-making power for the program belongs solely to the organization's President, a volunteer who also works a full-time job as a political lobbyist. She helped start the program in 2007, has volunteered countless hours, and is deeply personally invested in the idea that Republican women's leadership should be promoted. She receives help from the program Vice President and other volunteers, but singlehandedly plans and executes the majority of tasks associated with MPLS – even making and bringing home-cooked meals to feed program participants every training weekend.

If the President were to leave the program, it is difficult to imagine that MPLS could withstand the disruption in leadership. The program rests on her shoulders – she

has built relationships with trainers, alumnae, and representatives from the venue that hosts MPLS trainings. Another volunteer or team of volunteers could step in to take over program facilitation, but the continuity of operations would likely suffer since the knowledge of how to run the program rests primarily with one individual and is not codified. At one time, there was a Board of Directors for the organization that shared institutional knowledge and decision-making power, but it has since been disbanded. In part because of the Republican Party's general aversion to identity politics and values emphasizing self-reliance and the ability of anyone to be successful with enough moral strength and self-discipline (Lakoff and Wehling 2016) rather than providing some groups special treatment, there is likely a smaller pool of interested volunteers to lead and contribute to MPLS than there are for SU.

In contrast to MPLS' likely inability to continue were its President to leave, SU was able to continue its operations in 2018 and 2019 despite rapid, disruptive changes in leadership because its leadership structure is more diffuse. SU has an active Board of Directors who were able to find and hire an interim leader to take the place of the departed Executive Director. The interim Executive Director was able to hold the program together and facilitate trainings by drawing on the Board for help, hiring an additional staff member, and relying on volunteers. The 2019 training program schedule was delayed, and much event planning took place at the last minute, but it still ran successfully. Because SU's executive leadership and decision-making power is shared and spread out, the program was able to withstand a temporary leadership vacuum. If a

similar change in leadership needed to occur for MPLS, a new President would have to (with no compensation, as it is a volunteer-led organization) wade in without robust assistance to attempt to reach out to existing contacts and recreate, or entirely re-envision, the program. These differences in organizational leadership structure have significant ramifications for the programs' ultimate longevity.

Training Programs' Discursive Relationships to Their Parties and the "Establishment"

Upon discussing how surrounding political contexts and party cultures affect women candidates and candidate training programs and how each organization interacts with their party infrastructure in terms of training and recruitment resources, left to explore is how program leaders and participants at each field site understand the significance of partisanship and discursively position themselves in relationship to their party and "the establishment." Turning to participant observation and interview data, how are party relationships communicated in training content and other program materials and statements? How do program participants position themselves as party insiders or outsiders? How do they view the "establishment" and what does that mean in these contexts?

Both SU and MPLS are explicitly partisan organizations, and both programs ask applicants to confirm their party registration on their application. But beyond confirming party registration and asking applicants to demonstrate their involvement and familiarity with their local parties, there are no specific requirements for how zealously progressive

or conservative applicants must be. In the past few SU recruitment and application cycles I have observed, there has been some internal disagreement among SU application reviewers and staff about whether some applicants demonstrate progressive enough values. But program leadership has confirmed that SU is for all women who fall under the Democratic umbrella, regardless of how far left they are. Indeed, my SU interlocutors vary from self-identifying as a democratic socialist to being a "moderate Democrat." Similarly, the President of MPLS emphasizes that participants are all over the Republican spectrum and there is no requirement for applicants to have a certain level of conservatism. When one alumna asked about encouraging a woman who was not especially conservative to apply to the program, the President reassured her that there is no litmus test – she would not check on people or ask "how pro-life are you?" Indeed, most alumnae of MPLS view the far-right Tea Party as too extremist.

In the following sections, I consider in detail how relationships to parties and views of "the establishment" are expressed in training program discourse, and how individual program participants relate to their political parties and express their political orientations, drawing on Lakoff's work on partisan frames of communication.

Partisan motivating issues

What general aspects of their political party culture and values did interlocutors most identify with? Reflecting the main tenets of the Republican Party, there were two distinct camps in regard to the issues MPLS participants found most motivating and which most affected their partisan leanings: religious conservatism (primarily right to

life), and fiscal conservatism (primarily lowering taxes). Approximately half of the Republican women I interviewed were devoutly Christian enough for the subject of their religious identity to come up over the course of our acquaintance or to be cited as a primary reason they are Republicans. Others discussed their aims to improve governmental efficiency and their central concern of "who's going to pay for it" when considering policy.

While SU participants' specific motivating issues varied, social welfare issues including education, healthcare, and housing were central concerns (affordable housing is a particular issue in California, which as of 2020 had the highest number of people experiencing homelessness and largest percentage of total homelessness by state of any state per data from the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness at USICH.gov). Most interviewees focused on equity and social justice and the need for policies that reflect those values as a central reason they were aligned with the Democratic party. As one SU trainee put it, "whether it is in education or whether it's criminal justice, or immigration, anything where the people who have been in power have better outcomes than those who don't, I think that there needs to be reform." Government intervention to promote a more equal distribution of resources and rights was a top consideration.

Points of conflict with parties and party leaders

From the above outline of participants' motivating issues, we see, unsurprisingly, that the opinions of interlocutors on both sides of the aisle aligned with central values of their party. Both SU and MPLS are explicitly partisan, working alongside and with their

respective political party organizations and connecting to them in various ways as part of their state's political ecosystem. But there are some points of tension in both groups' relationships with their party establishment and leaders.

Applicants must be a member of the given party and the programs' recruitment efforts revolve, at least in part, on party membership and involvement. However, SU in particular also appeals to an outsider-oriented message of shaking up the establishment in their recruitment messaging and social media. For example, the slogan for one SU recruitment tour, "It's Our Turn," hearkens to the idea of upsetting the status quo. More pointedly, a Step Up leader released a statement following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 that indicates a growing call for large-scale institutional change. The statement includes explicit calls to "radically change and update" government institutions, laws, systems, and policies that uphold white supremacy. In social media posts sharing the statement, SU wrote, "If our elected officials are not going to do what it takes to safeguard our communities, it's time to replace them." By not specifying the political party of the current elected officials who are "not doing what it takes," SU seems to condemn inactive leadership across the board and call for the replacement of ineffective Democrats as well as Republicans.

In some cases, candidate training organizations' tension with their political party establishment manifests as tension with individual party leaders. For example, California Democratic Party Chair and labor union activist Rusty Hicks spoke with the SU Class of 2020 as part of their "Sacramento Day" state-level politics training in 2020, but his

relationship with SU is potentially uncomfortable due to his electoral history. Hicks' opponent in his election for California Democratic Party Chair was Kimberly Ellis, a featured and beloved speaker at SU trainings who remains close with SU leadership. When she spoke to the Class of 2020 at a previous training, Ellis discussed the difficulties of that race and running for office as a Black woman more broadly. While the class seemed to appreciate hearing Chair Hicks' presentation about the state party, there were a few pointed questions thrown his way from class members about the state party's plans to better serve and include underrepresented communities like women and people of color. In their post-training evaluations, a few class members expressed disappointment with his presentation and that he had been victorious in winning the state Democratic Party Chair seat over Ellis.

Ellis was called "the most powerful unelected person in California Democratic politics" in one *Sacramento Bee* newspaper article (Smith 2017). She ran unsuccessfully for Chair of the California Democratic Party twice, narrowly losing in 2017 to a man who later had to step down due to accusations of sexual misconduct, and losing to Hicks in 2019. She embraces the position of progressive outsider to the Democratic Party establishment and adopted Shirley Chisholm's 1972 presidential campaign slogan "Unbought and Unbossed." After a training presentation by Ellis in 2019, many SU participants expressed interest in volunteering for or supporting her campaign. After her unsuccessful election later that year, class members expressed their disappointment and several even came together to send Ellis flowers. This alignment and broad support of

Ellis highlights how many SU graduates may feel like "unbought" outsiders to the Democratic Party establishment despite the fact that SU leaders have been entrenched in party politics as consultants, policy officials, and staffers.

SU's movement to elect more women is becoming increasingly powerful. Illustrating this is the recent establishment of a "political pipeline project," detailed further in chapter six, that has brought together an informal consortium of California organizations dedicated to women in politics including SU, Close the Gap California, and Fund Her with the goal of identifying specific women around the state who are in positions to run for state-level office in 2024 and propelling them to victory. Whether or not they see themselves as members of the existing "establishment," SU is perhaps forming an establishment of their own.

Similarly to the SU class members' disappointment with California Democratic Party Chair Rusty Hicks' victory over former Executive Director Kimberly Ellis, an unfavorable opinion of a male state party Chair in comparison with a woman Chair (in this case, a former Chair rather than a candidate) has been expressed on the Republican side as well. One interlocutor, a Republican woman party leader who is not a MPLS alumna but is a supporter of the program, told me, "the Michigan Republican Party, I think as it is right now with the current Chair – and I'm not saying anything to you I wouldn't say to him – they just don't care. In fact, the Chair's gone out of his way to say, 'the grassroots are nothing because they don't produce the money, the only people I want to talk to are the elites that are going to produce the money.' And whereas Ronna

Romney McDaniel, when she was Chair, she was awesome. She was just awesome. She made you feel included. And by the way, there it is, she's a woman. And she did a whole lot, and this state went red under her watch. Why? Because she made people feel great. That sixth sense that she's got as a woman just brought it out of everybody. I mean we were energized, we were excited, and I've been involved for a number of years and I've never seen anything like that until her." One might expect this kind of gendered dissatisfaction with current state party leadership from Democratic SU participants whose party culture is generally more friendly to identity politics and criticism of those at the top. But it is noteworthy to see the opinion mirrored by a staunchly Republican and pro-Trump leader who we might otherwise expect to evince Lakoff's (1996) conservative approach that support leaders as singular moral authorities.

The sympathy and support many SU participants have for Kimberly Ellis and their upset with how she was treated at the state party convention is also similar to how some MPLS participants discussed the treatment of Tonya Schuitmaker, a judge and former Michigan state senator who lost her 2018 bid to be the Republican nominee for Michigan Attorney General to fellow Republican Tom Leonard. Her hard-fought primary campaign was described as "tough" and "sometimes bitter" (VanHulle and Beggin 2018). Leonard was voted in as the GOP Attorney General nominee at the Michigan Republican Party state convention in 2018. At the initial meeting of the MPLS Class of 2019, one participant who had attended that convention discussed how a man in the audience was so mean to Schuitmaker that she felt compelled to find Schuitmaker's husband in the crowd

and express her sympathy to him for how she was being treated. Other MPLS participants agreed with her assessment of Schuitmaker's unfairly negative treatment, and one program leader described Schuitmaker as a very nice woman. Schuitmaker is a white woman, so this instance lacked the additional element of potential racial bias at play in Kimberly Ellis' defeat and treatment. However, similar complaints about women candidates being treated badly in state party contexts were expressed by participants on both sides of the aisle.

Training programs as status quo outsiders?

By definition, these training programs exist because there is dissatisfaction with the current gender makeup of elected officials and a desire to increase the number of women in political office. The reason underlying the development of these nonprofit women's training organizations is that political parties and voters are not doing enough on their own to elect women. The political party establishment not always being a welcoming or supportive environment for women or people of color is a common refrain from participants on both sides of the political aisle who are frustrated with the "boys' club" (or more accurately, "old, rich, white, cisgender, heterosexual men's club") of elected office.

The ethos of both SU and MPLS necessarily involves a degree of embracing outsider status in that sense. But – reflecting their political orientations – the discursive positioning of MPLS leaders also places them as pragmatic moral authority figures in opposition to far-right "crazies" and liberal progressive "resistors," reflecting elements of

Lakoff's (1996) "strict father" metaphor that maintains how conservative leaders position themselves as protectors in a dangerous world. SU's leadership, in contrast, increasingly calls for farther left, progressive structural and institutional change that reflects Lakoff's (1996) "nurturant parent" model emphasizing empathy and shared social responsibility. Thus while some interlocutors on both sides of the aisle expressed frustration with their political parties, their reasoning tended to differ along party lines. MPLS interlocutors expressed more dissatisfaction with divisiveness and extremism (including far-right extremism) and a desire for moderation and to come together, while SU women, in contrast, were largely dissatisfied because their party was too moderate and expressed a desire for change and farther left social welfare-related policies. While one can conceive of the possibility that some conservatives might call for radical change in the sense of dramatically reducing the reach of government, only one MPLS participant I interviewed described herself as a relatively fringe member of the Republican Party who identified primarily as a libertarian. In contrast, my SU interlocutors included self-described Democratic socialists and many self-described progressives along with a few who considered themselves more moderate Democrats.

Many involved in MPLS criticized Republican Party leadership and far-right Tea Partiers, and program leaders often expressed a surprising (to me) fairness to Democratic leaders. Opinions of President Donald Trump, for example, did not fall in line to evince party loyalty but varied widely from admiration to disgust. Positive characterizations of Democrats included one trainer's lauding of Democratic 2018 gubernatorial candidate

Gretchen Whitmer's campaign as being "good politics," and a MPLS leader's comments during a training on how talented Democratic U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow was at reaching out to her constituents. Positive attitudes towards bipartisanship and "building bridges" discourses among MPLS interlocutors are discussed in detail below. In contrast with MPLS' participants expressions of respect for or willingness to work together with their Democratic political adversaries, no Republican leaders were spoken well of during my training session observations with SU (although a few Democratic interlocutors expressed a willingness to listen to Republicans in interviews). This difference may be due, at least in part, to differences in their geopolitical contexts – interactions with Republicans are rare in extremely-blue coastal California. SU staff did attest to the value of hearing from more moderate Democrats as well as progressives.

Republican women and the status quo

The origin story of MPLS involves the founders' frustration with the Republican Party's treatment of women as "window dressing," meaning they were trotted in front of cameras but not given real power. The very existence of MPLS as an organization that promotes the identity group of "women" positions it in opposition to the Republican Party's rejection of identity politics, as evidenced by the male party official not understanding the need for a women-specific training group discussed above, and challenges the value typically placed on gender-neutral recruitment by the Republican Party (e.g. not becoming involved in primaries, not prioritizing electoral races involving women simply because a woman is running but only when the race is important to overall

party strategy) which makes it harder for women to succeed (Och 2018). MPLS women remain frustrated by the gender makeup of their party. During one training, a participant who held local office critiqued the campaign literature of a "very typical Republican man that is running for office" in her area. Another participant took offense, arguing that she was "sick of hearing about how if a Democrat woman runs against a man, then we're going to lose." But as the critical participant told me later in an interview recounting the exchange, "Well, honestly, the way the world is changing, that's how I feel. Especially if they don't have a good platform." She was fed up with "typical" Republican men running for office and felt that their time in power was coming to an end.

Tension between a desire for gender neutrality and the positioning of women as an identity group with unique characteristics and barriers that need to be addressed also emerged in interviews. Often, MPLS participants expressed meritocratic discourses or that one should not vote for a woman just because she is a woman – reflecting the Republican Party's emphasis on gender neutrality and meritocratic ideals emphasizing self-discipline and individual effort – but they also spoke to the need to elect more women or support women and provide them a space, breaking from traditional conservative frames. Republican women often discussed how one should support "the most qualified candidate" regardless of their gender. For example, one 19-year-old trainee explained to me in an interview that, sure it can be "the year of the woman," but "every year should be the year of everyone. And we shouldn't just elect someone because they're female. We should elect someone because they have the passion, they have the

drive, they have the ideas." Cementing this point, in summer 2021 MPLS recruitment emails ended with the line "The women who win, win because they are the best candidate on the ballot, NOT because they are a woman." The public stance of the organization reflects a meritocratic understanding of candidacy inherent to Republican party culture, which assumes that everyone can be successful regardless of background if they have enough moral strength and self-discipline (Lakoff and Wehling 2016).

One MPLS trainer, a local-level elected official, described her "naiveté" in a previous run for office. The incumbent officeholder told her to get out of the race because he would out-fundraise her and the establishment would support him, but she responded, "I was raised by a single mom so all you just did was throw a whole lot of fuel on the fire" by telling her she couldn't do something. She lost in that primary, but was proud to get 37,000 votes. Looking back now, "what was I thinking, running a county-wide million population race?" But she explained that she did not regret running, because a lot of good things resulted, chiefly name recognition and respect from peers in local politics who witnessed her hard work. By invoking her status as the child of a single mother to explain her determination and pointing out how the establishment supported the incumbent, she positioned herself as an outsider to the status quo, but one who followed Republican Party meritocratic ideals in her belief that with enough hard work, she could be successful regardless of her background and position.

Republican women as the establishment

Seemingly contrary to discursive positioning as outsiders, some MPLS participants embraced their status as the establishment or moral authority and voice of reason in opposition to the "drain the swamp" far-right Tea Party crowd (which in the context of Trump-supporting Michigan may itself be considered a kind of outsider position in relation to the increasingly-far-right majority). One MPLS alumna explained, "we had a big Tea Party wave… and it was good, but they were unwilling to work. I've been in Eaton County for eight years. I just got elected to our executive committee two years ago. And that was only because I basically worked with a group of people to throw everyone out, we threw a little coup basically… But it was really annoying that after being around for five years and saying, 'hey, I want to serve on a committee, I want to help. I don't need to be an executive, I just want to serve, what's your committee schedule?' And you were met with so much resistance... And it's like, but I have experience, I know what I'm doing, I have access to resources, why won't you let me participate in this process? And it was very much, well you're part of the establishment, we don't really need you." Her frustration with those who she viewed as "unwilling to work" reflects conservative "strict father" (Lakoff and Wehling 2016) ideals of personal responsibility and self-discipline.

One MPLS leader discussed her opposition to the Tea Party not in terms of values, but because of their methods and attitudes, saying, "a lot of their tenets I agreed with and so I would go to Tea Party meetings to learn. But it was their process and their

methods that they used… they got too greedy and it's going on in Oakland County now. They've taken over Oakland County government. They're saying that everybody else to the left of them are irresponsible and not accountable. I mean the rest of the world is not that extreme, okay, they're talking extremes. They're people that are not admired or necessarily have any party's interests at heart but their own. They're very selfishly driven, what they want is what they want and it's the right way." Both MPLS women were frustrated by the Tea Party's unwillingness to compromise and work alongside more moderate Republicans. Reflecting the Republican Party's top-down power structure, they wished that the Tea Partiers would fall into line to support their party rather than protesting and forming their own more "extreme" faction.

One MPLS leader who works as a lobbyist jokingly referred to herself as a member of the special interest "swamp" political establishment who does not stray far from the capital. She and others discussed conflict within the Republican Party involving far-right "crazies" taking over from more moderate mainstream Republicans. She joked more than once that she wanted to start her own third party, called "People Over Politics," because of her frustration with polarization and political divisiveness. She brought up how some accused Republicans who supported Democratic 2018 candidate for Governor Gretchen Whitmer of being RINOs (Republicans In Name Only), but reasoned that "we didn't put the best candidate forward," implying that supporting Whitmer was an understandable position. She mentioned that while the Democrats have "Bernie crazies" on their side, there are some people on the Republican side who are so

far right she "can't even talk to them." As another MPLS leader said about the libertarian leaders she viewed as taking over Oakland County politics, "that's the extreme. That's to the right of the Tea Party, which is pretty far right. I'm not there, I'm not a libertarian." Again, these interlocutors' views reflect the Republican Party's top-down power structure in that they wish the more "extreme" factions would fall in line under the Republican Party establishment.

An association of far-left with far-right groups came up again in a later MPLS training conversation. When one participant questioned how "angry" Democratic women who say they are anti-establishment expect to be able to come in in January and get anything done, another related this point to "the Tea Partiers," who also said they would not go along with the status quo, but will, she maintained, not have the power to enact change because the more centrist leaders do not trust them enough to work with them and place them on important committees. In this way, despite the complaints MPLS participants made about Republican Party leadership and elected officials and calls for more women to be taken seriously in leadership positions in the party, many (although certainly not all) still considered themselves ideologically pragmatic "establishment" or mainstream Republican Party members as opposed to extremists (in either party) calling for radical change.

Similar to the tongue-in-cheek suggestion to create an alternative "People Over Politics" party, another MPLS participant described her desire for a "no party system" in an interview. She explained, "I feel like it just doesn't matter what party you run for, we

should have the same goals. Except really, the Republicans I feel it's more about who's gonna pay for it. And I think we do have more in common than not. I think that we need to stop polarizing and labeling everyone so much. Because I just think, don't the Democrats and Republicans want a lot of the same things? But we don't talk about what we have in common. We more talk about what we don't agree on… I think if we work together more, or didn't have the parties, it would be a lot different." When asked what kind of party system she would prefer, she said, "a no party system. We're all Americans, we all want to do good, we all want to have the government run great and efficiently and help people, and we have a lot of the same goals." This anti-party polarization position and less antagonistic view of the rival party, discussed more in the "Building Bridges" section below, was prominently reflected in Republican interlocutors' discourse but not present among Democratic interlocutors. It is an unexpected finding from my fieldwork that speaks to an intriguing potential broader benefit of electing Republican women as a way to improve the extreme polarization in our political system today.

Democratic women and the status quo

SU accepts women from across the Democratic spectrum, whether or not they look especially favorably upon the current party platform, and in fact many SU alumnae discursively position themselves as outsiders to the political establishment or the Democratic Party elite. In her discussion of not belonging to elite insider groups that often hold political power, one Latina SU participant in Northern California explained, "I didn't go to a top school. I didn't go to Yale, I went to [a California state university], you

know, I worked my butt through. Went to law school and worked during the day. So I'm nobody special. I'm probably reflective of most of the population." By invoking her educational history and claiming to be "nobody special," she positioned herself as an outsider to the political elite establishment who worked hard to get ahead, similarly to the Republican interlocutor quoted above who discussed how her determination stemmed from being the child of a single mother. The most salient difference in their views may be how much they seek to change this system and provide supportive networks for those in similar positions (this Democratic interlocutor's views on the power of SU to provide a social network that serves as a counterpart of elite "boys' clubs" is discussed in chapter five) or whether individualistic hard work and self-reliance is the preferred method for getting ahead.

"The status quo must go" became a rallying cry for the SU Class of 2020 at their graduation celebrations. Program recruitment materials for the Class of 2020 stated "we still have a status quo to crush!" and the SU web site discussed the need to "change the face of power" and "disrupt the status quo." However, while the organization may situate itself in this marketing discourse as a challenger to the political establishment writ large, and many alumnae discursively position themselves as outsiders and change agents, the official stance of SU as an organization is to embrace the Democratic Party. Like MPLS, they do not require a political ideology litmus test, but they are an explicitly partisan organization that requires party membership. They hold up the Democratic Party platform and values in their marketing materials and training content.

Democratic women as the anti-establishment

Not all SU participants express partisan loyalty and alignment with Democratic Party values. One SU alumna who is a local Democratic Party leader and candidate for local office, for example, defined themself publicly in their Twitter bio, which has since been updated, as "Queer non-binary power femme, Democratic socialist infiltrating the Democratic party. ✊ they/them/theirs pronouns." They are positioned as a far-left outsider to the mainstream Democratic Party.

While she did not discuss it in terms of infiltration but instead as purposeful affiliation in response to the limitations of a two-party system, another SU alumna also brought up Democratic socialism when asked about her somewhat ambivalent identification with the Democratic Party. She explained in an interview that, "I'm not a California native, and when I moved here 16 years ago, and I was registering to vote with my change of address form, I realized that I could be listed as 'Decline to State.' And at that time of my life, I thought it was quite novel. That I could choose – not that I would ever vote for a Republican, but recognizing that we only have a two party system has always felt a bit like a constraint. And knowing that I'd like to run for office and knowing that we have a two party system and knowing what happened in 2016 when the Democratic Party said we will not get behind a radical candidate... several months ago when I was going through the process of trying to figure out what it takes to run, and looking at all the documentation, and I realized, if I want to be a candidate that has the most support, then I need to go with a party that is big and powerful, and not have a

barrier out the gate. And in this moment, when the Iowa caucus was last night and it looks like Bernie Sanders, a Democratic socialist, may have won – it makes me think that maybe there's actually another way. But I'm a Black woman, who is masculine-presenting, gay-identified. I think that for me, being a Democratic socialist... I already checked so many boxes that are on the margin, I don't know if I could afford to check another box. That would be Democratic socialist. Even though that might most closely align with my values. So the Democratic Party is a party for me of affiliation. But I think that principally the Democratic Party is not necessarily matched with all of my values." While this interlocutor identified more with Democratic socialist values, she feared that her marginalized identity as a masculine-presenting Black lesbian made her too much of a long-shot candidate already, and it would be a better strategic move for her to align herself with mainstream Democrats. Her account of the Democratic Party not reflecting all of her values is similar to the view of another program member who explained, "to be totally frank with you, I wasn't a Democrat until about a year ago… I was 'no party preference' for very long time." While she eventually registered as a Democrat because she acknowledged that, for her, "there's no point in me pretending like I would vote anything different or more conservatively on certain things," she also contended that "the Democratic Party needs some help. Right, we need some rehab. We gotta actually be walking the walk and we do a lot of talking the talk, but I don't see a ton of walking the walk. If you look at a lot of these [voting] records." She explained that she was hesitant about Kamala Harris' record, for example, but she was excited to support progressive

activist and self-proclaimed "Unbought and Unbossed" outsider Kimberly Ellis in her 2019 bid for California Democratic Party Chair.

There are SU alumnae who have successfully gained office under the banner of Democratic socialism rather than identifying as a Democrat – as one *Sacramento Bee* article about Sacramento City Councilmember-elect and SU alumna Katie Valenzuela describes, "a self-described democratic socialist, Valenzuela, 34, has been called Sacramento's Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez. When she is sworn into her council seat in December, she will be the youngest member and the only renter" (Clift 2020). Unlike the SU participant above who reflected that while Democratic socialism more closely aligned with her values, the "big and powerful" Democratic Party was a better strategic move for her to align with because of its greater resources and popularity, Valenzuela was able to achieve success in a local government race under the Democratic socialist label.

While women across the political spectrum expressed unalignment or disagreement with their political party, the reasons for this frustration tended to differ between Republicans and Democrats. Unlike some MPLS interlocutors' dissatisfaction with the existing party system and suggestions to start a new "People Over Politics" party or adopt a "no party system" that stemmed from a frustration with divisiveness and extremism, including far-right extremism, these SU women's ideological dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party stemmed from it not being extreme *enough* and their hopes for farther-left policy change focused on social welfare and shared responsibility to ensure all

people are successful – hallmarks of the "nurturant parent" progressive values communication frame (Lakoff and Wehling 2016).

Apart from ideological disagreements with the Democratic Party, participants also discussed the difficulty of breaking into party politics as a newcomer. One SU alumna running for local office in San Francisco explained, "this is part of the challenge that I see for myself. If you are a political outsider, not well entrenched - meaning that you have been doing this for a long, long time because people who are in politics in San Francisco stay in politics for a really long time, even if not in elective office, then in things on the periphery like the DCCC, or commissions, or boards or whatever else. And they continue to wield political influence even though they're not in elective office anymore. If you are not entrenched in that, if you are not part of that ecosystem, it is very difficult. And so the question is... do you start planning for a political career in your 20s? Do you have to have that political ambition that far out in order to be successful? And, you know, I didn't. And so that's part of the challenge for me, because there are candidates who have been part of that political ecosystem for a very long time." While this alumna did not discuss the impenetrability of her local political establishment in gendered terms, the idea of political networks of power and influence being dominated by men and especially difficult for women to break into is one that came up again and again.

Material vs. ideological party support

It is curious that Democratic women involved in Step Up more often position themselves discursively or rhetorically as outsiders to their party establishment than

Republican women, most of whom position themselves as insider members of the mainstream Republican Party establishment, despite the fact that political science research shows that Democratic Party leaders provide more substantive support for women candidates than their GOP counterparts. In other words, MPLS interlocutors' loyalty to their party is relatively unrequited, and the Democratic Party's loyalty to SU is relatively unrequited. These stances may be due, at least in part, to differences in political party cultural attitudes.

As Freeman (1986) explains, one of the fundamental differences between the parties is attitudinal: "Republicans perceive themselves as insiders even when they are out of power and Democrats perceive themselves as outsiders even when they are in power." Neither women nor either of these organizations are "in power" per se. Men remain overrepresented in elected office. But SU's growing network of over 700 women – 182 of whom serve in elected office as of 2022 – and recent establishment of their "political pipeline project" with other California organizations dedicated to getting women elected evidences their increasing influence. It may be the very identity politics-embracing nature of Democrats and the accompanying tradition of protest that provides SU with the funding, flexibility, and freedom to make such robust calls to change the face of power and replace ineffective elected leaders in their party and beyond. As long as part-time volunteer-led MPLS relies on Republican Party networks for recruitment assistance (assistance that is not always effective, as evidenced by the male party official who responded to recruitment efforts by questioning the need for a training program that

didn't include men to exist at all), it seems unlikely that leaders would be able to espouse revolutionary rhetoric or take seriously the call for a new "People Over Politics" party even if they wanted to.

Many GOP practitioners I spoke with expressed positive characterizations of current power structures or masculinized approaches to leadership when discussing women's political underrepresentation, reflecting a conservative approach and Republican political party cultural values of respecting party loyalty and existing structures. One trainee who was also a local elected official stated when asked about women's political involvement, "what women don't understand is that to get into the boys' club, you've got to become a part of the boys' club." She detailed how women should branch out from their "own little world of you know, your family and your kids and soccer practice and hockey practice and homework, and your career…" and participate in political networking events, as well as "divorce emotion from decision making" in favor of cool rationality. Both socially and emotionally, she suggests that women who aspire to political leadership become "part of the boys' club" and more similar to those already in power.

Republican Nurturant Parents? Bipartisanship and "Building Bridges" Discourses

"Bridges are meant to be crossed, not burned"

The importance of working together with members of the Democratic Party emerged as a running theme in MPLS program discourse, and came up repeatedly in training sessions and interviews. In one training session on political appointments, one

MPLS leader explained, “I always say in this class and even kind of my mantra in life, is ‘bridges are meant to be crossed, not burned.’” She explained that politics is “…a really small world,” and “we really are a big family whether you’re Republican or Democrat because – and I’ll tell people this all the time – if somebody gets sick downtown [at the Capitol], there’s a meal chain. Somebody will be at your door with a casserole, somebody will make sure your kids get to soccer, and it doesn’t matter at that point whether you’re an R or a D, we all come together.” This attitude may be influenced by the Michigan political environment, as well as a “midwestern nice” attitude. The state is a politically mixed swing state, rather than a solidly partisan state such as California, necessitating that lawmakers work together more often to pass bills.

Still, I was struck by the prevalence of discourses about cooperation and bipartisanship among Republican interlocutors, and the lack of similar discourses among Democratic interlocutors, who focused much more on “fighting” injustice. While interlocutors’ policy positions and values still align with their respective political parties, this leadership style is a notable departure and even a reversal from Lakoff’s (1996) central partisan leadership communication metaphors of the Republican “strict father” as singular moral authority whose word is law and the “nurturant parent” who values cooperation and open communication with all parties to understand different points of view.

A former political official conducting a MPLS training session agreed with the “building bridges” concept, saying, “we just need to come a little bit more together.” She

referenced then-Senator John McCain's famous defense of Barack Obama from a supporter who called him an Arab, and said "we all have to be committed to doing that and saying we're just gonna treat each other with respect." The idea of respect for and reaching out to the other side became a point of contention and object of further metadiscourse during the training, as one young trainee complained that she had been told by others involved in Republican politics *not* to say that she would support reaching across the aisle. Others in the room immediately questioned this, including two trainees who were elected precinct delegates, a position for which the duties include attending state party conventions. One participant who holds local elected office responded that while those farthest right may "scream the loudest," in her words, "they're nuts" and most people are more moderate and see value in reaching out to the other side. This interlocutor valued moderation and calm moral authority in the face of extremism.

"I would [support the idea of building bridges]" said another participant who holds local elected office, "I've been saying that for years. …Any board that's actually a good board, if you're open and inspired and you sit at a table, the best ideas come up, and the best policy comes out… having the diversity, and women being a part of that process…working across the aisles is mandatory, and that's why it's set up the way that it's set up to begin with is that you have that, to come up with the best policy." Here this interlocutor seems to depart from Lakoff's "strict father" singular moral authority model of Republican leadership, in favor of a more cooperative style that values understanding

others' viewpoints and seeing the world through others' eyes – something Lakoff (1996) associates with the Democratic "nurturant parent" approach.

The finding that women, even Republican women, tend to discuss cooperation in favorable terms is perhaps less surprising in light of scholarship that shows how a feminine leadership style is associated with traits like the ability to compromise and cooperation (see Alexander and Andersen 1993), although it must be noted that a leader's gender need not align with whether their leadership style is masculine or feminine (see Reingold 1996). Holman and Mahoney (2018) show that the presence of a women's caucus can help collaboration between women continue even in polarized environments where cooperation between opposing party members is waning, providing real-world evidence for women's association with cooperation. Some MPLS participants who were current office holders discussed examples of times they might work with Democrats; one talked about increasing gun control on college campuses, for example. It is difficult to know whether their statements – or indeed the statements about ideals and values made by any of my interlocutors, most of whom did not yet hold elected office – would hold true in reality once they found themselves actually in elected office. But the all-Republican environment of the training would suggest that their words were heartfelt rather than designed to appeal to absent Democrats.

"Building bridges" with actions

The "building bridges" discourse is not only woven throughout MPLS trainings, a spirit of reaching across the aisle manifests in decisions about what trainers to bring in as

well. During a discussion after a MPLS training session, the leader of MPLS said, “We bring in the best trainers of the best, and I’ll be honest, we’ve brought Democrats in before. Because they were the best. They were the best in their field.” There were some murmurs of surprise at that, and then a few women saying, “that’s great,” and “that is good,” and “it’s good to get the perspectives of other people.” “My media coach is a Democrat,” added a trainee who is a long-time Republican staffer. Another trainee responded, “that’s good, because that’s not about party, it’s about being the best at what you do, period, and that’s what it should be.” Again, this openness to other viewpoints reflects Lakoff’s “nurturant father” approach to leadership more associated with Democrats (1996).

I was also surprised to hear trainers were not required to be Republicans simply because MPLS is an explicitly partisan organization and, along with SU, requires trainees to confirm their party registration. The choice to invite Democrats to train may be a reflection of the Michigan context, as with a smaller population, the political field is more limited and there may be fewer expert consultants available to choose from. In contrast, I cannot imagine a situation in which SU would bring in a Republican trainer. It would not occur to the program leaders to do so, and Republican consultants are also likely far outnumbered by Democratic ones in blue California. MPLS training, in contrast with SU, also occasionally involves apolitical trainers. One trainer I observed who discussed leadership skills described herself as “hospitable, not political,” for example.

The following exchange during one MPLS training illustrates how openness to the other party was discussed. During the training session, a program leader said, "my favorite thing is to bring a Republican and Democrat together and go, 'this is why I think the two of you should network with each other.'" She explained that, "you can learn something from each other. And you can build a relationship, and you can build a network. Because if all you're living in is in your own little bubble, you're never going to know what the other arguments are, for one." The trainer agreed, adding, "Listen, I've spent a long time in the Republican Party, okay, been there. But I have friends on the other side of the aisle, too. And now here I am all these years later with these great relationships and I'm not [working] in the legislature anymore, but I can still call these people and I can still interact. So, long after the political thing is out of the way, you still want to have these relationships with people and not get yourself so entrenched into a party kind of position, that you shut yourself off from people. Because at the end of the day, you get to a place where I am. And I've really become more about people than party. I'm going to be about good people." A trainee in the session responded, "Well, if I win – when I win – I'm gonna be serving both. I want to hear what the other side has to say too. If I'm representing everyone." The trainer agreed, "Absolutely. And you'll be surprised how… you're going to align with those other people too, you know what I mean? They're going to say things to you, and you're going to be like, 'Well, you know, I feel that way too.' So it really isn't a party thing." These kind of discourses about bipartisanship and openness to connecting with members of the opposite party (for

substantive discussion, not just to win an election) that sometimes circulated in MPLS reflect Lakoff's (1996) "nurturant parent" stance that is open to different viewpoints rather than the stereotypical Republican "strict father" singular moral authority.

In contrast, bipartisanship discourse is absent from SU training except in a few cases, discussed below, such as sessions aimed at trainees in relatively conservative areas such as Orange County who need to say the right things to win votes from Republicans but do not necessarily express a desire to actually connect with Republicans for substantive open discussion. This is perhaps because California leans so blue that most Democrats do not interact with Republicans enough for the need for bipartisanship to come up, but is likely also because Democratic interlocutors were on the whole (with a few exceptions outlined below) so vehemently opposed to Republicanism and Trumpism that they did not see any value in connecting across the aisle. While an ideal of open-mindedness is associated with Democrats when it comes to embracing social change and liberal policies (e.g. gay marriage), reflecting Lakoff's (1996) empathetic "nurturant parent" leadership metaphor, open-mindedness clearly does not always extend to hearing from the political opposition.

Democratic interlocutors' lesser interest in bridge-building

Some SU trainers and speakers, especially those from California's more conservative areas like the Central Valley and Orange County, discussed how to appeal to more conservative voters. One alumna, a Black woman who holds local elected office in Orange County, described how she drew on her deep roots in her city and deliberately

used language that emphasized continuity over change to emphasize shared experiences with and appeal to white, more conservative voters in her community. She utilized these messaging strategies in order to get elected, but she did not attest to any substantive benefits of working across the aisle once in office. Although one SU participant, a religious leader in northern California, did discuss her willingness to listen to those across the aisle, saying, "I am willing to listen to my Republican sisters," bipartisanship or "building bridges" was not a prominent, or even present, topic in any SU training discussions I observed.

In interviews, some SU participants living in deeply blue areas described a need not to work across the aisle with Republicans, but to appeal to both progressive and more moderate Democrats. One San Francisco-based SU participant explained, "in San Francisco it's a bit different right, you have the progressives and you have the moderates. And sometimes the fighting between those two groups can be just as vicious as fighting between Republicans and Democrats." She discussed a need to navigate this divide, "When I asked [a local elected official], 'Hey, which Democrat club should I join?' He said, 'all of them.' In San Francisco there are clubs that are traditionally more moderate, and there's clubs that are traditionally more progressive. Harvey Milk's more progressive, Alice B. Toklas is more moderate. And it was really good advice, because he is one of those people that seems to be embraced for the most part by both progressives and moderates." She attested that there was a need for negotiation not between Democrats and Republicans, but among Democrats, "it's challenging too because you

have people who see, on the progressive side, any sort of negotiation as you're a sellout and you don't care about working people. And that's hard because it's politics and negotiation is necessary. You may not necessarily get everything that you want, but you might get some concessions if you're willing to make some concessions. And that doesn't fly with a lot of the hardcore progressives in San Francisco, so, you know, trying to navigate this space where yes I'm a progressive woman, and at the same time I might make decisions that are going to piss somebody off. You know, that's something that still plays out in San Francisco in spite of the fact that we're pretty much all Democrats." Interestingly, her characterization of hardcore progressives viewing any negotiation as being "a sellout," while certainly aligning with Lakoff's (1996) general Democratic "nurturant parent" frame in terms of emphasizing shared social responsibility, the interactive communication style itself, or frame within the frame, seems closer to the "strict father" associated with conservatism who sees themselves as a moral authority who knows what is best for all and brooks no discussion or negotiation. While this interlocutor recognized a need to work with those across the Democratic spectrum, when I asked if she saw a benefit to electing more Republican women as well, she told me, "most Republican women that I've seen either profiled in the media or who I've talked to, I don't want to characterize them as selfish, but they're very focused on maintaining the system as it is. More deference to corporations, more deference to industries that really are squeezing the middle and working class. So I think it's really imperative that we elect Democrats, the focus can't be on women exclusively, because it's a party

connection. And progressive Democrats need to take the wheel. I don't think Republicans or even centrists at this time are going to make a large enough impact for people on the ground are receiving the benefits that they need, the resources and the support they need to not only survive but thrive. Can't count on Republicans for that." She referenced the conservative tendency to maintain existing order and promote competition and individual responsibility (the "strict father" approach) as less beneficial than the progressive ("nurturant parent") focus on shared responsibility.

Some SU participants who lived in less blue areas of the state were more open to and supportive of the idea of working with Republicans and the possible benefit of electing more women across the political spectrum. One woman running for office in the Central Valley said, "I am very left-leaning and I have very strong feelings. But at my core, I do believe, in part because I was an American History professor, that the people of the United States deserve a government that looks like them. And we're not 100 percent liberal, it's roughly half and half. And if I could have a moderate woman at the table, who's a Republican with a conservative point of view… I do think that there's a strong need for women with those points of view." In this interviewees' rural community, she posited that reaching across the aisle would be needed to pass legislation, and she would have to be amenable to the idea of working with Republicans.

One SU participant went even farther and espoused that there was a substantive benefit to bipartisanship and hearing from Republicans, telling me, "I don't think that we would operate successfully if we were 100 percent Democrat. I think there does need to

be obviously some balance with regards to not only gender but perspective because it's important to hear what other people have to say. And it's important to hear other people's perspectives and feedback and experiences that have got them to the point that they're at. I don't necessarily think it would be ideal to have only Democratic women in office either. At the end of the day, it boils down to what it is that we need to be saying and talking about, and what kind of issues we need to be collectively discussing and brainstorming about, etc. So I don't think it's necessarily one way or the other with partisanship because I think that it's beneficial to have people from all different areas." She went on to explain that those in her region are "definitely primarily Democrats. But there's a lot of really staunch Republicans in Contra Costa County. A lot of conservatives, like maybe even more libertarian-leaning people, like fiscally conservative but socially liberal, or there are all kinds of socially liberal until that means something happening in their backyard that they're not crazy about." She welcomed this diversity, saying, "I am somebody who is welcoming of hearing what other people have to say. I mean, I'm a lawyer, right? So I don't mind a debate. I think you learn by listening, which I think a lot of politicians do not do. And so for me, I like the idea that we'll have an environment where I'm working with both parties." Whether this interlocutor still feels that way once she is in office remains to be seen, but her attestations of bipartisanship's benefits echo the "building bridges" discourses that circulate in MPLS trainings. While bipartisanship was not a training topic or promoted consistently, it was discussed by these few Democratic interlocutors in interviews.

One SU participant, whose spouse voted for President Trump in 2016, described how Trump's election and the intense political polarization in the U.S. made her "want to learn more about the middle of the country." She went so far as to say, "I think we've got to get back to a place of moderate," and recounted, "I had an opportunity to work at the Kansas City Star when I was a journalist. And I went there to try it out. We went there as an introductory weekend… I declined. I declined because I just felt so out of place… because I just felt so out of my comfort zone there, between black and white, and I'm brown. But I think that's just what it is, is we just do not know enough about our fellow Americans. I have family in Oklahoma. I sent my daughter there. And, you know, it's just a different culture. We're the same country, but we're so so divided." She added that, "if anything, what am I learning from [President Trump] is just that we really have to do a better job of getting to know each other… we go travel to different countries to learn about their cultures, but I think we need to do that here. Somehow. Bridge ourselves. We're just different and we're lucky to live on this island here in California. We just get caught up in our own little bubble here." She was concerned about how politically polarized Americans are and wanted to learn about other's views in order to return to a more unified place. While discourses about reaching across the aisle were almost entirely absent from SU training and many Democratic interlocutors expressed intense opposition to Republicanism, a handful of interlocutors did discuss the need to "build bridges."

Angry Democrats: Limits to "Building Bridges"

Despite the prominence of discourses about openness to working across the aisle, my Republican women interlocutors certainly do not love or agree with Democrats. Some program members despaired that liberals are "crazy" and repeated Trumpian rhetoric such as referring to Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) as "Pocahontas." One MPLS trainee who serves on a city council complained that her Democratic counterparts like to talk about empathy but then failed to show any empathy to an elderly constituent who could not afford to pay her city's expensive tree removal fine. Many of my Republican interlocutors negatively characterized liberals, and especially liberal feminist women, as "angry" (see further discussion of interlocutors' discourses about emotion in leadership in chapter four). Yet as evidenced above, there is a thread of cooperation and bipartisanship discourse at MPLS, and even action in the form of bringing in Democratic trainers, that is not as present among SU participants, many of whom are, indeed, angry.

As discussed previously, SU leaders expressed righteous anger and opposition to current political systems in statements written after the murder of George Floyd that called for the replacement of ineffective leaders and a radical transformation of political structures and policies. The expression of anger also appears in other SU messaging, such as a call-to-action email SU sent to their fundraising network in 2020 that referenced how angry program leaders were about President Trump's attacks on the congressional legislator "Squad" women of color. There was certainly no love lost for President Trump among SU women (although one interlocutor did tell me, "I pray for him"). As one

trainee put it, “he has put this country back so far that it’s going to take somebody really special to bring us out of this in the amount of time that he brought us into it. I think the divisiveness that he has caused this country, the full on blatant lies and inability to accept reality, has contaminated the country.” It should be noted that opinions about President Trump among MPLS participants ranged from positive enthusiasm to similarly extremely negative characterizations, although for some, a negative view of his character did not affect their willingness to vote for him and the Republican administration. As one MPLS interlocutor who described President Trump as “absolutely repulsive as a human being” put it, “I don’t like Trump as a person at all. I just don’t. I don’t need to [like him in order to vote for him], though.” She intensely disliked President Trump, but prioritized her dedication to Republican Party policies in her decision to vote for him anyway.

Democratic women being “angry” is something that the leader of MPLS has brought up in discussions about activism, feminism, and the Women’s March specifically. She often expressed her disagreement with Democratic protesters who angrily focus on “resistance” and opposition, a stance she perceives as unproductive. She assured me, “you’ll never see 3000 Republican women marching or knitting pink hats, that’s not what we’re about.” She and other participants questioned what Democratic protesters do to actually get involved and change things. This attitude towards protest relates to party culture – while the Democratic Party is comprised of different constituent groups that seek to have their voices heard and their concerns addressed and listened to, reflecting Lakoff’s “nurturant parent” approach that is open to listening to the citizen

"children" (1996), the more top-down hierarchical model of power in the Republican Party is less supportive of these forms of group protest.

A Historically Polarized Moment: Women's Candidacies and the 2016 Election

No Step Up interlocutors came close to expressing support for President Trump. It is unclear whether all of my Midwest Public Leadership Series interlocutors, some of whom expressed intense distaste for him as a person, voted for him in the presidential election despite their dislike. Perhaps more interestingly, one MPLS participant who holds local office expressed how she disapproved of Hillary Clinton but could have seen herself voting for her had she handled the Monica Lewinsky scandal differently. Her stance might be understood as a feminist critique of the Clintons' victim blaming. As she explained, "I have very little respect for [Hillary Clinton]. I know she's a smart woman. I know that she's an accomplished woman. But the way she ran her house and her personal life, I did not agree with. Had she actually dumped her husband's ass after getting caught with Monica Lewinsky, and went out on her own and then got elected Senator? I would have voted for her. But she stuck by that asshole, and then she villainized the victim. I... really? You think I'm going to forget that?! I'm not going to forget what you did to her. I was an intern once too."

Somewhat similarly, another MPLS participant expressed her opinion of Hillary Clinton as being initially positive but becoming negative after the Lewinsky scandal. She said, "I liked her when Bill was first in office, but once the cheating thing came out, and she never commented on it or left him, I really just do not respect her anymore. And I

always think of that when I see her. I really just kept that in my mind. Like, I would leave in two seconds. I think it was embarrassing for her. 'Cause she just chose to stay and didn't care, or didn't say a word about it. And he was able to just keep on doing whatever he was doing. So it did make me not respect her for that, and maybe that's wrong and it's not really my business what happens in their marriage, but it did make me have a lesser opinion. So then I didn't take her as seriously when she was running for other things." Whether or not these Republican interlocutors would actually have voted for Hillary Clinton in 2016 if her actions taken in response to President Bill Clinton's sexual misconduct were different is unclear. But the fact that they position themselves in this way in our interviews indicates, at the least, a potential openness to Democratic candidates and not voting purely along party lines.

CHAPTER 4: SHAPING WOMEN LEADERS: TECHNOLOGIES OF SELF AND METAREPRESENTATIONS OF LEADERSHIP

The Transformational Process of Leadership Training

Women's candidate training programs are a uniquely effective lens through which to explore questions related to gender and political representation because they make semiotic processes explicit that may otherwise remain opaque, illuminating sociocultural norms at play in how women political actors are understood. Upon observing my very first candidate training, a nonpartisan one-day workshop for women candidates, I was struck by how the trainers were quite literally shaping trainees into legible political candidates, bringing cultural norms about how successful (women) political actors look, speak, and act into sharp relief. During one interactive segment of on-camera communications training, for example, attendees were coached and prodded to speak more effectively and even instructed to hold their hands at a certain height so nonverbal gestures could be seen. Gender-specific ideas about how women should speak, act, or dress in order to be politically successful are often expressed as practical guidance (see Barbara Lee Family Foundation 2021), although trainers themselves sometimes struggle to balance providing pragmatic advice that reinforces patriarchal norms with their ideals that women should have the freedom to present themselves and their candidacy however they wish.

Assumptions about women inherent in training topics provide insight into practitioners' gender ideologies. At the first workshop I attended, gendered

characterizations included, for example, assumptions about women's hesitancy and tendency to apologize when asking for donations. Other training sessions I have observed have dedicated time to the discussion of women's "imposter syndrome." By tailoring their training to address women's assumed timidity or ingrained inferiority complexes, trainers may help women who struggle with those issues, but they also reinforce gendered notions of women's capabilities, leadership abilities or styles even as they work toward gender equality and women's empowerment. Some training organizations, including my main Democratic field site, emphasize and celebrate how women leaders bring new and different perspectives and styles to politics. Whether the circulating gendered assumptions about leadership are positive or negative, women's candidate training provides a window into sociocultural norms, including tensions between trainers' strategies for success in the political world as they understand it to be now and their ideals and hopes for change in the future.

Specific coaching on bodily comportment, style of dress, communicative practices etc. encourages people to adopt "signs" associated, by trainers with expertise in those areas, with successful candidates. In general, social identities may be understood as products of communicative practices that emerge from semiotic processes through which images of personhood become aligned with publicly perceivable signs (Agha 2007). A leader may be understood as a constellation of signs through which they represent aspects of themselves to constituents while, in turn, representing those constituents to others. Understanding political representation as a semiotic process allows for the investigation

of democratic representation and electability as linked to semiotic representation, and in turn reflective of surrounding cultural understandings such as gender (and race, class, etc.) norms and ideologies. Training programs may be understood as metasemiotic organizations designed to manipulate the representation process and bring about change. By advising women about everything from crafting a persuasive message and fundraising effectively to what color suit jacket and what kind of hand gesture is most flattering on camera, trainers encourage the adoption of particular signs and attempt to shape women into something closer to the predominant cultural image of a legible and "electable" political leader. The "Characteristics of an Ideal Candidate" training session description on the 2019-2020 MPLS curriculum touts that participants will "develop the attributes of an effective candidate. Although it is not necessary for a candidate to possess many desirable qualities in order to win, the more of these traits one has, the greater that individual's chances of winning an election." The strategic metarepresentational processes at work in training programs circulate meaningful signs and representations relating to the attributes, dispositions, personal qualities, skills, and interactional styles that leaders who are successful in getting elected are assumed to possess and the complexities that exist within them in terms of political ideology, race, class, and geographic location, among other variables.

As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, candidate training programs' focus on assisting individuals in gaining particular knowledge and skills that will help them secure a political position may be seen as an extension of the broader fetishization

of skills as Foucauldian "technologies of self" (1988). As evidenced by the proliferation of the self-help and skill-building industries and described by linguistic anthropologist Bonnie Urciuoli (2008), contemporary neoliberal capitalism has led to a shift towards workers' employment value being dependent on their skills (e.g. communication, leadership) and their ability to communicate those skills. Workers aim to develop skills and articulate them persuasively on their resumes in order to be valued as employees, and political candidates similarly seek out skills training to succeed in their industry and win over voters by demonstrating and communicating their leadership skills. For *women* political candidates, gender is an additional aspect affecting this process and the traits, qualities, and skills they need, or think they need, to be successful. This study adds to recent ethnographic research on women's elected political leadership outside of the U.S., including Nakano's (2018) exploration of how "housewife activism" in Japan that emphasizes an inclusive and caring approach to politics has propelled women into local political office and Buyandelger's (2016) study of Mongolian women parliamentary candidates' self-styling into "intellectful" political leaders.

This chapter explores how training programs and aspiring women candidates, in light of the gender ideologies and political party cultural values surrounding them discussed in the preceding chapters, go about the transformational process of becoming leaders. What skills do training programs seek to impart? What qualities do candidates seek to inhabit and exhibit? And what do these things indicate about how women's

leadership is understood by practitioners in the contemporary, changing U.S. political landscape?

Masculinity and Femininity in Leadership – The Double Bind

Before exploring the (meta)representations of leadership that circulate among women's candidate training program practitioners, it is helpful to understand the broader context of how scholars theorize leadership and gender. As mentioned in chapter three, the political parties are themselves gendered institutions, with the Democratic Party being associated with more stereotypically feminine values and leadership styles and the Republican Party being associated with stereotypically masculine ones. But what does that mean? How do theorists conceptualize and define gendered leadership?

Gendered leadership styles do not necessarily correspond to leaders' actual gender, although voters and training program interlocutors may conflate the two. As Blankenship and Robson (1995) point out, a "feminine" political style may be used by candidates of any gender. They define a feminine approach as involving the use of personal, concrete experience to express political views, valuing inclusivity, viewing public office as an opportunity for empowerment of others, a broad and holistic view of policy, and emphasizing women's issues. This contrasts with more independent and individualistic leadership styles characterized by toughness and decisiveness that are more "masculine." Similarly, Huddy and Terkildsen's 1993 experimental research on the gender stereotyping of political candidates focuses on how the tendencies of voters to expect greater expertise on stereotypically masculine matters like defense and the

military from male political candidates and higher performance on stereotypically feminine "compassion" issues like healthcare and social welfare from women stems not from the candidates' gender, necessarily, but from their personality traits. A relative superiority of "male" traits (e.g. assertiveness, rationality, decisiveness) for most important policy issues, regardless of the candidates' gender, was found (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). Following this, they explain that women candidates must portray themselves as possessing these more highly valued "masculine" traits, possibly in addition to "feminine" ones, to gain voters' confidence. Of course, the political parties themselves are also gendered and whether a leader's traits and values align with their party's is also important. Feminized traits, for example, are more in alignment with the Democratic Party's greater focus on stereotypical domestic "compassion" issues so will likely appeal more to voters who care about those issues. Women candidates generally tend to be seen as more liberal, Democratic, and feminist than male candidates, which can be problematic for female Republicans who may face voter misperception of their platform (Ibid.).

Alexander and Andersen claim that "successful women candidates feel the double bind of having to be both feminine and masculine," (1993: 542) meaning that they must evince traditionally feminine skills like "compassion" and "ability to compromise" and also display traditionally masculine traits such as "decisiveness" and "ability to handle a crisis" to get elected (Ibid.). Many scholars discuss this "double bind" that women in public or leadership positions face of having to be seen as strong, competent, and not too

"feminine" or too emotional, while simultaneously running the risk of acting "too much like a man" rather than appropriately feminine (Jamieson 1995). In recent years, there has been much discussion and pushback in media and scholarship about the requirement for women leaders to be "likeable" (Burrell 2008; Agarwal 2018; Seabright 2020), an inscrutable trait often placed in opposition to competence. "Women, thus, are in a double bind that men are not. They are perceived as either likeable or competent but not both" (Bohnet 2016: 26). Jamieson has some tangible advice for aspiring women leaders to overcome this unfair predicament, urging them to "speak softly while carrying a big statistic" (1995: 197) by opening their campaign with data-driven material that proves their toughness and ability to lead and then following up with more empathetic, "caring" content, for example. "These moves are designed to overcome the 'bitch' factor, shorthand for the femininity/competency bind," Jamieson (Ibid.) explains. Women must find ways around the double bind and appear both tough and caring. This research may be nearly 30 years old, but concerns about the double bind still emerged in my interviews with interlocutors – as one Democratic program participant and candidate for state-level office explained, "there's an expression I know for women candidates that you're supposed to be 'tough as nails and warm as toast.'"

Again, "masculine" and "feminine" styles of leadership need not correspond to candidates' gender. Tolleson-Rinehart found in her case study of large city mayors that the men executives were more likely than the women executives to claim in interviews that politics was more about cooperation than conflict, and all of the executives she

interviewed most admired stereotypically "feminine" leadership qualities of "motivation, concern for people, vision, commitment, listening, and communication" (2001: 155). The political styles and personas that appeal to the electorate in question vary over time and space and between political parties. Lead political correspondent for *The New York Times* Robin Toner, for example, observed in a 2007 article how then-Presidential candidate Barack Obama's emphasis on listening and bringing people together contributed to a "sensitive guy" persona that appealed to women voters and meant that he could appear both "strong" and "soft." Toner posited that this evidenced a shift towards more feminized, compassionate candidates of both genders in U.S. politics. That may be true for the Democratic Party, whose leaders tend to evince a more "feminine" style (see more on this point and Lakoff's gendered political communication frames below). The 2016 election of President Donald Trump, who certainly did not evince a "sensitive" or "listener" style of leadership, does not support her case for the Republican Party however.

As a final caveat, it should be noted that leadership style should not be conflated with voting behavior, which has been found in studies of congress members to be more strongly predicted by factors other than gender, such as party affiliation, constituency interests, personal ideology, and ethnicity (Welch 1985; Vega and Firestone 1995; Schwindt 2000; Swers 2002).

Interlocutor discourses about the double bind

According to those involved in women's political candidate training organizations, does successfully running for office as a woman (still) require essentializing gender and balancing the stereotypically "masculine" and "feminine" traits described above, or are other strategies being promoted? The "bitch factor" (seeming too direct or assertive) and its opposite (being too quiet or passive) was cited by interlocutors. As one SU program member put it, "everybody who is smart is a bitch, right? Everyone who's direct and knows what they want... And I think that men are allowed to get away with being able to be direct governors and solution makers and leaders with any kind of attitude, and it feels like as soon as women show any of those characteristics we're dubbed as something low." Republican interlocutors also cited this issue – at one MPLS training, participants discussed the unfair expectation placed on women candidates to be personable and likeable as well as competent, whereas men candidates can get away with only being competent. As one participant suggested, people might say "'He's got some great ideas. He's not very personable.' [But] that's not how they talk about women… 'she's cold, she's frigid.'" An MPLS program leader agreed and brought up the "bitch factor," explaining, "Men are aggressive, women are a bitch." An SU participant who discussed the specific challenges of running for office as a Muslim woman of color told me that for women, "what may come across as a more passive or a less aggressive personality is seen as a weakness. So being a quiet woman, I think, is often as negative as being a more aggressive woman. So it's sort of not knowing where to be then, because if

I'm too quiet then I'm seen a certain way, and if I'm too aggressive then I'm seen a certain way." As these quotes illustrate, women candidates on both sides of the aisle continue to be concerned with the double bind of evincing enough – but not too much – of a "masculine" leadership approach.

The double bind and questioning of voters' perceptions of them as leaders is of particular concern to women of color. As one Black SU participant in Northern California explained, "being a woman specifically, you've got to be careful not to appear too emotional or too angry, right? You don't want to be the angry black woman, you don't want to be the emotional woman… we think of the don'ts, there are more don'ts than there are dos, right? And so it is hard to craft a personal narrative that is authentic and true to you when you're constantly thinking, okay, how is this going to come across?" Being careful with how one presents oneself came up in conversation with other alumnae, one of whom explained, "so many times we're stereotyped as the angry Black woman, and I have to be careful how I present myself in the public daily…" These interlocutors' experiences reflect the keen awareness of the uptake of others and internal conflict stemming from constantly seeing oneself through the dominant groups' perspective that characterizes the experience of oppressed groups, described by W.E.B. Du Bois as "double consciousness" (1903). The double bind or "bitch factor" may be a concern for women generally, but it is a greater and more complicated constraint for women who are members of historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups for whom racialized stereotypes intersect with and compound the challenges of gender stereotypes.

What Does Training Provide?

A Comparative Lexical Analysis of Training Programs' Promotional Materials

Given this background information on gendered leadership stereotypes and the particular leadership trait-related challenges women face, let us consider what, generally speaking, candidate training programs do to help candidates, and whether *women's* training programs do anything different. A comparative lexical analysis of marketing literature, testimonials, and promotional video discourse surrounding mixed-gender and women-only candidate training organizations indicates what training topics and benefits are most central, illustrating how the programs aim to help aspiring candidates and bringing to light additional areas of focus for women candidates specifically – namely, confidence-building. The relatively greater focus on psychological affirmation-related topics in women's training program materials empirically illustrates how confidence is a "sign" or technology of self associated with successful candidates and that women are assumed to require training to obtain it whereas men are not, illuminating sociocultural norms about gender and leadership.

Table I below compares written materials drawn from the marketing literature, testimonials, and promotional videos of women's candidate training programs: prominent national organizations with multiple state-based affiliates Emerge (Democratic), the Richard G. Lugar Excellence in Public Service Series (Republican), and Ready to Run (nonpartisan), as well as EMILY's List (Democratic) and nonpartisan programs Women Elect, Real Women Run, the Barbara Lee Family Foundation, and the National Women's

Political Caucus, with materials drawn from 10 different mixed-gender campaign training programs: The Campaign Workshop (Democratic), Midwest Academy (progressive), Wellstone Campaign Training (progressive), The Progressive Change Campaign Committee (progressive), Democracy for America (progressive), American Majority (conservative), and nonpartisan programs Victory Institute, New American Leaders, New Politics, and Veterans Campaign.

Table I. A Lexical Analysis of Political Training Program Promotional Materials

Lexical Item	Number of Instances: Mixed-Gender Programs (Corpus of 9201 words)	Number of Instances: Women's Programs (Corpus of 9686 words)
"confidence" / "confident"	1	23*
"inspire" / "inspiration"	5	10
"encourage"	7	17*
"skill" / "skills"	27	21
"network"	9	27*

***Proportional difference in the number of instances between mixed-gender and women's programs is statistically significant at a .05 level.**

Consider the programs' use of psychological affirmation terms "confidence," "inspire," and "encourage" in contrast with the use of the more general term "skills." The women's training programs referenced "inspire" 10 times, "encourage" 17 times, and "confidence" 23 times. "Skill" was referenced 21 times. The mixed-gender training programs together made only 5 total references to "inspiration," 7 to "encourage," and

just a single mention of "confidence." "Skills," however, were referenced 27 times in the mixed-gender programs' written materials. These numbers are small, and the discourse samples are not random. But the proportional differences in the number of instances of "encourage" and "confidence" between women-only and mixed gender trainings are statistically significant at a .05 level. All candidate training programs discuss nuts and bolts campaign "skills," but this brief lexical analysis clearly indicates that additional psychological topics of concern feature prominently in women's programs.

One example of how "confidence" is discussed in women's candidate training organization promotional materials comes from an informational video from the Jo Ann Davidson Ohio Leadership Institute, a Republican women's political leadership training organization. In the video, formerly hosted on the program's website JADleadershipinstitute.com but now no longer available online, program founder and former Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives Jo Ann Davidson explains, "through the years, I've tried to really analyze why more women don't run for office, and it became pretty clear to me through my years of recruiting for the House, you know for candidates, and women candidates, that they don't often have confidence in their own abilities. And consequently they don't sometimes understand how they get involved and how the political system works. So I thought if there was anything that we could do as a group who believe like I did to help them, [it] would be to have a Leadership Institute where we can build their confidence in their own abilities…" Here, she highlights how increasing women's self-confidence will lead them to become more politically involved.

Her observations align with contributions from scholars such as Wolak (2020), who finds that self-confidence promotes political interest, attention, and feelings of personal competence in politics, and who argues that the gender gap in political engagement is partially due to men's greater self-confidence.

Following Urciuoli (2003), terms such as "leadership" and "confidence" may be understood as "strategically deployable shifters," or "referring expressions whose semantic value seems obvious but are relatively indeterminate" (Urciuoli 2018). The above data indicate that the training program context-dependent meaning of "confidence" is linked to gender, while the term "skills" is not. Confidence, it seems, is something that women in particular are in need of bolstering. The prominence of these implicit references to psychological barriers and individual self-efficacy in testimonials illustrates the centrality of internal political ambition concerns for women's political involvement, despite scholarship indicating that psychological constraints may impact trainees' ultimate decisions to run for office less than financial or structural issues such as the way districts and primaries are run, a lack of access to funding networks, and caretaking and/or breadwinning responsibilities (see Sanbonmatsu 2015; Piscopo 2019; Bernhard, Shames, and Teele 2021). The single use of "confidence" in a mixed-gender program occurs in a testimonial for New Politics, a bipartisan organization catered specifically to national service and military veterans. Their "Answering the Call" program is described on their website as "an opportunity to undertake a deeply personal journey and reflect on who you are as a leader and how you feel called to political service, now or in the future"

(New Politics 2021). This unique "personal journey" is certainly individual and psychological, but focused on whether one feels a personal "calling" rather than being a skill-building workshop or a motivational seminar designed to increase confidence.

Candidate training, like other ubiquitous neoliberal self-help and personal development initiatives, occurs at the individual level. It follows that women's candidate training organizations would be more equipped to assist with personal inspiration, campaign skill-building, and confidence-building than broader systemic reform such as restructuring the entire political system to be more friendly to candidates with caretaking responsibilities, for example. Discourses relating to (hard and soft) skills development point toward neoliberal subjects' continued self-commodification as bundles of skills (see Urciuoli 2008). But while training programs generally promote individualistic strategies for overcoming the political gender gap (see Maillé 2015), the networks they create may ultimately also help address certain broader issues – chiefly, a lack of access to fundraising and mentorship networks. Trainers are more likely to highlight the specific skills women gain in a program, but many trainees' testimonials discuss new friendships as the most meaningful training outcome. Mentions of the beneficial "sisterhood" gained through women's candidate trainings are ubiquitous in testimonials about programs from both sides of the political aisle. In fact, the term "network" is referenced a total of 27 times in the women's campaign training program discourse outlined above and just 9 times in the mixed-gender groups' materials (a significant difference at a .05 level). This highlights the importance of social networking aspects of trainings in addition to

individual factors. As discussed more in chapter five, this network-building may be the most critical aspect of the training, and trainees often support each other socially, emotionally, and materially – by volunteering and donating to each other's campaigns, for example.

Confidence-building in training programs

As illustrated by the lexical analysis of candidate training program marketing discourse above, psychological affirmation in the form of "confidence-building" and "inspiration" are prominent in women's candidate training program discourse. When discussing the benefits of training, one MPLS participant explained, for example, how "[politics] can be a frightening thing," and "women have to be convinced that they're good enough to run for office." MPLS, she argued, helps to "soften that for you and gives you the confidence that you need to prepare yourself for office." Similarly, a Republican woman leader of a bipartisan program that trained both men and women interested in running for office described the difficulty of recruiting enough Republican women and explained, "I think for some women it's a confidence issue. Like, 'oh, I can't run for office.' No, I also think it's a confidence issue that we see between men and women in other spheres where you know, there's the old story about how women feel like they need to be a lot more prepared than men do… And I think on the Republican side, I think Republican women tend to be... some of them think 'well I just want to stay behind the scenes. I don't want to be in front of the scenes.' One thing that is wonderful though is when after they go through the program they're like, 'I am gonna run. I am gonna file for

office,' they've got that confidence." According to these interlocutors, participating in training can be an effective strategy to increase women's ambition by helping women feel more prepared and inspired to run.

Training serving as a source of confidence was also true for some SU participants. One alumna described at a training session when discussing the benefits of SU that from it she had gotten "the opportunity to feel more solid within myself, and to be more confident in how I carry myself." As one SU leader put it when discussing her goals for the program, "With the folks who are in office today, with the track record, I imagine that folks applying to the program and who are participants have high expectations for the program. And so obviously, I hope we meet and exceed those, but in a lot of different ways. Again, not only just technically being trained and ready to run for office, but that confidence, and then, talk about that camaraderie. I do believe that that's important as a woman in politics." Beyond the nuts and bolts training on how to run a political campaign, this SU leader hoped that trainees gained confidence and a supportive network through their experience. Scholars including Sweet-Cushman (2019) have found mixed results regarding whether role models at one-day campaign trainings for women increase or decrease participants' ambition to run for office, depending on how strongly participants identify with them. But by bringing in trainers and speakers who specifically speak to the importance of public service and the need to increase the numbers of women in politics as well as providing participants space to hear each other's stories, explain their passions and reasons for running for office, and express support for each other,

participants on both sides of the aisle contend that these longer-term cohort-based training programs effectively encourage and inspire them to run.

As described by the Republican interlocutor quoted above, "the old story about how women feel like they need to be a lot more prepared than men do" (see Mohr 2014) is reflected in the prevalence of candidate training aimed at preparing women to run. Perhaps as important a factor as the actual skills learned, training provides a credential that may make them feel more confident about their preparation to run just by attending. Women's drive to be prepared does not end once they decide to run for office. In their Center for American Women in Politics research with women state legislators, Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, and Walsh (2009) describe how women who reach the state legislature are consistently more qualified for the position than their men peers. They posit that this may be because more is expected of women candidates – and especially women candidates of color – by voters and gatekeepers, or perhaps that women simply want to feel more secure and solid about their preparation and qualifications. Regardless, the act of attending candidate training may provide benefits both in specific campaign skills and in general feelings of psychological preparedness and confidence that participants have taken a concrete step towards running.

Metarepresentations of Leadership in Women's Candidate Training Program Discourse

Having established some central benefits touted by candidate training programs and the particular gendered focus on psychological affirmation-related practices of

confidence-building and encouragement that characterize *women's* training programs, let us dive further into the strategic metarepresentational processes that emerged in training program and interview discourses. Trainers and trainees circulate representations relating to the attributes, dispositions, personal qualities, skills, and interactional styles that they associate with successful elected leaders. These leadership strategies and characterizations vary with interlocutors' political ideology, race, class, and geographic location, among other variables. Below, I outline several metarepresentational leadership discourses that emerged among both Republican and Democratic interlocutors, as well as approaches that varied along partisan lines.

Listening

The ability and inclination to listen to all parties involved in a discussion was cited as an important aspect of leadership among interlocutors on both sides of the aisle. It reflects the widespread association between women leaders or a feminine style of leadership and collaboration, as discussed in the above section outlining gendered leadership styles and women leaders' "double bind." One MPLS participant who was running for state-level office initially hedged when I asked her if she thought men and women had different styles of leadership. She explained, "people are so individual." But she went on to say, "I think you can be more effective as a leader by not being such a boss. I actually like listening to people and figuring out how you can help and helping, instead of just saying you do this, you do that… I think women are all really more effective because they can listen." She posits that listening makes leaders more effective,

and women leaders are particularly adept at listening. Her initial reluctance to characterize leadership as differing along gender identity lines but subsequent claim that women are more effective leaders illustrates the tension experienced by Republican women between their political party culture's aversion to identity politics and affirmative action, and their support for women as an identity group to be better represented in public leadership, as evidenced by their participation in MPLS.

The notion that voters value candidates who listen came up repeatedly among Republican interlocutors. As one MPLS trainer advised during a workshop, candidates should "learn to really listen to people and interact with what they say." A MPLS participant who held local elected office explained when I asked her what voters looked for in a leader, "voters will – and this is going to be sound really bad, but – voters will vote for anyone who will listen to them. Okay. They believe if you sit and listen to them, you're going to change their world. Voters don't – the majority of people don't – understand all the dynamics that play in politics. But the people today do hold us to a higher standard. We have some people who come into Council, and they're like, 'you haven't done this, it's been six months since you did this. I was here six months ago. And I have to keep coming to you.' So when they're picking candidates, they want those that'll listen to them and they want people who are going to do something." She placed listening at the very top of the list for how to be a successful elected official. As another MPLS participant and candidate for state-level office put it, voters "look for honesty and integrity, and someone that will listen. Someone that'll listen." This was cited as an

important aspect of leadership generally, as well as, for at least a few Republican interlocutors, something that women tend to be better at.

The understanding that listening to constituents is centrally important for elected officials was expressed by Democratic interlocutors as well. One SU participant described how effective communication in leadership should go both ways, explaining, "it's hard to build trust if someone's just talking at you, or talking down to you or saying 'this is what it is, there's no room for your opinion, there's no room for your thought, there's no room for your questions.'" Valuing listening and connecting with constituents, again, reflects the collaborative and communal leadership style associated with women leaders as described above. Another SU participant explained her willingness to listen to and work with even those on the other side of the aisle, saying, "I am somebody who is welcoming of hearing what other people have to say. I mean, I'm a lawyer, right? So I don't mind a debate. I think you learn by listening, which I think a lot of politicians do not do." She also made a gendered distinction with listening and being responsive to constituents, explaining, "women as leaders tend to hear feedback a lot better than men do. [Men] may sit there and listen to it, but what they do with it is different." Women, she suggested, do "not just let it go in one ear and out the other." Importantly for this interlocutor, a leader should not only listen for listening's sake but also take action to incorporate feedback.

The importance of listening but also remaining honest and upfront about decisions that one's constituents may disagree with was summed up by one SU participant who

formerly held local elected office as follows, “If you want to be in public service – which, I think that’s what politics is, you have to be a public servant – you listen to your voters. And if your voters are wrongheaded about it, you can try to explain to them. Or if your voters have a different idea, and there’s a false equivalency in their head, and it causes demonstrable harm to another part of the constituency, then you have to consider that as well. And then you have to be prepared to stand behind it and explain to the voters if you’re not doing what they want you to do. You have to be prepared to do that and that’s hard, it takes courage, but you have to do that.” Her emphasis on standing by one’s values and being honest in addition to listening to one’s constituents brings us to the next section – honesty.

Honesty

As one MPLS trainer described in a discussion about authenticity and not changing oneself to appeal to voters, “just be authentic and be yourself and at the same time, you’re right, you’re going to have to kind of adjust how you project yourself to people… I just think you have to be you. And admit what you don’t know. And say, this is how I feel about issues. And I think that’s part of the problem sometimes with people in the political arena, I think that they try and act like they know things, and they don’t. And it’s just, it sounds so fake. And that’s how we get to these places about people not liking other people, because it just, it doesn’t align with who you want to be and what your core value system is all about.” Discourse about being true to one’s values and being honest with constituents, as well as critiques of leaders who are “fake” and misrepresent

themselves to appeal to voters, emerged in training sessions and in interviews with interlocutors on both sides of the aisle, indicating the primary importance of honesty as an aspect or "sign" relating to leadership.

One MPLS participant who held local office contended that voters want candidates "to be genuine and true and honest." When I asked if voters' expectations were any different for women candidates in particular, she expressed how women had to be especially credible and educated on the issues. The emphasis on being genuine and honest remained – as she put it, "you either stand up and stay true to who you are, because the voters know the difference, or you can pretend to be somebody you're not." Strikingly similar sentiments were shared by an SU alumna and candidate for local office in the Bay Area, who also discussed the critical importance of honesty and the tendency for voters to see through lies, "I think that people can tell if you're feeding them a line of b.s. versus, 'this is who I am, this is what I represent.' I think that comes with a little bit of age and seasoning, too. Like the more comfortable you are with yourself, I think the more that it comes across as... that you feel like you have permission to be yourself in front of other people. There are a lot of politicians, men and women, who I believe when they communicate are not authentic and you could tell. They may still get elected, but maybe they appeal in some other way to the electorate. Yeah, I think people should just be who they are. That's not exactly politically popular all the time." This disapproval of inauthenticity from leaders and the recognition that voters' see through "the b.s." is a discursive theme uniting interlocutors across party lines.

As one MPLS alumna who leaned Libertarian and voted Republican but did not like President Trump put it, "you need to be your own honest self. And so if you are trying to be just a caricature of what you think a candidate should be... well, I don't know, it worked for Trump, so maybe that does work, I don't know. But... I mean, because he's not a Republican, he's just an opportunist." She went on to discuss Republican candidate for state-level office Candius Stearns, whom she admired. She described Stearns' honest approach to campaigning as, "when she was out campaigning and talking to people, you know, she can't promise 'Oh, well, I'm going to do this one specific thing,' because that would be intellectually dishonest. I mean, she doesn't know. She knows some things that she thinks are broken and some areas where she thinks she could look into it. But until you're actually there [in elected office], you don't know all of the details. And so being able to have that honest conversation with people and not being afraid to say that you don't know all the answers right now, this is where you think some areas are that you're going to look into, but you can't possibly know what all the answers are." Similar to those quoted above, this interlocutor stated the importance of being honest even if that means admitting when one does not know the answer to a constituent's question.

While conventional wisdom holds that women politicians are seen as more honest, the reasoning behind the electorate's perception of women politicians being less likely to engage in corruption is less straightforward (Alexander and Bågenholm 2018; Barnes and Beaulieu 2018). As these accounts show, the topic of honesty came up often

among my interlocutors. Sometimes "honesty" discourses included gendered assumptions about candidates' tendencies to lie. One MPLS participant, for example, expressed frustration about not knowing how to respond to interview questions. When another participant suggested she "b.s. her way through it" if she did not know what to say, she exclaimed, "I don't know how to b.s. my way through it!" She continued, "I think guys do. More so than women do." Her assumption that men tend to be more comfortable spewing "b.s." was shared by a program leader, who responded, "[men] do. But I also think people realize that, too." She turned the discussion towards the interview questions that the trainee had responded to effectively, explaining, "And your questions that you were on fire on, you were genuine, nobody was going to doubt your response. And because everything comes back to, who funds it? Who pays for it? Where does that come from? You can always turn it back to your accounting background. And you're going to come across as authentic and genuine. Because you know that shit inside and out." Before this conversation, the MPLS leader had discussed how men are more (overly) confident than women about running for office, saying, "women think they need to know the answers to absolutely everything before they run for office. And men are like, hell yeah, I'm going to run. I don't even know shit. I'm just, I'm running." Men who run for office, according to the interlocutors quoted above, tend to have fewer qualms about making it up as they go along than women do. The MPLS leader also discussed the need for elected officials to remain true to their values, open, and honest with all constituents even when in disagreement, explaining, "as long as you're always confident in what your

core value is, and what you believe in, you'll answer any question famously. Better than anybody else can. Because that's who you are and you're authentic, and you don't come across as somebody who's pandering for a vote. People may not agree with it, and that's okay. But at least your answers, it's not gonna be like you're telling this group what they want to hear and then this group what they want to hear, and this group what they want to hear. It all balances out in terms of 'this is who I am, and I'm going to be the same when I talk to you. And I'm gonna be the same when I talk to you.'" The notion of "authenticity" and maintaining one's core self consistently rather than telling people what they want to hear is linked to honesty and figured prominently in discourse among interlocutors on both sides of the aisle, although it was especially featured in SU training content.

"Your authentic self"

Both during training and in interviews, program participants at SU and MPLS discussed leaders they admire and strategies for effective leadership. The concept of authenticity in leadership came up repeatedly in training workshops and conversations with program participants. "Authenticity" is a notion that appears in discourse surrounding many women's political candidate training programs. As Erin Vilardi, the founder of nonpartisan women's training organization Vote Run Lead, explained in one 2018 interview, "Our curriculum is called 'Run As You Are' because we're not trying to turn women into political robots. This is about teaching political skills, but keeping your authentic self" (Cook 2018). While candidate training programs provide skills training

and inspiration, Vilardi insists that women should retain their individuality and the qualities that maintain their "authenticity." Similarly, at a nonpartisan Running Start women's candidacy training in 2019, the workshop facilitator explained to participants that "authenticity is going to carry you a lot farther than trying to model yourself after somebody." She urged the women present to think about how they could connect with people through personal stories when drafting their "elevator speech" about who they are and what position they are running for. This emphasis on emotional appeal and personal experiences is a strategy defined by Blankenship and Robson (1995) as being aligned with a "feminine" political style, and one that is more often used by Democratic politicians.

Illustrating how prominent the notion is in SU training, one SU communications trainer used the term "authentic" in regard to candidate messaging, logos, and print media 10 times during her one-hour session. SU trainers discussing on-camera communications similarly stressed authenticity and emotional appeal, saying, "don't be afraid to get personal… You hear this all the time, but you have to be your authentic self, so don't be afraid to be vulnerable, don't be afraid to be funny. Use humor. Be human. …Be yourself, because you're very likable as you are. Don't fear emotion. And that means – that's two sides of that coin – that means don't fear showing emotion, because if something moves you, chances are it also moves someone else. So you want to emote emotion and you also want to provoke emotion. Okay? Make them want to vote for you." This focus on making voters want to vote for you through emotional appeal and

vulnerability was echoed in an interview with an SU leader who, when I asked what voters look for, responded, “sincerity and vulnerability. I think that when people can see themselves in others, and their electeds, and feel connected to them, I think that’s what attracts the voter to a candidate.” She recognized that women candidates face a double bind, explaining, “women, we don’t want to show our weaknesses or talk about struggles we’ve had, because we want to look strong in the political space.” Yet she insisted that, “at the heart of it, I do believe that being authentic and so, talk about being sincere and vulnerable, I think that cuts across the board. And helps people relate to you, helps people like you, helps people trust you, and... I think it’s less transactional when you talk to someone. You’re not talking to them for a purpose. You’re trying to be who you are to connect with another human. And so I think that can go a long way as a candidate. Because I think it goes a long way as a human.” This emphasis on sincerity and human connection, she argues, is important for candidates, even women candidates who face the gendered hurdle of not wanting to appear weak, because it is important for all social relationships.

A focus on authenticity in leadership also featured in Republican training, although it was not as central a focus. At a 2019 workshop, a MPLS trainer who had worked in the Governor’s administration urged participants to “understand what your platform is and what you believe in. And I really believe when you have an opportunity to do that, the passion in you comes out and people believe you. And this is about building trust with people. And so when they see how authentic you are [name of

participant], like when you just said that, 'oh yeah, you know, I just say it like it is,' that's good! You being you is the most important thing. Don't try and manufacture yourself into being something else, because generally it just doesn't work well." This advice is nearly identical to the advice of Democratic and nonpartisan program trainers quoted above who want candidates to steer clear of attempts to imitate others or become "political robots." A MPLS participant asked the trainer about the tension involved in remaining authentic while also trying to appeal to an audience who does not agree with you, explaining, "I'm going to need to cater to some of the moderates, because I want their vote. So that's where I'm struggling a little bit, like when I'm reaching out because it won't be a total authentic me." The trainer responded, "that's a really good point too…you can't get out there too far and alienate people. So how do you find that happy medium of being your authentic self, but also… maybe being your authentic self is to say, 'here's where we do align, but you know, on some of these I think that maybe we're just going to have to agree to disagree,' because I don't think you can find anybody that you're going to line up with 100 percent of the time, you can just really kind of own it." Here there is an emphasis on remaining open and honest even while moderating oneself for various audiences.

Another MPLS participant explained in an interview that candidates must be authentic because "you cannot be fake with people in politics because they will see right through it and it turns people off. You need to be truthful with people. Now that doesn't mean that you need to say exactly what's on your mind. You don't need to be blunt. But

you need to be truthful about yourself and about your views." She continued, "I would give the same advice to anyone [considering running for office] who came to me – old, young, male, female. You need to show that you have passion for something and it goes back to the same points I said, you've gotta ask yourself why. Once you're passionate and you're authentic then everything else will fall into place." Like the MPLS trainer above who encouraged candidates to speak with passion to connect with people and develop trust, this participant placed authenticity as a centrally important aspect of gaining constituents' support.

In contrast, one SU participant from San Francisco was relatively less convinced that "authenticity" was centrally important for candidates. She discussed how "the really authentic candidates can come out of nowhere and do really well. Because they're just inspiring and people relate to them. But I think that I would be interested – I don't know – my hunch is that that's kind of the exception, and that there are other things like raising money that are far more impactful across the board." She sees authenticity as an asset for candidates, but hypothesizes that how authentic or personally compelling a candidate is may be less critical than their ability to raise money. In terms of women candidates specifically, she explained that "women being authentic can be, there's kind of like a double edged sword there as well, where I think a lot of men and voters who are not comfortable being open with their emotions could feel uncomfortable about that. And so it's this interesting balance of what authenticity resonates and what doesn't." She considered how personal storytelling may or may not be appealing to voters, and while

she recognized that "really authentic" candidates can inspire voters and be successful, she posited that there are times when a candidate's openness and honesty, if involving too much emotion, and especially if the candidate is a woman, could make voters uncomfortable. Her concern about candidates' ability to raise money being more important than their authenticity reflects a larger issue at play in candidate training: individual skill-building and "lean in"-style candidate supply-side measures that focus on individual barriers like skills training or a lack of confidence or ambition are simply not equipped to address systemic inequalities in the electoral system, such as a lack of access to fundraising networks – something that women and especially women of color and those from historically excluded groups are more likely to struggle with. However, the relationship-building "sisterhood" aspect of training programs may serve to ameliorate some fundraising woes by providing a network to draw upon for practical campaign assistance, as discussed further in chapter five.

Telling your story

Discourses about one's ability to "tell your story" as a leadership skill circulated throughout my fieldwork experience. Using personal experiences to express political views is an aspect of "feminine" leadership as defined by Blankenship and Robson (1995). Relating to appealing to voters through authenticity, the idea of "telling your story" is central in both the Democratic SU and Republican MPLS programs, as well as other nonpartisan programs. At a Running Start training I attended in 2019, for example, attendees were encouraged to tell a personal story about an issue they cared about in

order to emotionally appeal to others. The "Story, Power, & Persuasion" section of Vote Run Lead's "Run As You Are" webinar series also touts the importance of storytelling, explaining to viewers, "Voters vote for people they like and trust. Stories build bridges between your experiences and the voters and their experience. Voters remember how you made them feel, not the facts you said. Show your authentic self" (Vote Run Lead 2020). One section of the MPLS training curriculum is titled "What is YOUR Story? Telling Your Story Effectively." The "Public Speaking: Finding and Using Your Authentic Voice" section of the SU curriculum is similarly devoted to harnessing one's personal story to communicate and connect with people for impact. Most SU alumnae profoundly value this training. It receives consistently high scores and much praise in participants' post-training evaluations.

One SU participant explained to me that what voters look for in a candidate is "authenticity, someone they can trust. And possibly someone who's accessible, that's warm – I hope, because that's one of my favorite traits, is to hopefully be approachable – and feel like they can trust you to carry their priorities." When I asked how a candidate might convey authenticity, she said, "I think giving stories, probably. Trying to explain when you've had a situation that was hard for you and explain the way you thought through it, and what was your priority… giving people examples. I do find that the most compelling people that I like, like Elizabeth Warren is constantly giving stories, they're all giving stories. And it's just the best way to relate to people. So if you want to share your values, you need to think about those stories and your own personal experiences that

help convey those values." For this trainee, the use of concrete personal experience to express political values was an effective communication tool for candidates.

Another SU participant, who had spoken about her difficulties running for office as a Black woman, had the following advice for those interested in running, "for women of color, I would just say: lean in, and don't let them tell you who you are. Don't let them craft your story. Don't let them fuck with you. Lean in to who you are. And believe in yourself, because if you don't believe your shit, nobody else will." Candidates telling their own story and representing themselves rather than being pigeonholed by others who may make assumptions about their life experiences takes on additional significance for women of color. This participant also cited authenticity when describing the elected officials she admired, explaining, "I'm really following AOC right now just because I like the authenticity that she stands in. And I like her ethics. I'm really interested in seeing where she goes with some more experience… one person I really am enjoying right now is Kimberly Ellis, I'm excited to support her. Yeah, because she's authentic and she's real and I think she's what this state needs to stay on track." Kimberly Ellis, a former Executive Director of SU, used Shirley Chisholm's campaign slogan "Unbought and Unbossed" during her run for California Democratic Party Chair and positioned herself as a progressive outsider to the Democratic Party establishment, much as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez did when she challenged a long-time Democratic incumbent as a progressive political newcomer.

Authenticity and physical appearance

Similar points about authenticity appealing to the electorate and not letting anyone else change who you are were made by a Republican woman leader, who linked it specifically to candidates' appearance. She recounted in an interview, "people call me and say [about a former member of congress from Michigan] 'she needs to do something about her hair, she needs to wear a different kind of outfit.' Like, that's who she is! And people like that she's authentic. So if she's gonna start shopping at Saks and not at JC Penney, her constituents are going to know that. And they're not going to like it. Because she's not being authentic." She acknowledged that "there's tactical changes to your wardrobe, like what's good on camera and what jewelry to wear, that's different though then changing your whole persona. …When they try and change you, and how you look and who you are, then that's bad." As this interlocutor contends, there is a line between small practical changes to one's appearance and changing one's whole persona, and leaders will lose the authenticity that wins over voters if they start changing themselves too much to please others. This illustrates the balance that candidates must strike between trainers' encouragement to adopt particular appearance-related signs that align with the predominant cultural image of a legible and "electable" political leader, and their need to retain the "authenticity" that trainers assure them will win over voters.

With clothing and personal appearance specifically, the line between staying "authentic" and true to oneself versus aligning oneself with existing male-dominated images of political leaders is contentious. As nonpartisan training organization Vote Run

Lead founder Erin Vilardi wrote in a *Ms. Magazine* article, "No longer confined to outdated political norms or gender stereotypes, many women are ditching pantsuits for boxing gloves and tattoos" (2018). This may be true for some women, yet nonpartisan training program Ready to Run, for example, continues to coach participants about what to wear and how to comport oneself on camera. Perhaps this reflects the difference between major changes and "tactical changes" as the interlocutor above describes, but the line is murky. There is an entire chapter in the handbook *Represent: The Woman's Guide to Running for Office and Changing the World* devoted to campaign fashion and clothing choices in which the authors reflect at length on the tension between the just-wear-the-boxy-suit-so-you-don't-have-to-think-about-it stance and the notion that following those prescribed norms and policing how women dress is ultimately harmful and upholds patriarchal norms. In fact, the first section of the chapter is titled "The Inherent Sexism in This Conversation" (Raphael and Black 2019). Whether wardrobe changes are seen as tactical choices or as changing one's persona depends on context, and tension remains for the authors, who worry any discussion of clothing upholds patriarchal norms. The book is aimed at all women, but it is written from a Democratic perspective: co-author and actress June Diane Raphael has spoken at SU events, and co-author Kate Black is the former Chief of Staff for EMILY's List.

Trainers exhibited this tension as well. At one 2018 training workshop held by nonpartisan organization Ready To Run, for example, trainees volunteered to give a short mock campaign speech on camera. After watching the video playback of their speeches,

an on-camera communications trainer provided feedback. Upon watching her recording, one trainee focused not on the substance of her speech but on her shiny forehead in the video. The trainer immediately answered with practical suggestions about wearing foundation and powder makeup to control shine, but then stopped herself, remarking, "I shouldn't have let you say what you said about your forehead – we've got to stop doing that to ourselves!" As discussed below, Republican interlocutors were less likely to reflect on the "inherent sexism" of the conversation and more likely to come down on the side of wearing a suit and maintaining a neat appearance to exhibit one's professionalism and respect for one's position.

As Torregrosa (2013) discussed in a *New York Times* article on the diminishing barriers to women entering politics, some scholars such as political scientist Jennifer Lawless contend that "women are no more subject to negative comments for their physical appearance, mannerisms and fashion than men are" when it comes to contemporary treatment in the media. Despite this, one's appearance being subject to scrutiny was a concern that came up for interlocutors on both sides of the aisle, and especially for women of color. They recognized a tendency for women candidates to be more harshly judged on their appearance. One SU participant, for example, discussed how "women are subject to an external appearance requirement that men are not. We judge women based off on the way they look. And women do it, too, because it's like, do they look like me? Do they wear makeup? Do they not? Do they wear heels? Do they not? Do they have long hair, short hair? You know, do they wear a suit, do they wear a

skirt, do they wear pants? There's a litany of different things that women get judged for." In a 2015 critical discourse analysis of *New York Times* articles, Carson found that one in five articles about women political leaders included discussion of their physical appearance, indicating that appearance is still a significant object of focus and this interlocutor's fears of judgement may not be unfounded.

As mentioned above, some Republican interlocutors emphasized the importance of maintaining a more traditional appearance as a candidate rather than "running as you are," regardless of gender. One MPLS participant and local officeholder described appearance as of central concern for all candidates, explaining, "you've got to be clean and neat in appearance. And then if [voters] can get past that, then it's about qualifications. If you're a woman going up against a guy and the guy's got a scraggly beard and a man bun, and you're dressed neatly and cleanly and have like a nice bob going on or have your hair pinned back all the time, you're immediately going to look more qualified, no matter what." When I asked if standards were different for women candidates, she continued, "no. I mean, I think men have it easier just because they have to do less to look clean and neat than women do. But once you get past that, the qualifications are the same. Are you going to pick the guy who's been pumping gas for 10 years over the woman who's got a graduate degree in accounting? If that happens, you really are living in a community that's sexist." Her focus on a professional and neat appearance indicating that one is qualified stands in contrast to the "run as you are" philosophy many Democrats espouse that celebrates candidates' individuality and

authenticity and the possibility for women candidates to significantly change norms surrounding what a politician looks like.

Another MPLS participant who held local office complained about elected officials in her community not adhering to standards of professional conduct or appearance, saying, "We used to have people that sat on [City Council] and they were doing all their email while we were conducting a meeting. I mean, the people see this, you're on TV! People are in the audience, nobody cares. So there's just that whole thing of etiquette of how you should be at a professional level. Our Mayor Pro Tem right now, still, he comes to meetings in jeans. I mean, it's not even thought of as being a professional seat. So, how do you take that? I just think there are standards that we should be living by. When you're in these positions. As you're representing the public." She understood the need for a high degree of professionalism in one's clothing choices and conduct as being a marker of respect for those you represent. These interlocutors emphasized dressing and styling oneself carefully, following prescribed norms of professionalism, regardless of whether a man bun, jeans, boxing gloves or tattoos might be more "authentic." This attitude reflects these Republican interlocutors' more conservative values, and contrasts with Democrats' greater likelihood to support the "run as you are" approach.

Calculations about running "as you are" or fitting into norms are far more difficult for women of color, who deal with additional challenges when it comes to appearance and the perception of professionalism. Black women with Afrocentric hair, for example,

may feel pressure to straighten it lest their appearance be judged unprofessional (see Opie and Phillips 2015; Cooper 2019). As one Black SU participant who ran for local office described, women candidates face scrutiny about "hair, especially for Black women, okay. My hair is ethnic, so now I have to straighten my hair and things like that. It's considered unprofessional for me to wear braids, or to wear my hair the way it naturally grows out of my head. I'm expected to straighten it at all times… it's incessant. The list goes on." Illustrating the importance of diverse representation in elected leadership, recent strides have been made on the particular issue of Afrocentric hair discrimination. California State Senator Holly Mitchell, who has been a featured speaker at SU events, authored the CROWN Act (Creating a Respectful Open Workplace for Natural hair) to protect against discrimination based on natural hair and protective hairstyles. It was signed into California law in 2019 and has now been passed by several other states and the U.S. House of Representatives. As Mitchell wrote in 2019, the law "challenges these narrowly defined Eurocentric standards of acceptability and beauty that have been so deeply ingrained in our society." While voters may continue to hold racist views on professionalism, this workplace protection marks progress.

Another woman of color SU interlocutor described how she was often mistaken for a scheduler or assistant while working as a field representative for a State Assemblymember. She attempted to "tone down" who she was in order to be taken more seriously in professional settings, explaining, "I am a short Asian woman of color. And I am a naturally happy, chipper person… I'll never forget a meeting in the

Assemblymember's office where he asked me to join him. And I went to the capital, [but] he ended up not being able to be there. And I was in my mid 20s, and I was the only woman, and it was law enforcement, so it was all men who were at least a decade older than me. And I remember just very much toning it down so that they would take me seriously, and kind of questioning everything about, you know, did I dress the right way? Do I look professional enough? Am I handling this well? Because I think there's probably greater pressure on women and women of color and API women too, about how we're conducting ourselves and how strong we need to be in these positions to be taken seriously and to be respected." Her experiences indicate how racialized and gendered ideas about professionalism in comportment and appearance made her feel limited in how she could express herself and maintain a sense of authority. This bind affects all women in the masculinized space of politics, but is compounded for women of color who contend with additional racialized understandings of leadership.

Gender, Party, and emotion in leadership

Using emotional appeals and personal stories to make powerful statements and connect with voters is a strategy brought up often in relation to authenticity, and is especially prominent in nonpartisan (which largely lean Democratic) and Democratic trainings. But concerns remain for some training participants about women candidates appearing too emotional and making voters uncomfortable. This reflects the "double bind" between evincing enough – but not too much – of both stereotypically feminine and stereotypically masculine leadership traits faced by women in leadership. As one SU

participant put it, “I feel like there’s like a sense of, ‘Oh, don’t be too emotional.’ Like be the right sense of emotional, but don’t start crying because then I’m uncomfortable.” Political figures’ tears are a topic of interest that can garner harsh criticism or, in more recent years, praise. As described in one *Guardian* article, crying can be a boost for politicians because showing compassion and humility is “precisely the “weaknesses” that one would want in a leader” (Benedictus 2016). But *too much* uncontrolled crying can still make one appear overly weak, something that, as the interlocutor quoted above and others below describe, women candidates must be particularly cognizant of.

While learning to effectively tell one’s story does feature as a MPLS training topic, the discussion of emotion as a strategy was far more prevalent at SU trainings. The greater tendency of the Democratic trainers and participants to focus on emotional appeals reflects partisan differences in communication styles. The tendency of Democratic leaders to invoke emotion was also recognized by one MPLS participant as, “before, Democrats, like the old Blue Dog Democrats, I think they really cared about this country. The Democrats coming in now, it doesn’t seem like it at all. They say they do, they say they care and they all work on emotion and feelings, but the stuff they want to implement is in no way shape or form good for our country, good for our future, good for anybody in our country.” Her observation is that current Democratic leaders use emotion and feelings when communicating their political ideas – even if, in her opinion, the ideas themselves are not good – reflecting their tendency towards more “feminine” styles.

Another MPLS participant who held local office was very critical of women in leadership positions showing emotion, and explained, "women can come across as being shrill and nonsensical, and unfortunately, a lot of times they are. They just are, and you just look at them and you realize that they're coming at the issue from a lack of experience, and a lack of understanding, and then they raise their voices and they get emotional, and it just completely destroys their credibility. There isn't anything they can say after that, that anyone is going to listen to. I'm not listening. Because I don't care anymore. It's like, you're an idiot. I get it." She contended that women, "have to be able to divorce the emotion from the situation. And if they can't do that, if they can't divorce the emotion from the situation, they've got no business being in there. If you get emotional when you're discussing issues that are business-related? And you gotta keep in mind, politics is a business. When you're sitting on a council or you're sitting on the legislature, or you're sitting in the Senate, you're making business decisions on behalf of your community or your state or your nation. These are business decisions. These aren't emotional decisions. You should never make a business decision from an emotional state, ever. You're going to make the wrong decision. So if you have someone coming in there that's getting emotional, one: they're dangerous. And two: no one's gonna take them seriously. You would never decide which mortgage to get for your house based on how you felt about it. Think about that." Her comparison of politics with business reflects longstanding discourse from Republican leaders who suggest running government like a business, including Donald Trump and Ross Perot (Bump 2017). Her aversion to political

figures getting emotional stands in sharp contrast to Democratic trainers and interlocutors who consider emotional appeals a valuable communications tool, and reflects the more "masculine," rational and authoritative approach associated with Republican communication frames (Lakoff 2004).

Most Democratic SU participants disagreed with the above interlocutor's assertion that showing emotion cannot be beneficial. One SU participant in northern California, for example, had the following advice for women candidates, "show your strength and your vulnerability at the same time. …That vulnerability puts more of a fire behind whatever you say, and it sparks the true commitment to make change. And if people can see that you are committed and really honest about what your goals are and the changes that you want to make, then people will believe, to the polls." Showing the correct combination of strength and vulnerability, while reflecting notions of authenticity, also hearkens to the "double bind" that can be experienced by women candidates.

Another SU participant from the Bay Area analyzed what she understood as a changing view of the power of emotion and a growing tendency for men in positions of leadership to seek to develop a more "feminine" emotional style as follows, "When [the trainer] came in and she said that political strategists, campaign strategists, are now teaching men how to cry?! That resonated with me, because I thought back to 2016 when Hillary Clinton broke down on the campaign because she was exhausted, and who wouldn't, right? And how the media tore her apart. And now us women, and I don't think this is a stereotype, we are more capable in most situations of being more empathetic,

being more sympathetic, particularly when it comes to the struggles of women and families, working families. And I think that's a huge difference, and now being in a position where society is starting to embrace what was once considered weakness, sets us apart. We are stronger when we show emotion and when we empathize with people in a real way. When we cry with them, when we say I truly understand your struggle because I've been there, whereas before that's been taboo. I honestly feel like that is one of our strengths." She considered how gendered leadership may be shifting, and how women are changing the game when it comes to leadership, "I was thinking about that whole 'lean in' concept, right? And how so much of that book and that philosophy hinges on women adopting more male characteristics. Nuh-uh. Men need to adopt more stereotypically – not stereotypically, classically, I don't know how to frame this – but more female characteristics, right? Why should we change to adopt that strategy and that leadership philosophy when we are very effective when we come to the table as who we are, and that we need to stop trying to change to fit into a more male construct of what constitutes leadership. And the more we do that, and the more we set the example of what leadership looks like, not just female leadership, but leadership in general, I think it's going to be more widely adopted. And I think that we're gonna set the standard. We're going to build the table. We're not just coming to the table, we're now building the table, and that's dope." Rather than asserting that women candidates embrace a rational and unemotional traditionally "masculine" approach to political leadership like the Republican interlocutor quoted above, she recognizes and celebrates what she understands as a growing trend

towards “feminized” leadership styles adopted by candidates of any gender, a trend also cited in media (see Toner 2007), and which aligns with typical Democratic communication frames (Lakoff 2004).

Representation, identifiability, and the future

Ultimately, an elected representative’s job is to represent their constituents’ interests in political decision-making. In semiotic terms, the political-leader-as-sign-vehicle should resemble its object: the constituency. Political representation and semiotic representation are not divorced from each other. As one MPLS participant and candidate for state-level office put it, “it’s complicated, because you’ve got all this stuff that’s going on in the House or the Senate, then you’ve got your constituents. You’re there representing your constituents. You are voted in by them. So you better do your best job possible to represent them.” How do interlocutors view the relationship between elected representatives and their communities of constituents?

Many interlocutors’ emphasis on listening, described above, relates to representation in the sense that representatives are expected to listen to and reflect their constituents. As one SU participant who had previously held local elected office described the relationship between candidates and constituents, “do you strictly listen to the voice of the people that you represent? And do exactly what they want? Or do you exercise your own judgment in conjunction with listening to your constituents? Or do you not listen to your constituents at all? …I tend to like to listen to the voice of my constituents. And I did when I was on school board, I had friends, and people that would

contact me regularly, who were so far from me on the political spectrum. They wanted our teachers to carry guns. They knew I was opposed to that but they would still talk to me about it and I'd still have a conversation with them, and we kept it civil." While she disagreed with her constituents and did not necessarily take the action they wanted, she attempted to connect with and understand them.

This recognition that an elected leader must consider the diverse viewpoints of their constituents even if they do not agree with them appeared among Republican interlocutors as well. A MPLS participant who held local office explained that, "when you think about it, you're representing the masses. You're not just representing everybody who likes chocolate milk, you're representing everybody who likes strawberry, vanilla and everything else too. So you have to be that person to easily represent all the people. And you should always be professional. This is not a fly by night thing. You take an oath to serve the public, this is a big deal." Her account of the need for representatives to represent all constituents regardless of their views (on milk flavors or more substantive issues) was echoed by another MPLS participant and candidate for state-level elected office who said during a training discussion about party differences and the need for bipartisan connection, "If I win – *when* I win – I'm gonna be serving both [parties]. I want to hear what the other side has to say too. If I'm representing everyone." Even if the sign vehicle (politician) does not perfectly reflect its object (the constituency), they must take their diversity of opinions into account somehow.

Of course, one must first get elected if one wants to serve as an elected official. One MPLS participant with aspirations for county office explained how she thought about appealing to diverse constituents while remaining firm on one's personal values as, "so you do definitely want to have a stand and be true to your values and what your core concerns are, things you really want to make a difference at doing. But additionally, I think sometimes you look at who's in your audience. And think about, well, what kinds of things would make them think that you'd be a great leader? You know what I mean? And so maybe you're giving the same speech with a slightly different twist, depending on who is in your audience. Because you do want to appeal to them. It's kind of like a salesman, right? You're trying to sell yourself. So if you're not appealing to the public, and again, you're supposed to be representing your public as well. So are you really representing the ideas that they have?" Understanding one's audience and attempting to appeal to them by emphasizing different aspects of your leadership, this interlocutor posited, is critical to winning votes.

As another MPLS participant described, "[voters are] looking for somebody to reflect themselves back at themselves. Regardless of whether they consciously understand that's what they're looking for. When they say, 'somebody that I can believe in, somebody that I can trust,' well, if you're not parroting back to the person an image of themselves, then they probably won't believe you, won't trust you." She emphasized the importance of representatives understanding and working towards the needs of their constituents, pointing out that, "you need to ask yourself why you're running if you don't

think that you can accurately represent the views and the needs of the people that you want to be representing. …If you can't be aligned with what your community's needs are, then you shouldn't be running." While one can imagine that aligning with your community's needs may be easier for a moderate candidate and less possible for a more extreme candidate, appealing to the tendency of Republicans to be relatively more status quo-maintaining, her point reflects the general principle of representational leadership.

An SU participant in northern California similarly emphasized the ability of candidates to reflect voters, suggesting that voters "look at the ability to identify with their candidate, whether it's the message they're saying, all the way down to the shoes they're wearing. I think that in a lot of ways, we tend to gravitate towards people that are like us. Whether or not they look like us, whether they sound like us, whether they have the same interest as us, or whether their message is something that's important to us. So I think that's kind of where that connection between constituents and candidates happens is… people feeling like they're heard, like what's important to you is important to them and vice versa." Unlike most MPLS participants, she posited that this connection was substantively different for women, explaining, "as a female candidate, the identifiability doesn't just come from your message. It comes from, could I be friends with her? Would I hang out with her? Could we go to happy hour together? And I think in a lot of ways, that's how women identify with their candidate. It's like, would I want to hang out with that person? Because I want to hang out with them because of the way they dress. But also because of the things they say. Like I could see hanging out with this person, I could

see having lunch with this person, whatever… whereas with men, I don't think they think about it like that." When I asked whether she was making a distinction between men voters or with men candidates, she continued, "Both. Male constituents, and male candidates, right? I don't think my husband would say, 'yeah, I'm totally voting for so and so because I'd like to go grab a beer with him.' But I can see women in general saying, 'I really like her. I'd like to go get brunch with her. I really like what she…' you know, claiming what somebody stands for. But at the end of the day, is it that you feel like you identify with what they stand for? Because you also identify with the fact that you probably wear the same size clothes." In this interlocutor's view, women candidates must be likeable and personable so that women voters positively identify with them. These characterizations – coming from a Democratic woman attorney who leads her own law practice – also reflect stereotypical associations between masculinity and rationality and femininity and emotionality.

In contrast, a MPLS participant who is also a successful attorney and local officeholder contended that women, when they run for office, "have to divorce emotion from decision making. And then they have to do that consistently before they run. And they have to be known in the community before they run. I think a man has to do that too. I don't think that's any different." Rather than being emotional, she insisted that, for women, "you've got to be the rational mom at school, and the rational voice, and always be that voice and not be the crazy one. Because even if you're more qualified, they're still gonna vote for the guy who's been pumping gas [if you are too emotional]." Both she and

the above interlocutor share the view that women are associated with emotionality (she highlights women's need to divorce emotion from decision making because of an assumption that women otherwise will make emotional decisions). However, they differ on whether that characteristic is something to be embraced or at least accepted, or something to combat and overcome. Rather than emphasizing how successful leaders, and especially women leaders, must make constituents feel like they're heard and be personally relatable (a "feminine" approach), this Republican interlocutor emphasizes how successful leaders of both genders must exhibit rationality over emotionality (a "masculine" approach).

The above discourses about the value (or problem) of emotion in leadership align with the communication styles associated with interlocutors' respective political parties. They also indicate a stark division in how these women may envision the future of political leadership and signs associated with leaders – whether women in power will lead similarly to the men who came before them, or whether, as the SU participant quoted above put it, women will "stop trying to change to fit into a more male construct of what constitutes leadership" and instead usher in a new and different era of feminized leadership for officials of all genders.

CHAPTER 5: NEW GIRLS' CLUBS: BARRIERS FACING WOMEN CANDIDATES AND HOW THE GENDERED SPACE OF CANDIDATE TRAINING CAN HELP

Foundational to women's candidate training programs' existence is the basic underlying premise that women-only spaces are needed to support women specifically and encourage them as an identity group to combat their underrepresentation in elected office. This chapter examines why the homosociality of gendered training programs is so critical in participants' success. Beyond what specifically the programs teach and what participants believe are the necessary skills and qualities to succeed as a candidate and leader, as discussed in chapter four, I consider the importance of the gendered training space itself through a discussion of the gendered barriers to political participation cited by interlocutors and the training program practices that work to overcome them and support trainees most effectively. By examining this, I hope to help organizations adapt and grow more successful at propelling women into elected office. The development of a powerful network of support is something that would perhaps especially benefit Republican women, considering their party overall is more averse to gender-based identity politics, as discussed in chapter three. However, the Democratic group is larger and has been more successful at network-building – due, in part, to its surrounding party culture being friendly to identity politics.

Comparative political science scholars such as Piscopo (2019) assert that candidate training cannot effectively address external systemic institutional and structural

factors, which are the most salient barriers to women's political representation. Training programs' focus on individual skill-building and internal psychological barriers instead puts the onus on women to "lean in" and solve the problem of their own political underrepresentation (Piscopo 2019). Indeed, candidate training can be understood as yet one more product of neoliberal capitalism's broader shift towards self-help and self-commodification, as discussed in chapter four. As linguistic anthropologist Bonnie Urciuoli (2008) describes, one's employment value now often depends on one's skills (e.g. communication, leadership) and one's ability to effectively articulate those skills as punchy action verbs on a resume. Similarly, candidates must have and effectively exhibit leadership qualities (e.g. authenticity, listening skills) to be valued by constituents.

This characterization of candidate training programs and their transmission of campaign skills as an individualizing process is not inaccurate. But it is, I argue, incomplete. What I have found in my ethnographic research with long-term, cohort-based women's candidate training programs is an implicit set of assumptions and goals that are more collectivist than Machiavellian, more about solidarity than the competitive and manipulative classic anthropological understanding of politics as power-struggle would indicate (Bailey 1969), sometimes resonating with feminist ideologies or notions of a universal womanhood, and sometimes uneasily skirting alongside competing political party values. They are not a panacea, but women's candidate training programs are doing something more interesting than leaning in. They are shaping individual women

politicians, yes, but the parts of the training process that are social may be the most transformational of all.

In this chapter, I analyze discourses about "sisterhood" and "safe spaces" to reflect on how participants gender the process of training and its transformative process and draw out dimensions of contrast between political parties. I investigate the importance of this gendering of the training space for the effectiveness of the programs' strategies of confidence-building and network-building, examine what barriers to candidacy they ameliorate, and compare and unpack the similarities and differences in trainees' experiences.

"Sisterhood" and the Importance of Women-Only Spaces

A central component shared by the programs relating to the gendering of the training is how discourses about participants' relationships are expressed in familial terms, emphasizing the trainings' emotional and social aspects. I aim to explore how much importance participants place on the training being gendered, how the women-only nature of the space affects their training experience, and who is included in and excluded from the "sisterhood."

Discourses about "sisterhood" and the importance of women coming together and women supporting women circulate in both the Democratic SU and Republican MPLS political training programs. On their face, the sentiments appear similar, with women involved in both programs emphasizing how program member "sisters" emotionally support and encourage each other in the male-dominated field of politics as well as

provide a practical network to draw on for campaigning and fundraising help. A more in-depth analysis reveals the limits of sisterhood, as differences in organization structure and political party makeup and culture shape the effectiveness of the programs' strategies. How much "sisterhood" discourse is just talk (akin to "girl power" marketing), and how can it be mobilized for action and change?

The GOP not only has a smaller pool of women to draw from, but also party cultural values that emphasize self-reliance and the ability of anyone to work hard and get ahead, an attitude that is in general opposition to identity politics and affirmative action (see chapter three for further discussion of political party culture and its effects on women's candidate training organizations). This hinders the ability of Republican groups to promote and emphasize women as an identity group that deserves special treatment, consideration, or funding. Despite this, MPLS has met with notable success – six program alumnae were sworn in as Michigan state Representatives in January 2019. In contrast, although SU has been around five years longer and has approximately ten times the number of graduates that MPLS does, as of 2021 there were only three SU graduates occupying statewide office. Republican women leaders such as Elise Stefanik have called on their party to do more to support women, such as raising political action committee money to help women win primaries. In the following sections, I will first provide a brief overview of scholarship on gendered women's spaces and then discuss the centrality of "sisterhood" and "safe space" discourses and the ramifications of genderedness and gender solidarity for how effective the two programs are at supporting candidates.

A brief background on gendered conceptual cues and women-only spaces literature

There is a rich history of scholarship on women's relative disengagement from the political world. Researchers have studied women's tendency to be less politically knowledgeable, less interested in politics, less likely to comment on presidential candidates or campaigns, and less likely to discuss political topics (Bennett and Bennett 1989; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Atkeson 1998). Atkeson (2003) suggests that one reason for this disengagement in politics is the low visibility of viable women political leaders in America. This is an expansion of the conceptual cue theory: the lack of competitive women politicians sends cues to women citizens that suppress their political engagement.

The converse of this idea – that increasing the visibility of women politicians or leaders can improve women's engagement – has been illustrated in ethnographic work and work on education. That women benefit from women-only groups is an assumption underlying the development of gendered educational spaces, including women's candidate training programs, that is borne out by research literature. Chesterfield and Enge's 1998 study of Guatemalan teachers' classroom interaction patterns in regards to gender supports the conceptual cue theory, for example. In their study of rural schools with male and female teachers, they found that girls participated more in classroom discussions with female teachers than male teachers. While some argue that there is no evidence that separating students by gender increases achievement, proponents of single-gender education have argued that in single-gender environments, girls feel more

comfortable participating in classroom discussion, asking and answering questions, and their self-confidence, self-esteem, and opportunities to take on leadership roles improve (Koppel et al. 2003). My interlocutors who express their appreciation for the all-women environment of their training programs describe similarly that participants feel more free to ask questions and express opinions because there are no men in the room.

Dasgupta and Asgari (2004) similarly provide evidence that gendered social environments affect how strongly one associates women with leadership roles. They conducted a short-term laboratory experiment and a year-long field study in two educational institutions with varying proportions of women in leadership roles to determine whether being exposed to women leaders could increase participants' associations between women and leadership roles. In both the short and long term, increased exposure to women leaders correlated with increased interest and belief in women as natural leaders. This supports Atkeson's conceptual cue theory-based hypothesis: women's political engagement increases with more visible competitive female candidates (Atkeson 2003). In layperson's terms, "you can't be what you can't see." This indicates a vicious cycle at work – politics is likely to continue to be a (white) man's world if male politicians continue to dominate politics. Women's candidate training programs may be thought of as a sort of field experiment or initiative following these researchers' hypotheses that exposure to women leaders will increase participants' interest in being a leader themselves. By bringing women who are interested in politics together to hear presentations from women who hold leadership positions, training

programs encourage participants to see themselves in and seek elected office. This practice is even more important for women of color, who remain particularly underrepresented in politics. As Sanbonmatsu (2015) explains, women of color who participate as presenters in campaign trainings serve as role models and mentors to help other women of color run for office. In addition to benefits resulting from showcasing women leader role models as speakers and trainers, the single-gender environment of women's candidate training programs, according to interlocutors, supports single-gender education proponents' case that women-only spaces increase how confident and comfortable participants feel about participating in discussions and asking questions.

"Sisterhood" and "Safe Space" Discourses

"Sisterhood" discourses at Step Up

Graduates of SU refer to each other as "sisters," and the importance of the Step Up network and the relationships formed through the training process consistently comes up in interviews with alumnae and conversations with staff in the Step Up office. The "sisterhood" features in testimonials about the benefits of the program. As one program member explained, "I love that we're building this cohort. And women, specifically women, we have each others' backs. …That's what I expect to achieve, is that camaraderieship with women through Step Up, along with all of the nuts and bolts ideas about how to run a campaign." The program, she hoped, not only teaches actionable skills but also grants one entry into a supportive network.

Another Step Up trainee compared SU with her previous political training experience with EMILY's List. She explained, "Step Up feels to me like an [tech industry] accelerator, like it has that same feeling of comfort, that you're a valued part of a family and a part of a network that you can always go back to. EMILY's List didn't provide that. Like they gave you, you know, 'you can contact these people should you need help,' but... the women that I attended that training with, I don't know where they are or what they're doing. So it's very different in that way from Step Up. Step Up is a lot more of like a sisterhood, and it feels a lot more organized and focused. It has more direction." Because SU has a cohort-based model and groups of trainees spend 70 hours together over the course of 6 months, the program members form close bonds. This model is unique – other organizations like EMILY's List and Vote Run Lead that offer candidate training for women have shorter 1-3 day workshops.

The idea of the program being a safe space for Democratic women to come together was evident in the account of another recruit with aims at state-wide office. When I asked her what she hoped to get out of SU, she responded that she was looking forward to "the network. I love the reference to the sisterhood. Because for me, especially being newer to California… I know how important it is to nail your words, and to get your messaging right. And you really need to know your audience. And you really need to have confidants that you can go to and say, 'I'm thinking about this,' and you get that brutally honest feedback before you try and run with it." The idea of training as a safe

space to ask questions and get honest feedback from other participants is a theme that shows up among MPLS interlocutors as well, as outlined below.

Sisterly solidarity does not mean there is no conflict. Alumnae sometimes run against each other for the same office – but as one Step Up leader put it, "I think that's great. That doesn't mean that there's not camaraderie and sisterhood and support. When folks in your own community are starting to run for office against each other, that's the marker of success and progress." Infighting, disagreements, and political rivalry exist in the SU community, but graduates also continue to help each other with their political campaigns long after training is over, illustrating how the "sisterhood" is more than talk – candidates can and do leverage the alumnae network for fundraising, volunteer requests, feedback on campaign logos, campaign staff and hiring suggestions, and more. There is significant ongoing mentorship and connection among "sisters."

"Sisterhood" discourses at the Midwest Public Leadership Series

"Sisterhood" discourses are also present in the MPLS community, although they are less ubiquitous. For example, one testimonial on the MPLS website states, "The friends and sisterhood I have garnered through the Midwest Public Leadership Series program is invaluable. These incredible women will be an inspiration to me for years to come." And in the MPLS alumnae Facebook group, women sometimes refer to each other as their "MPLS sisters" when they post messages.

One alumna described the "sisterhood" of the program and support it offers when I asked her what she had gained through her MPLS experience: "I'll say sisterhood if you

will, meeting the young women, and we've stayed connected over the years, and just to watch them grow and just always having that... being able to go back to that base, it's always there and I just think it's a great opportunity for women." Like the SU interlocutor quoted above, she discussed how program outcomes include actionable skills as well as a supportive network: "It offers a lot of the skills or opportunities for women to hone in on their skills, whether it's public speaking or preparing them to run for office… I think it's something even deeper because women, you usually have to convince women to run for office… we don't have a lot of confidence or don't think we can do it, or it's always difficult, I think, for women to stick their neck out there and put everything on the line knowing that they may get attacked, or their family may get attacked… it can be a frightening thing and MPLS kind of softens that for you and gives you the confidence that you need to prepare yourself for office." She considers the MPLS training and the network it provides especially crucial for women, who need extra confidence and support.

While they did not necessarily use the term "sisters," several interlocutors discussed friendship or the network as a key aspect of MPLS. One program graduate turned political staffer discussed how "the relationships that you build have been really meaningful and helpful to me now having finished the program and actually working with a lot of those women… I think one of the most powerful ways to get more women to run for office is to have women reaching out to other women, which is why I think [the program] is so important." Another MPLS alumna and self-described libertarian

explained, “I certainly made new friends, I met people that I would have never ever met if I hadn’t been involved in the program and I think that’s the largest benefit that I’ve gotten from it. There are people that I was able to find ways to have commonality with that, while I disagree with them on things… there’s still ways to be agreeable, even when you disagree.” She described finding commonalities with people who were anti-vaccination, for example, even though she rejected their views as “junk science,” by focusing on other beliefs they did share.

Another program graduate stated that “for jobs, it’s not about what you know, to some extent, it’s who you know. And for me, I thought [the program was] also a good networking connection piece, because as we grow this organization, hopefully it becomes a sisterhood of Republican women.” While inspiration and the emotional closeness or support involved in friendship is one important aspect of the MPLS network, alumnae also state practical reasons to get to know each other and keep in touch, such as for future job prospects. MPLS’ alumnae network is smaller and more diffuse than SU’s, but MPLS alumnae sometimes support one another’s campaigns with in-person volunteering or social media posts. The president of MPLS, who works in state-level politics, helps graduates with campaign planning even after they complete the program. She is also actively trying to increase alumnae’s use of the MPLS Facebook group, encouraging those who are running or staffing local elections to seek advice and assistance from their fellow program graduates.

"Safe space" discourses at the Midwest Public Leadership Series

How much trust do training program members have in their classmates and networks of fellows, and what are the perceived benefits of limiting the training space to women only? Discourses about "safe spaces" reference things like openness, honesty, trust, support, comfort, and confidentiality for participants in both the Republican and Democratic programs. Both programs have a "what happens in the room stays in the room" policy – the Republican program leader includes that messaging in all of her introductory calls to program applicants, and participants in the Democratic program actually are required to sign a formal confidentiality agreement. This attitude cuts across partisan and gendered lines of candidate training. A Republican woman who directs a bipartisan political training program open to all genders told me, for example, "people are vulnerable. They're testing ideas out, they're testing their skills out. So we try to have a very supportive atmosphere. So yes, we do kind of try to have a safe space."

In my very first phone interaction with her, a program leader defined MPLS as a "safe space" for Republican women who are often sidelined in the GOP. This was early in my field research, and her use of the term surprised me, as I had previously associated "safe space" discourse as being used by Republicans only in reference to the needs of "liberal snowflakes." "Safe space" discourse continued to occasionally come up organically and unironically in Republican spaces. So I began to ask members of the MPLS community in interviews whether they would classify MPLS as a "safe space," and responses were mixed. Some immediately rejected the notion, with one woman

explaining, “I like strong women, and the women that are joining [the program] are strong, confident, competitive women, I mean it’s not like a meek, ‘better have a safe place, because we’re all scared and timid.’ That’s how I take safe place.” While this negative perception was shared by a few MPLS interlocutors, often their reluctance or ambivalence about characterizing MPLS in that way had more to do with the word “safe space” than its meaning or the purposes of the program.

Several participants discussed the benefits of a private place of mutual trust, without judgement, and without men, but “safe space” was not their preferred term for it. For example, one Republican program alumna said that she would not use the term because “safe space” has “a different connotation.” But she described the program as “a circle of trust” or “a peer group” instead. “It’s like when a group of CEOs gets together and they can actually talk about their issues without the fear of having someone judge them for something like they’re really concerned about, or don’t understand,” she explained to me. The invocation of CEOs as an example of people who may need a private circle of trust may be unexpected considering safe spaces’ typical association with marginalized individuals. But her description mirrors the definition of “safe space” as a physical or metaphorical place free of judgement or harm. Another Republican interlocutor called the program “a confidential environment for learning” but said, “I agree with the concept [of “safe space”]. It’s safe for people to be themselves in these sessions.”

How much trust participants had in the program being a "safe space" varied. One Republican program participant explained, "if someone comes out and says something really ridiculous, I'm not going to forget that. Would you? It's a safe space I think in terms of asking questions. You can ask whatever question you want, and you can make whatever statement you want. But you should still understand that anything you say can and will be held against you later. But if you're getting into politics, you have to be aware of that." While most participants discussed their appreciation for the MPLS environment (whether they used the term "safe space" or not), some had concerns about the term's connotations and the limitations of confidentiality. A participant who held local office said, "I don't want it to be [a safe space] – to me I think that makes it like what we feel and what we believe is not good enough to be out in the open with. You know what I mean? I guess I don't know why it would be called that for me, because I don't view it as a safe place… We can be open to speak. I think that's different than making like it's safe to say whatever, because, quite honestly… you're gonna offend somebody anyhow, because we all have different beliefs." She recounted an incident that happened at a previous training, when she offended another participant with her harsh criticism of a Republican man's political candidacy promotional materials. "I don't feel [the program] as a safe place because I left with the feeling that okay, well, I can't make a comment about something even related to that…" Rather than confidentiality concerns, she was concerned about disagreements about political strategy resulting in conflict and, as a result, feeling unsafe to speak her mind freely in the training space.

Some MPLS participants had no problem defining the program as a safe space to express their political views. One alumna appreciated the program as a place where she could express her negative opinion of President Trump. She recounted how the program is a safe space "especially to me, because I don't think that our current president is a very good person. And there's a lot of places where saying openly that you think Donald Trump is an abomination, I just can't say it..." Conversely, another participant characterized the program as a safe space for those who *did* like President Trump. She explained that MPLS was "definitely a safe space, in the sense where I can talk, blah, blah, blah, about my political views... I can support Trump in that room. And I'm not going to be [called] a racist. Yeah, so that's safe." These participants describe the program as a safe space because it is for Republicans specifically, rather than tying the "safe" aspect to participants' gender.

"Safe space" and "brave space" discourses at SU

For the leaders of the Democratic women's training organization SU, there is a conscious effort to promote not a "safe space," but the alternative idea of a "brave space." Staff have started incorporating an untitled poem originally by Beth Strano and adapted by Micky ScottBey Jones as "An Invitation to Brave Space" as part of program orientation. It opens with the lines:

> Together we will create brave space.
> Because there is no such thing as a "safe space" —
> We exist in the real world.
> We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds.

SU staff discuss the importance of fostering a "brave space," reflecting a need to examine one's preconceived notions to focus on growth and improving understanding of others' experiences.

When I asked Democratic SU participants whether their program represented a safe space, most agreed it did and should, although perhaps within limits. One SU trainee said, "Yeah, I think that politics are funny, and that everyone is always sort of playing a game, right? But I think that there seems to be a real effort and sense of trying to include people at Step Up, and I feel like that creates a really comfortable space. There are still things that I will not say in front of groups of people that I will say to other people, just in terms of like, keeping it real, right? I will give you 90% of keeping it real. But that extra 10% is always kind of for different spaces, I think. I see the intentions of Step Up as really powerful and really clear. I feel like it's a safe space. I'm still not gonna say anything too crazy..." Her resolve to "not say anything too crazy" mirrors the words of the Republican MPLS participant quoted above who recognized how anything said in the program may be held against one later.

While most were supportive, a few SU program members were more reflective or skeptical of the notion of "safe space." One participant explained, "I think when you gather a group of individuals – women, men, or anyone – who don't know each other that well, it takes a while to get to that comfort level, and so you can say safe or brave space all you want... I just don't know if it's realistic." Having recently started the training

program, she was not yet convinced that participants would reach the level of comfort needed to feel truly "safe."

Women only space = safe

One aspect of "safe space" that crossed partisan lines was its association with the training being a gendered space for women only. The Republican MPLS program president explained, "to keep [the program] as women only, I think, it keeps that safe space, because women clearly speak and think differently than men do. So it just keeps it that place where you can be okay to expand on ideas and throw ideas out there and have conversations and not feel like you're going to be ridiculed…" Another Republican program member agreed, saying "If it was co-ed, I wonder how much we would be willing to freely speak. I feel like we're in a safe space. That if you want to say something, you can say it. And you don't have some guy sitting there rolling his eyeballs at you..." Another trainee told me similarly, "I think – especially given the makeup of the class, we've got some inexperienced older women, we've got some inexperienced younger women – that if you had some 25-year-old guy in there that decided to make his point known, that it would probably change the tenor of the conversation. I think the girls and some of the other women would not want to share their opinion as easily." This illustrates how the gendered nature of the training experience, following the findings of single-gender education proponents who argue that it leads to girls' increased participation, leads to increased comfort and participation among participants.

When I asked Democratic program members about the importance of limiting the training to women only, before bringing up the term "safe space" at all, one participant explained, "I think it's like a safer space to be honest, and I think you can support each other a little bit differently. And I think men tend to take over – and you know, I enjoy working with men – but there's definitely that different dynamic." Even when the term "safe space" was not used, other Democratic women discussed the importance of a women-only space in similar terms. For example, the same participant who had been skeptical of the program being a "safe space" explained, "if it were opened up to men, the authenticity and the candor that I think is often able to be expressed in a room where it's all female, would be… diluted for lack of a better word… if there were men present, I think it would take away from what we're trying to accomplish. I mean my husband is a devout feminist. I still don't think I'd want him there. I don't think that we could comfortably be fully honest about the objectifications that we've experienced, and the issues that we have faced, if there were men present." An understanding of the lack of men as a distinct benefit or at least an important aspect of the programs that made participants feel comfortable asking questions and making their opinions known without feeling intimidated or feeling judged, came up repeatedly for both Democratic and Republican participants, whether the term "safe space" was used or not.

Who Gets to Be in the "Sisterhood?"

Who gets to participate in the sisterhood and safe spaces of these trainings? Is there any consideration for the complexities of gender, nonbinary candidates, or

transgender women? Much anthropological work has focused on destabilizing the "man is to culture as woman is to nature" sex/gender binary and highlighting cultural variation within the ways sex and gender are understood, breaking down assumptions of a universal womanhood (Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Nanda 1986). Yet a binary understanding of gender inequality provides the organizing framework for advocates at my field sites who seek to get more women elected to office. How do these practitioners and leaders discuss gender identity and the extraordinary diversity of gendered experiences in the contemporary world, and what are the ramifications for who can benefit from the programs?

Step Up gender identity discourse

Step Up has used the term "Democratic self-identified women" rather than "Democratic women" in their communications in recent years. This was a conscious choice by program leadership to emphasize inclusion of transgender women in their program. The first transgender Executive Director of a Step Up affiliate was hired in 2022, and SU has made an effort to recruit more LGBTQ+ women to train. As part of their recruitment drive in the summer of 2019, for example, they held an "LGBTQ Women Recruitment Webinar" in partnership with the California Democratic Party LGBT Caucus, featuring Redlands Mayor Pro Tem Denise Davis (Redlands' first openly LGBT council member and SU alumna) and California Democratic Party LGBT North Chair Tiffany Woods (a transgender woman and SU alumna).

Still, there is occasional friction about gender identity and pronoun procedures within the Step Up program and its affiliates across the nation that affect who feels welcome in the training space. At the SU Class of 2020 orientation, a participant brought up the need to include preferred pronouns as part of the class members' introductions, for example. At her words, some participants expressed confusion about the concept or the process of expressing preferred gender pronouns, and a disinclination to participate in the practice. Others were adamant that the training could not continue unless and until everyone expressed their preferred pronouns, because it would be impossible to converse with each other respectfully without knowing how everyone identified.

The atmosphere in the very full room grew tense and heated, with a lot of contentious side talk occurring between the 70 participants, until an SU staff member with a professional background in mediation stepped in to address the topic. She explained in a measured tone that gender is a complex issue, and that participants were coming into the SU space with very different levels of familiarity. She suggested that those in attendance should recognize how they may be in a position of learning or a position of demonstrating when it came to gender pronouns, and that each participant should do what they are comfortable with, whether that be including their pronouns in their introduction or observing and learning from those who did. She discussed how Step Up is a space for women, but that "women" encompasses many identities on the gender spectrum and that those who identify as women may use a variety of pronouns. Finally, she ended her explanation by recognizing that they needed to move on from the topic of

gender identity and introductory pronouns not because it was not important, but because it was *so* important that they did not have the time and space to fully address the topic at the moment and needed to table it until the culturally competent campaigning training scheduled for March, during which there would be adequate time and space to address it comprehensively as part of the existing training module on understanding the gender and sexuality spectrums. Her respectful addressing of all parties and recognition of the topic's importance deflated the tension in the room, and the orientation moved on. This conflict was relatively minor, but other Step Up affiliate programs have recounted more serious gender identity-related situations where, for example, harm was caused to nonbinary participants who experienced misunderstanding or exclusion at trainings. In response, the Step Up network in 2022 began discussions aimed at improving clarity and support for nonbinary participants through updated language and policies.

SU training includes a segment on understanding gender and sexuality variation as part of their "running a culturally competent campaign" training, and since 2021 has shifted some of its public-facing language away from emphasizing "women" towards emphasizing "leaders" more inclusively. Still, some trainers continue to unreflectively use gender-essentializing language when making references to, for example, historical gender hierarchies and tendencies for women to share certain characteristics, such as a lack of confidence. Generally, a binary understanding of gender inequality provides the organizing framework for the organization's mission of electing more women to office.

There are several transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming SU alumnae, some of whom the organization has spotlighted on their social media as trailblazers. For example, in a series of celebratory Pride Month posts in June 2020, a photo of alumna Tiffany Woods was posted touting her as "the first trans woman elected to a leadership role in the [California Democratic Party] LGBT Caucus!" One 2020 alumna described themself as a "queer non-binary power femme," and others express a butch lesbian or "boi" gender expression. Navigating the complexities of gender identity in an overtly gendered "women's" training space can be awkward, as the accounts above show, which has led to a few uncomfortable situations for nonbinary Step Up participants. But transgender and queer program participants are treated as full members of the SU sisterhood, take part in and host events, and their accomplishments as members of the transgender community are celebrated.

Midwest Public Leadership Series gender identity discourse

MPLS participants and leadership discussed the transgender community in more unfamiliar terms, and understood MPLS as limited to cisgender women. Language on the MPLS website describes the program as for "Republican women only," and the application does not include any gender identification language, but simply asks applicants to check whether they are a "Ms." "Mrs." or "Miss." The topic of gender identity was not referenced in any training I attended (MPLS does not include any cultural or sensitivity training that would be analogous to the cultural competency training held by SU, nor have I observed such an offering from other right-leaning

organizations), although the sexuality of elected officials was occasionally discussed, such as references to Michigan's Attorney General Dana Nessel, a lesbian who made history as the first openly LGBTQ+ person elected to statewide office in Michigan in 2018.

In one of our first meetings, a leader of the organization discussed how they had never had "transgenders" attend the program. She went on to observe that there had, however, been some transgender women at a bipartisan training she had been involved in, which "led to some interesting conversations." Her use of the term "transgenders" as a noun implies a separate gender category – rather than being "transgender women," she did not necessarily view "transgenders" as fitting within the umbrella of "women." Her use of the term was not intentionally disrespectful, but evidences her relative unfamiliarity with the transgender community – according to the GLAAD Media Reference Guide, it is preferable to use the term "transgender" as an adjective, not as a noun i.e. "transgender people" is viewed as more respectful than "transgenders."

In another meeting, the President discussed more about the program's history with gender non-normative participants. One of her major planned projects for the upcoming year was to track down every MPLS alumna and update their records. But she recounted how one alumna had been removed from the alumnae contact list because, in her words, "we're not sure if she was a she." Program participants stayed in shared hotel rooms during the training weekend with rotating roommate assignments, and she explained that the unclear gender of this participant made other trainees uncomfortable. During our

discussion, the President repeated that she had no problem with transgender people generally, "but that's what [bipartisan candidate training program for women] Vote Run Lead is for." This invocation of a different training organization for transgender women candidates to participate in clarifies that MPLS is not, in the President's opinion, a good fit for them. The program is intended as a space for Republican cisgender women.

Transgender women came up in discussion again while a MPLS leader and I were comparing our experiences participating in various candidate training workshops. She described a bipartisan training she had recently attended, and joked that she thought there were more transgender women in attendance than Republican women. Republicans tend to be vastly outnumbered by Democrats in nominally bipartisan women's candidate training groups, an issue that was a common refrain among my Republican interlocutors. The President reflected on how the fashion choices of some transgender women in attendance at the bipartisan training did not fit in with the practices of the surrounding cisgender women, explaining that some incongruously wore white socks with black suits. She jokingly lamented, "I tell you what, I'm like, if that's what you think women look like…" One of the few other mentions of transgender people at MPLS occurred when a public speaking trainer who worked as a communications consultant and coach mentioned that she had clients in politics, acting, and "even a couple transgenders." Again, her use of transgender as a noun rather than an adjective implies a separate gender category rather than an understanding of transgender women as fitting within the broader category of women.

From these accounts, it seems difficult, if not impossible, for transgender women to be considered part of the Republican MPLS sisterhood alongside cisgender women. The program leader and trainer quoted above interacted with transgender women in other domains of their professional lives without issue, but the MPLS training specifically was not understood as a space for them. If "transgenders" are understood implicitly by leaders and trainers as a separately gendered category of persons who do not always fit in with cisgender women – due to clashing socks or, more consequentially, discomfort in shared lodging situations – how could a transgender woman fully participate in the sisterhood?

Gendered Barriers to Elected Office and How the "Sisterhood" Helps

Having analyzed discourses establishing the importance of limiting the training to women only for building a supportive homosocial network where participants feel safe and comfortable participating and explored understandings of gender identity and who gets to experience the "sisterhood," let us unpack further how women who undergo candidate training discuss the gendered challenges of running for office and the benefits that women's candidate training programs can provide. Program strategies include skill-building, personal empowerment, and network-building, which may address some of the gendered challenges to running for office outlined by scholars.

As discussed in chapter four, confidence-building and encouragement are central focuses of women's candidate training programs. This indicates the primacy of internal psychological barrier concerns, or those emphasizing the "supply" side of women's underrepresentation: fewer women choose to run or want to be involved in elected

politics. Scholars contend that women are socialized to have certain internal psychological predispositions, like a lack of political ambition, confidence, or sense of self-efficacy that make them less likely to run (see Lawless and Fox 2010; Preece 2016). These concerns were shared by many interlocutors who discussed how women think they "can't do it," but that candidate training can give them "confidence." As one MPLS leader put it, "[Women] have a hard time self-promoting themselves on their accomplishments… I don't think they realize how their experiences equate to bigger things. They say, 'well, I only ran the PTA.' Okay, well try and herd that cat!" Her discussion reflects the persistent gender gap in self-promotion found by economic researchers, who contend that women's relative reluctance to self-promote contributes to gender inequality in educational and labor market environments (Exley and Kessler 2020).

External barriers to elected office

External barriers to women who seek elected office are those emphasizing "demand" factors in women's underrepresentation, such as the political arena remaining dominated by men and the difficulty for women to break into those networks, or voters' preference for men candidates. Scholars including Piscopo (2019) assert that candidate training cannot effectively address external systemic institutional and structural factors, and that their focus on individual skill-building and internal psychological barriers instead puts the onus on women to "lean in" and solve the problem of their own political underrepresentation. I argue that this characterization does not include the full picture of

what long-term, cohort-based women's candidate training programs specifically have the potential to address. It is certainly true that individual training cannot address barriers inherent in electoral systems such as, for example, many public officials' salaries being so low that those who are not independently wealthy cannot afford to serve. Training programs work within existing political and social systems. However, I find that their function as builders of social networks has the potential to ameliorate certain external barriers by providing a more egalitarian alternative to elite fundraising and mentorship networks enjoyed by (wealthy, white) men, as outlined in the sections below. Beyond confidence-building and nuts and bolts training on topics such as how to make a campaign budget, get out the vote, develop a campaign message, and fundraise, the networks of women leaders created and maintained by the programs can provide social, emotional, and material fringe benefits that have potential to mitigate some of the external challenges women face.

The importance of the programs' networks and the relationships formed through the training process consistently come up in interviews with alumnae and conversations with staff, who describe how it is crucial for women in positions of power to reach out to other women and be supportive of one another. Training programs may focus largely on individual skill-building with the extra gendered concern of raising women's confidence, but a central benefit is also the networking and relationship-building that occurs. The beneficial effects of political women banding together in gendered social groups are not surprising – homosociality benefits have been documented once women obtain elected

office as well; in their study of U.S. state legislators, Holman and Mahoney (2018) find that women legislators are especially more likely to collaborate on cosponsored legislation with each other when there is a women's caucus.

"Good old boys" clubs

The notion of politics being a "boys' club" or a "man's world" was consistently cited by interlocutors. Women complained about being attacked, ignored, or provided less support. Stories about the challenges involved in dealing with powerful men included accounts of sexist treatment (e.g. being hit on, being called "sweetie" and asked about future family plans, not being taken seriously), descriptions of male candidates seeming to steal the spotlight from women, and a harrowing account from one Republican former candidate of last-minute "dark money" support that always seemed to go to men. As one MPLS participant described, a man at a fundraiser for a local candidate "talked to me for a minute and he said, 'you're not going to win, you're too nice.' You know, 'You're a woman.'"

One MPLS alumna, a wealthy white woman in her 50s, seemed to have many things stacked in her favor but still cited a lack of access to powerful networks as a central challenge for women generally. She explained, "women don't have the networks like men do. We live in a gated community, and the men have a locker room, and the women have a locker room, and the men have a separate little restaurant. They drink beer and smoke cigars and play cards. Imagine they're all in there after playing golf or they're watching golf together. 'Hey, Johnny, do you want to run for county commissioner this

year? Hey everybody…'" She continued, "I think that we're kind of behind in that networking. We're taking care of the kids or they're home shopping and cooking, and the men are there up at the ground watching golf, watching Tiger Woods win yesterday, drinking beer and probably talking about, 'is Johnny gonna run for office?' And we're vacuuming. I know that sounds really antiquated, but it's true." Her assertion that despite her own relatively privileged position, women still "don't have the networks like men do" evidences the potential importance of training programs' networking function.

Another Republican interlocutor explained, "When I first ran [for office] … I stood up and I said, 'Guys, I believe very strongly that we can do a whole lot more in this district.' And I upset a lot of people but I won. And the people that were upset with me were the good ol' boys, the good ol' boys that were large and in charge." She described blatant sexism, saying, "I am certain that the first time I ran, the guys in the room that thought they had it, thought 'well, we're not going to have a skirt runnin' this district.' I'm certain." As discussed in chapter three, there are fewer women in the Republican Party than the Democratic Party and Pew research has found that Republicans are significantly less likely than Democrats to agree that there are too few women in high political offices (Parker, Horowitz and Igielnik 2018). GOP women candidates are less likely to receive structural support or support from party members (Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018). Given this, it is not surprising that Republican women interlocutors would describe intra-party opposition from men.

Complaints about political boys' club emerged on the Democratic side as well. One SU trainee, a young woman of color from the Bay Area, referred to "this constant grooming of men." She described how one of her local officials is "grooming one of his campaign guys to run in the same way he did," and told me, "I don't know of one man in office whose mentee is a woman." Another SU participant and first generation Mexican-American running for local office described, "there's these things like good old boys' networks and family legacies that help men, and others, get a leg up in politics. You know, they all maybe went to the same prep school, or the same college, or the same rotary... kind of that exclusiveness to how the world works in politics." She described SU training as a way to gain access to a powerful network of women who could serve as mentors and supporters, or even just cheerleaders who emotionally support one's candidacy ambitions, helping make up for a lack of access to a boys' club or elite educational pedigree. She explained, "what I hope to get out of this is exactly what I'm seeing, and that's the networking and skills that many people have access to just in their social and their birthright and business connections that I don't have." Women may find it difficult to gain access to exclusive "good old boys' networks" or wealthy donor networks, but candidate training program networks that provide benefits such as mentorship and fundraising assistance can help fill that void, to varying degrees.

Access to fundraising networks

Related discourses among interlocutors reference how it is more difficult for women to gain the support of elites or get donations – either because people are less

forthcoming, because women have less access to wealthy networks, or because women find it difficult to ask for money. One Republican Party official and retired educator said, "these elites as you put it, they just don't want a skirt. They're not ready for it… I would like to see the Republican Party trying to recruit more women to run and then support them." Indeed, as discussed above and in chapter three, political science research shows that Republican women candidates are less likely to receive support from their party members (especially men in the party), political elites, and donors, than Democratic women candidates are (Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018). As one young Republican woman who worked as a political staffer said, "I do think that [donors] are more likely to donate to a guy, like 'oh you want to run for office? Here's 500 bucks.'"

A lack of access to powerful networks for fundraising, especially for women with less affluent backgrounds and women of color, was a central topic of discussion in Democratic SU fundraising panels and in one-on-one interviews. One SU fundraising discussion panelist described her background as a Latina who did not have access to wealthy networks, and emphasized how as a candidate, you must be tenacious until you find an ally who *does* have access to those networks who will hold the door open for you and serve as a bridge to introduce you to their wealthy network. By connecting trainees to a network of over 700 alumnae, consultants, etc. SU serves as a potential source of such allies with wealthy network access. Members of the SU community donate to, volunteer for, and publicize each other's campaigns, and SU alumnae are encouraged to reach out to the SU network with fundraising calls.

Once SU program members graduate from the program, they receive access to the alumnae database and can solicit their more than 700 fellow alumnae for campaign support. As explained by one alumna, there is an expectation to donate to and volunteer for each other's campaigns. She said at a 2019 training session, "use your networks in this room and beyond. And know that there are many Step Up graduates and we are expecting if you're in our area to invite us to your events, and we expect you to ask us for funding. So I will be frustrated, or I will be disappointed if someone was running in my area and didn't ask me to donate." As her account illustrates, the sisterhood provides not only a "feeling of comfort" but it is expected, or at least hoped, that SU alumnae who are able provide each other with practical assistance and fundraising support.

Because the MPLS network is much smaller, this internal networking is more limited. Still, some alumnae help each other by volunteering for or otherwise supporting each other's campaigns. The program President has also donated to alumna campaigns. Neither program serves as a perfect substitute for membership in high-powered professional, educational, social, neighborhood, or family networks and organizations. Nor should they, if you believe that political leadership should be about the good one will do as a public servant rather than one's personal connections. But they provide another group that alumnae can reach out to as an avenue for fundraising, advice, and volunteer soliciting – something that the SU alumnae network of over 700 women is better equipped for than the MPLS network of ~70.

The harsh political environment

As the editors of a recent volume on women's candidacies write, "in the United States we rely on individuals to step forward somewhat independently to pursue electoral office. Within this environment, the personal and financial costs of running for office are high. Given the vitriol in recent elections and the high level of hyperpartisanship, negative advertising, and animosity in even lower-level elections, it is fair to ask: Why would anyone run for office?" (Shames et al. 2020: 2). Why, indeed? Running for office can be difficult and unpleasant due to the harsh and polarized political environment, and the costs are even higher for members of marginalized identity groups who lack privileges of wealth, whiteness, and masculinity. By building an emotionally supportive social network where women can share their experiences and commiserate with one another, candidate training programs can provide some solace.

One MPLS leader described how in her experience, "women tend to be challenged more in a forum situation" than men, for example. "You just definitely gotta have a cast iron stomach, and I think that's what scares a lot of women away [from politics]," explained another Republican interlocutor. An extremely negative perception of the U.S. political arena is shared by many potential candidates, as Shames' (2017) work with millennials who often cited the corruption and brokenness of politics as a reason not to run for office shows.

My Republican women interlocutors were overwhelmingly white. That they found themselves subject to attack in the political arena and felt unused to and

unequipped to handle it reflects how much of a departure such treatment is from the romantic paternalism, or benevolent sexism, that has characterized discrimination against white women throughout U.S. history. Women of color and especially Black women are, in contrast, more frequent targets of aggressive encounters in daily life (Jones and Norwood 2017). Unfortunately, the political arena is yet another source of such encounters for many women leaders of color. One high profile example is Republican U.S. Representative Ted Yoho's verbal attacks on Democratic Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on the steps of the Capitol in 2020 (Lillis 2020).

Democratic Black women interlocutors especially discussed the struggles involved in dealing with a hostile environment while also trying to avoid being characterized as an "angry Black woman." As one SU alumna described in a discussion of political barriers and stereotypes, "I should be allowed to be angry. But instead, I'm second guessing that, right. Because as a woman of color, I don't have a ton of space for that, just in reality. …I feel like I'm always having to second guess and triple check before I make any move. …You don't want to be the angry Black woman, you don't want to be the emotional woman…" Her experience reflects a fundamental challenge and internal conflict faced by colonized groups in oppressive societies who are forced to adopt a keen awareness of the uptake of others, constantly seeing themselves through the dominant groups' perspective – what W.E.B. Du Bois termed "double consciousness" (1903). The intersection of race and gender for members of historically marginalized groups constrains the actions women feel able to take in response to an unwelcoming

environment, compounding the challenge. Having a supportive network of women who share their lived experiences to discuss these issues and commiserate with is likely especially valuable, then, for women of color.

Affective benefits of being in the room together

As outlined above, women's political training programs aim to teach campaign skills and shore up participants' confidence and motivation as well as function as powerful networks for participants who rely on the sisterhood for social, emotional, and material support. Participants are introduced to consultants, elected officials, party officials, political staff, and others who may be useful contacts as they enter into elected office. The elected officials and program alumnae who speak as panelists serve as role models and allow participants to see women who look like them in positions of power. All these possible benefits should be studied. But being in the room together with other women who want to lead can provide additional intangible affective benefits.

The SU training's "closing circle" tradition, in which trainees discuss their takeaways from the program about leading with "their authentic selves" – authenticity being a leadership quality that is promoted as part of SU training that also features heavily in Vote Run Lead's trainings and has been mentioned in MPLS trainings, as discussed in chapter four – illustrates the potential affective benefits of establishing a supportive "sisterhood" and "safe space" for candidate training.

After a 2019 SU Boot Camp training, the group of current political candidates, an SU staff member, and myself held hands in a circle of chairs. The candidates shared how

their life experiences influenced their priorities and approaches to elected leadership with stories that provoked both laughter and tears. Rather than feeling hokey, it felt powerful and cathartic to hear the diverse personal stories that had brought these women to seek elected office. After everyone had spoken, the staff member in charge paused and took a breath. She asked us, "do you feel this? This is power."

Whether program participants explicitly express the need for women's solidarity and the benefits of having women in power or not, there is a sense of solidarity that can emerge from literally being in the same room with a group of women working towards gender equality by seeking to gain leadership positions and represent their community's interests. Being among a group of women who are ready and working to make change can provide an intangible sense of inspiration and resolve.

Partisan differences in network benefits – the "sisterhood" in action

The SU and MPLS training alumnae networks vary greatly in the kind of support they have the ability to provide. Differences in organization structure and political party makeup and culture affect how effective and sustainable these groups of women activists and leaders can be at propelling alumnae into elected office and illustrate the material power of the "sisterhood." The potential to build supportive social networks is of particular importance for Republican women, who navigate a party environment in which men and partisan institutions and culture tend to be more hostile to the notion that women are underrepresented and to identity politics and affirmative action more broadly. However, SU has much greater capacity and a larger network than MPLS – undoubtedly

due at least in part to these political party culture-related factors that influence how many people are willing to donate to their cause.

The relationships formed through SU range from trainees' informal friendships and support – both emotional (e.g. listening to each other's frustrations) and material (e.g. volunteering for or donating to each other's campaigns, providing advice) – to more official mentor-mentee relationships. SU has formalized an ongoing advisership program for graduates. Alumnae can make a private appointment with a volunteer slate of political campaign consultants who spend a few hours each month advising women candidates pro bono. Alumnae may also participate in additional ongoing virtual training sessions on campaign topics such as earned media and messaging. This keeps alumnae engaged in the SU network and provides ongoing support for those running for office.

This ongoing alumnae support – maintaining the alumnae database, providing professional consultations, holding ongoing virtual training sessions – helps SU alumnae across California access the kind of advising, mentorship, and fundraising network that they may not otherwise have access to. These initiatives are possible because SU has adequate funding and multiple paid staff. The shared labor, expertise, and fundraising of all these actors benefit the program and increase how much SU is able to accomplish.

In comparison, MPLS relies entirely on the unpaid labor of one or two passionate women. The program's smaller size and scale – MPLS alumnae number only about one tenth of SU's – limits how much ongoing support can be provided to alumnae. There is an alumnae directory with bios and contact information that is distributed to MPLS

graduates in an effort to provide a resource, cement the network, and allow everyone to keep in touch, but it is out of date and incomplete. The president is considering how alumnae might become more engaged in program recruitment and maintaining the network, but for now, ongoing mentorship and guidance is provided on an informal, ad hoc basis. Considering the limited size of the program's alumnae network and that the program leaders are volunteers who work other jobs, it is simply not possible for MPLS to provide the kind of support to alumnae – such as pro bono campaign advising with multiple consultants, an extensive and updated alumnae database, and free ongoing post-graduate training sessions – that SU does.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION: SHIFTING APPROACHES TO GENDER AND LEADERSHIP

How Did We Get Here, and Where Are We Going?

In this dissertation, I have used three central conceptual approaches to explore and compare the discourses and strategies of two organizations that propel women into elected leadership – one focused on Democratic women, and one on Republican women. I have qualitatively examined and compared how the programs and participants discuss gender, partisanship, leadership, and barriers to elected office to explore how political party culture affects the ways women understand the quest for public power.

Chapter two examines the programs in light of political scholarship on gender and leadership, and explains how the Democratic program's public discourse exhibits "female boosterism" (Alexander and Andersen 1993), a notion based on an ideology of gender difference that justifies descriptive representation by positing that women are different and better leaders than men. Chapter three considers how the programs are shaped by their political party cultural values and attitudes, pointing out how Lakoff's (1996) political metaphors characterizing liberal and conservative approaches to leadership as a "nurturant parent model" and "strict father model," respectively, become more complicated when leaders' gender is taken into account and fail to account for the strong focus on collaboration among Republican interlocutors. Chapter four explores the metasemiotics of women's candidate training programs in terms of the specific skills and leadership qualities trainers seek to impart, as well as the leadership characteristics that

program participants discuss and value. While many positive representations of leadership are consistent across party lines, some, such as leaders' use of emotional appeals, vary. Finally, chapter five explores the programs' genderedness by examining the benefits of a women-only space in greater detail. I push back on the notion that candidate training does not address external barriers to candidacy by outlining how the programs have the potential to function as powerful social networks that provide mentorship and fundraising assistance.

Based on the findings discussed throughout the preceding chapters, I argue that sociocultural attitudes towards gender and power at play in women's candidate training spaces are distinctive along partisan lines, despite the apparent similarities in practitioners' goals to elect more women and the training programs' strategies to prepare them. The surprising aspect is that the difference in ideological orientations to gender and leadership across the two groups is not what their respective historical partisan commitments to the gender binary suggest they would be.

Generally speaking, rightwing gender-related or women's movements have tended to mobilize around understandings of the distinctive values of masculine and feminine (Butler 2021). Leftwing movements, in contrast, have tended to emphasize gender similarity in terms of the equal abilities and capacities of people regardless of gender. However, as discussed throughout this dissertation but primarily in chapter two, Democratic women's candidate training program public discourses evidence how leftwing movements today also mobilize around gender difference and the perceived

benefits of a feminine approach to power, in contrast with Republican programs' public discourses that exhibit a "gender neutral" approach that is careful not to promote women simply on the basis of being women but on their individual merit as candidates.

Advocates' gender ideologies, then, cannot always be assumed based on their political ideologies. Whether one ascribes to liberalism or conservatism does not reliably indicate one's specific ideas about gender in the way we might assume. Perhaps among many everyday citizens across the United States, affiliation as a Republican *is* associated with a gender ideology of difference: more "traditional" understandings of masculinity and femininity and the role of women focusing more on the domestic sphere than the public sphere. Conversely, affiliation as a Democrat likely *is* associated, for many people, with a second wave feminism-esque gender ideology of similarity and equality that pushes back against traditional gender roles and critiques norms about masculinity and femininity as oppressive. But at the relatively politically elite level of those involved in women's candidate training organizations, this tendency reverses in public-facing discourse. A Republican woman elected official may contend that there is nothing different about women leaders and that they, just like men, should express conservative ideals and be cool, rational actors whom we can judge based on their individual merits. In contrast, a Democratic woman may claim that of course women leaders are different – in fact, their socialization as nurturers makes them more collaborative and *better* leaders. Part of this difference can no doubt be explained simply by sociocultural particularity and the rich and varied tapestry of human experience that anthropologists, with our aversion

to making sweeping generalizations about people, are so good at describing. Another part of the difference likely results from partisan differences in leadership style. It is convenient for Democrats, whose party tends to focus more on feminized social welfare issues, to rally around the benefits of feminized leadership that are already associated with their party's leaders of all genders. Still, this shifting patterned tendency indicates that something deeper is going on at the nexus of political ideology and gender ideology among women leaders. How did we get here?

Gender Identity Troubles in U.S. Politics and the Inherent Limitations of "Women's" Groups

Political training and support programs for women candidates in the United States number in the hundreds (Kreitzer and Osborn 2020). While some are affiliated with a political party, the groups are "informal" in the sense that they exist outside of the party's official candidate nominating structure and they offer an alternative strategy than, for example, political parties adopting policies like candidate gender quotas. The assumption undergirding these organizations is that women-only spaces are needed to support and encourage women as an identity group to engage in the political world.

In their book *Gender Trouble,* Judith Butler implores readers to ask, "what political possibilities are the consequence of a radical critique of the categories of identity," and "to what extent does the effort to locate a common identity as the foundation for a feminist politics preclude a radical inquiry into the political construction and regulation of identity itself?" (1999: xxix). They further suggest that "it is not enough

to inquire into how women might become more fully represented in language and politics. Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of "women," the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought." Basing one's feminist politics upon a shared gender identity as women as these political programs do, Butler contends, is inherently limiting.

As some leftwing movements follow Butler's suggestion and shift toward a greater acceptance of gender as a social construct and the breaking down of sex and gender binarism, left-leaning organizations that base their feminist politics upon propelling women as an identity group into power and emphasizing women's distinctiveness and shared gendered characteristics as leaders butt against this limitation. As they grow more open to participants who do not identify as women or whose gender does not align with traditional and stereotypical understandings of femininity, what reasons do "women's" political groups have to exist? If identities are understood as multiplicative and shifting, "women" as a category of mobilization is lost. How, then, should leftist feminist politics move forward?

As Butler (2021) describes, rightwing movements tend to be less accepting of the socially constructed nature of gender and more likely to mobilize around understandings of gender hierarchy and the distinctive values of masculine and feminine. Right-leaning practitioners who seek to increase the representation of women in public life face a primary tension between a political party culture that glorifies notions of meritocracy and "gender neutrality" and rejects identity politics and their simultaneous desire to provide

special assistance to those with the shared gender identity of "women." Right-leaning organizations that promote women's leadership must attempt to square those values and balance their goal of assisting women as an identity group with a political party culture that is generally averse to anything smacking of affirmative action.

There are tensions between pro-women discourses and those emphasizing gender neutrality or less attachment to a common women's identity across the political spectrum. For Democrats, building an overtly gendered space for women and making claims about women being superior leaders while also trying to be welcoming of those with other gender expressions and identities can create awkwardly competing discourses. For Republicans, a partisan aversion to identity politics and valorization of electing "the most qualified candidate" butts up against helping and promoting women as an identity group. These points are expanded on in the sections below.

Democratic gender tensions

Chapter five discusses in greater detail if and how the complexities of gender, nonbinary candidates, and transgender women are considered in women's candidate training program discourses. Generally, a binary understanding of gender inequality provides the organizing framework for advocates who seek to get more women elected to office. But how gender identity and the diversity of gender experiences are discussed varied between the Democratic and Republican groups I conducted participant observation research with. The Democratic program has used the term "self-identified women" rather than "women" in past communications as a way to try and emphasize

inclusion of transgender women and has made specific efforts to recruit more LGBTQ+ women by partnering with their state party LGBT Caucus and alumnae members of the LGBTQ+ community to hold recruitment events. There are several transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming graduates of the program – some who use they/them pronouns, and some with masculine-presenting "boi" gender expressions, for example. Trainers discuss how the program is a space for women, but that "women" encompasses many identities on the gender spectrum and that those who identify as women may express their gender in different ways and use a variety of pronouns.

The balance of welcoming those with various gender expressions while remaining a space designed for "women" is a challenge. One technically bipartisan but Democrat-dominated nonprofit organization that trains young women to become political leaders, for example, used this disclaimer language on their web pages and emails in 2021: "IGNITE is for all cis and trans women, as well as non-binary people who are comfortable in a space that centers the experiences of young women." The organization is an overtly gendered space, but they are also trying to include those who fall outside of the category of women. It is a curious balance to try and be welcoming of those who may or may not identify as women while also centering and often making blanket statements about women as an identity group to training participants. It is increasingly complicated for "women's" political groups to justify their existence with gendered claims about the positive difference women leaders make as the fuzziness of "women" as an identity category of mobilization becomes more widely acknowledged.

Despite some attempts at including participants with a wider array of genders, Democratic trainers and others I spoke with often circulated gender-essentializing discourses that characterized women as having certain commonalities. Discourses about women lacking confidence, women having a harder time asking for donations, or, more positively, that women's leadership is superior to and different from men's and thus "when women run, we all win," circulate prominently among left-leaning practitioners. As discussed in greater detail in chapter two, many interlocutors expressed how women lead and legislate distinctively from men, highlighting the shared characteristics of and challenges for women as a group and reflecting some elements of a universal understanding of womanhood. Discourses about women having certain characteristics and being different from men in crucial ways that make them superior elected officials exist awkwardly alongside attempts to include people with various gendered experiences outside of a strict binary.

The notion that women and men lead in fundamentally, substantively different ways goes beyond claims that having women in office would be a positive step for equality in representation, a benefit to young girls who would gain political role models, or even generally lead to better policy solutions through a greater diversity of perspectives. The Democratic training program I conducted research with stated on their website in 2021, "[Women's] leadership is based on honesty, compassion, integrity, fact and science, on the desire to protect and serve the most vulnerable among them, and to prioritize what is right and moral above politics. The outcomes show that when you elect

women, you are electing leaders who are bringing their lived experiences to the dais with them as they vote, as well as a value set that prioritizes collaboration, innovation, community and the common good." Women leaders, this organization claims, bring special and beneficial leadership qualities to their roles in elected office, and therefore one should support women's candidate training. It is not enough to gain descriptive representation. Democrats justify women's presence in leadership with a substantive impact argument focusing on how women's embodied, lived experiences influence how they lead and represent.

As outlined in chapter two, this embracing of both egalitarianism (women deserve equal rights and opportunities) and gender essentialism that emphasizes how women's qualities are *different* from men's but also *better* reflects a notion that researchers Alexander and Andersen in the 1990s termed "female boosterism." The stance also reflects what scholars in the 1980s dubbed "difference feminism," or the belief that men and women may deserve equal treatment but are still fundamentally different, rather than "equality feminism" which focuses on their similarities (of course, both of these views make masculinity the default – see MacKinnon 1987: 34). While the left side of the political spectrum, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, was commonly associated with "equality feminism" and its associated "politics of sameness" – think power suits and attitudes like "women can do anything men can do" – the left-leaning, Democratic program today firmly embraces a "politics of difference" approach in their claims that women bring unique and different positive values and qualities to political leadership.

While gender theorists including Butler (2021) describe rightwing movements as being more likely to mobilize around understandings of the distinctive values of masculine and feminine, these Democratic women's candidate training program discourses evidence how leftwing movements also mobilize around gender difference and the perceived benefits of a feminine approach to power.

Republican gender tensions

In contrast with the Democratic program's public focus on how women's leadership will change government for the better, the Republican program, in keeping with a political party culture that is generally averse to identity politics, makes no public claims about what qualities women in particular bring to elected office. While their website makes it clear that the program seeks to recruit and train Republican women and build a statewide network of Republican women leaders, there is no mention of *why* it is important to elect more women in terms of gendered leadership skills. Instead, the emphasis is solely on more equal representation of women in government as well as a more equal representation of conservative women among the women in government. The program's goal, as stated on their website, is "to form an effective and diverse statewide political network for Michigan Republican Women" and "to make sure CONSERVATIVE VOICES are heard" because "it is the ONLY program in the state of Michigan training REPUBLICAN women to be leaders" (emphasis in original). The organization is concerned not only with increasing women's involvement in politics (as its application states, "Applicants must display a commitment to the process of building a

tradition of full participation of women in politics and government"), but more specifically with increasing the number of *Republican* women. Of course the converse is also true of the Democratic program – these are explicitly partisan organizations. But Republican women are vastly outnumbered by Democratic women in elected office, so their path to equal representation is a steeper climb.

The Republican group's publicly stated focus on the importance of (Republican) women's participation in politics and government does not include any assertions about what women in particular may bring to the table. This view was reflected in some interviewees' discourses. As one Republican interlocutor participating in the training program said when asked if women bring something different to the table in politics, "I think that anyone can bring anything to the table. …I guess, yes… but so can men." This stance – that women are just as capable as men but not necessarily better than them in any specific ways – appears to reflect the tenets of "equality feminism," which focuses on similarities between genders in the call for equal representation (although the word "feminism" was not typically embraced by Republican participants). As outlined above, the "equality feminism" stance was historically associated with the political left. So in the case of these political training programs' public assertions about women's leadership, the alignment of political party orientation with "politics of difference" or "politics of sameness" is the reverse of what one might expect.

The existence of a Republican political training program specifically for women may also come as a surprise considering that for many Republicans, including

interlocutors who participated in the program, the idea of helping only women smacks undesirably of affirmative action and stands in opposition to hallowed notions of gender neutrality and electing the most qualified candidate. This inherent tension is reflected in the 2021 mission statement included in the Republican program's email newsletter, which states, "The women who win, win because they are the best candidate on the ballot, NOT because they are a woman." While some program participants invoked discourses about women being more effective leaders during training sessions or interviews, the Republican program hesitates to make any public assertions about benefits women in particular may bring to political leadership. By emphasizing how victorious women are elected because they are the best candidate rather than because they are women, the program seeks distance from claims that women are inherently superior leaders. Theirs is not a substantive representation-related argument in regard to gender. Instead, it focuses solely on gaining Republican representation. Rather than positing that women need women leaders to represent them and push forward specific women's issues, the Republican discourses emphasize how good leadership and good policy is not tied to gender. As outlined by Lakoff (1996), conservative values hold that everyone has the potential for success with enough hard work, and therefore it follows that everyone regardless of gender will benefit from meritocratic Republican policies, lower taxes, etc.

Man as the measure of all things

The Republican implication that women should be in power because they are just as capable as men but not necessarily different or better than them in any specific ways

appears to reflect basic principles of fair and equal representation and the tenets of "equality feminism," which focuses on similarities between genders in the call for equal representation i.e. "anything you can do, we can do" (see MacKinnon 1987). The word feminism, however, is not typically embraced by MPLS participants, as it has a political valence and is associated with the Democratic Party. As mentioned above, the "equality feminism" stance was historically associated with the left side of the political spectrum. However, in the case of these political training programs' public assertions about women's leadership, the alignment of political party orientation with "politics of difference" or "politics of sameness" is the reverse of what one might expect. Yet as MacKinnon (1987) explains, pursuing equality through a lens of difference or sameness as described above is simply two ways to hold women to the same masculine standard. She writes, "under the sameness standard, women are measured according to our correspondence with man, our equality judged by our proximity to his measure. Under the difference standard, we are measured according to our lack of correspondence with him, our womanhood judged by our distance from his measure. Gender neutrality is thus simply the male standard, and the special protection rule is simply the female standard, but do not be deceived: masculinity, or maleness, is the referent for both" (MacKinnon 1987: 34). Following this, both MPLS and SU may be understood as positioning men as the measure of all things, rather than fundamentally rethinking leadership outside of established gendered norms.

Why the sameness / difference feminism shift?

What sociocultural forces explain the prominence of difference feminism-related arguments for women's political representation among Democratic advocates today, and the converse shift toward equality feminism arguments for Republicans, as explored above? Democratic advocacy groups' celebratory claims of women's greater ability to lead in a "feminized" manner characterized by traits like collaboration and compassion may be related to the emergence of care-focused feminism in the 1980s and 1990s. This movement followed the ethics of care theory originated by Carol Gilligan (1982) that holds that the capacity for care is a human strength that should be the social responsibility of all, not just women. Along with other third-wave feminism ideals, this focus on care pushed back against earlier feminists' fights to include women in traditionally masculine spheres and sought to redefine what it meant to be a feminist to include a wider array of possibilities and value more traditionally feminine aspects. The "care economy"-centered feminist movement to pay attention to, respect, and equally value non-market care work associated with women as real work, argued most notably by political economist Nancy Folbre (2006), may also have something to do with why an association between women and a more care-focused take on political leadership is celebrated by contemporary leftist feminists, rather than women's capacity to, say, don a business suit and take charge of a boardroom.

Celebrating women for their stereotypically feminine traits and positing that those traits make them more effective leaders is also undoubtedly linked to increasing political

polarization and the political left's growing desire for sweeping policy change and greater emphasis on domestic social welfare issues, such as healthcare. A shift towards "feminized" leadership for Democratic politicians of any gender, as described in Toner's (2007) article about then-presidential candidate Barack Obama, may, at least in part, explain why some Democratic women's leadership advocates have turned to difference feminism arguments (and why Republicans have not).

As discussed in chapter four, valuing traits like emotionality in leadership is associated with the Democratic Party's approach to leadership. Benedictus (2016) writes that "crying is an important tool in the campaign armoury," and indeed leaders – at least the Democratic ones whose party's priorities tend towards "soft" domestic social welfare concerns and whose communication frames, per Lakoff (1996), are already "nurturant" – can benefit from showing their empathy and humility. If attributes like compassion, collaboration etc. are increasingly being touted as good traits for *all* Democratic leaders to evince, especially in this time of intense polarization when Democrats are presumably seeking to distance themselves from Republican modes of conduct as much as possible, then it benefits women leaders to play up their stereotypical strengths and claim even greater tendency towards these leadership qualities. As Thomas (1994) argues, however, pigeonholing women into compassion-based leadership and the domestic policy sphere in this way will not be beneficial to them if the political tides turn towards valuing a different leadership style and policy focuses in the future.

As the category of "women" itself is increasingly interrogated by those on the left in favor of spectrum-based understandings of gender and an intersectional approach to identities that recognizes how the umbrella of "women" is vast and shifting and social systems of oppression much more complex than the gender binary, one wonders how much longer the turn to difference feminism, and indeed left-leaning "women"-branded political advocacy groups, will last.

Women candidates, care work, and family commitments

As described above, the movement to recognize care and care work as a strength may have contributed to Democratic women's leadership advocates' embracing of gender ideologies of difference. How do women's candidate training program participants themselves discuss care work, and do their discourses about caregiving illuminate more about their leadership approaches?

As indicated in political science scholarship, women are more likely to reach office as the result of "relationally embedded decisions" (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013). This means that women tend to seriously consider how candidacy and officeholding will affect other people in their lives. The fact that family and caregiving responsibilities continue to fall disproportionately on women presents an additional roadblock to elected office, and this gendered barrier was discussed by interlocutors and program leaders I interviewed.

As one Democratic SU participant who unsuccessfully ran for local office explained, "we as women are the default caregivers… I'll speak very personally from my

own home, I have a partner who's an amazing supporter but he was not ready to support me during this campaign. And I wasn't ready to ask him for the type of support I needed during the campaign and it caused a lot of bitterness… so there's you know, that. Those are the things that we have to overcome is our roles in the household and kind of stepping away from those roles to become a candidate, and these are things that I think people in their minds think, 'you have a four year old, you should be staying at home with him. Why are you out on the campaign trail?'" Not only was it difficult for this interlocutor's family to adapt to the limitations campaigning placed on her family and caregiving responsibilities, but she also worried that voters would react negatively to her candidacy and question why she was running for office instead of caring for her young child.

Training program participant and advocate discourses reflect concern for family-related barriers facing women. However, some also charge that having more women in office who are concerned with this topic will be beneficial, reflecting the feminism of care points discussed above. One SU participant discussed how having more women in leadership would positively impact working women with children through child care policy reform. She explained, "there would be plans in place to help women be able to maintain their ongoing career path. They wouldn't have as much of a juggling act that it came down to having to decide, do I become a wife and mom or do I follow my career path? I think over time that because more women have gotten into office, that that is getting better. But that's only because of having women in office that those messages are even being heard, much less implemented. So I think it would be a lot less of a struggle

for families in general." This interlocutor focused on the substantive representation related expectation that electing more women to office would affect policies that disproportionately affect women.

This view of the importance of women's presence for improving caregiving policy is shared by Democratic women leaders across the country. As U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin explained in a promotional video for Democratic women's candidate training organization Emerge Wisconsin, "Many women are raising young children. In my case I was taking care of frail and elderly grandparents. And you question whether you can be involved in the public sphere and still do right by your loved ones. The answer is you can and you must and I would say, specifically on that, if we have policy being made only by people who don't have those responsibilities, that policy won't be as good" (New Moon Productions 2013). While the responsibility of caretaking may put an additional strain on women candidates, the women quoted above advocate for more women in office precisely because they are more likely to have these experiences and keep them in mind when crafting policy. They are, in effect, putting care-focused feminism theory into practice. Both women making this point are Democrats, reflecting both Democrats' tendency to focus on domestic social welfare-related issues and how women in the Democratic Party are more likely than those in the Republican Party to substantively change the message and policy priorities of their party to promote "women's issues," rather than changing the face of the messenger but maintaining existing policy priorities, as scholars like Wineinger (2018) and Swers (2018) describe.

In contrast with the above Democratic women's considerations of how women caregivers in office would positively change policy conversations around child care, one Republican interviewee discussed how women's greater family responsibilities is a barrier in part because being immersed in their domestic worlds makes women worse at being assertive and making decisions. As she explained, "If everything has been about what the feeling of their kitchen cabinet is... you know, 'how the girls felt about it'... If they're unable to look at a situation logically and try to determine the best outcome, then they don't belong in politics. …You have to leave the soccer mom scenario behind. You have to be willing to walk from that a little bit and go out and make new friends." She argues that women have to remove themselves from family and domestic responsibilities in order to become effective political leaders, becoming more similar to the masculinized leadership ideal. This point stands in opposition to the feminism of care related points made above that argue for the equal valuation of domestic non-market work.

The focus on women candidates' family responsibilities as a barrier to their political involvement is, for many, a source of ire in itself. Program participants and leaders on both sides of the aisle remarked that men candidates are never asked who is watching their children while they are spending time on the campaign trail, for example. As one MPLS trainer and statewide officeholder remarked during a 2019 training session, "everywhere I go, people ask me as soon as they hear that I have four kids, 'how do you do it?' My husband has never been asked that!" Her exasperation at the inherent sexism of child rearing being viewed as solely the mother's prerogative, along with the insistence

of the Republican interlocutor above that women must walk away from "the soccer mom scenario" if they want to succeed in politics, reflects the tenets of equality feminism in that both leaders emphasize the potential similarities between men and women, who they argue are both capable of leading in the public sphere. Their views align with Republican Party culture in that they seek to extend membership in the masculinized, child and kitchen cabinet-free world of politics to women, rather than characterizing the addition of feminized concerns about child care into the realm of politics as a positive step towards better representation of those with family priorities, as the Democrats do.

Contextualizing Women's Leadership in the Current Moment: The Trump Era

As social anthropologist F. G. Bailey wrote over 50 years ago, "leadership is called for particularly in conditions of uncertainty and when there is a need to take decisions which are also innovations" (1969: 59). With social unrest in the U.S., economic and political instability around the globe due to war, recessions, a pandemic, and Brexit, as well as the existential threat of climate change, we may certainly characterize the post-2016 years as times of uncertainty. This project explores the opinions of those who believe the answer to effective leadership in uncertain times lies, at least in part, in increasing women's representation.

The 2016 election was a watershed moment for women in politics. In the years that followed, widespread gender-related activism and social movements like the #MeToo and TIME'S UP campaigns and the Women's March indicated a growing concern with gender inequality writ large. The 2018 and 2020 elections saw record

numbers of women candidates, and public interest in women in politics remains high, as evidenced by recent much-publicized political candidacies of women and the historic appointment and election of Vice President Kamala Harris in November 2020.

While Republican women have made some inroads, these social movements and recent gains in the numbers of women running for office have primarily been fueled by Democrats. As Lloyd (2018) writes, "The 'pink wave' was always blue." The massive political mobilization of Democratic women, who outnumber Republican women in the general population, and whose participation in protest reflects the bottom-up power culture that characterizes the Democratic Party, is often cited. For example, the largely-Democratic Women's March made headlines around the globe in 2017 and the years that followed, and political action committee EMILY's List saw the numbers of Democratic women who contacted them about their interest in running for office increase more than twentyfold after 2016. As one Democratic interlocutor put it, "I'm running because of [Donald Trump]… I think the president has brought a divisiveness, but also a sense of like, well, if he can do it, why can't I do it? So I think he's inspired me… he's inspired me to push back. Big time. So I guess I thank him for that."

President Trump's win (and Hillary Clinton's loss) motivated not only Democrats, but women across the political spectrum to run. In a survey of 1000 women conducted by Bustle Trends Group and national nonpartisan women's candidate training organization Vote Run Lead, women who voted for Trump were actually more motivated by the 2016 election than any other group – 40 percent said the outcome of the election

increased the likelihood of their becoming more politically involved (Menendez 2018). 25 percent of Trump voters who completed the survey said they are considering running for office now or at some point in the future, compared to 19 percent of Democratic women and 18 percent of Republican women (Ibid.). Whether their motivation stemmed from anger or excitement over Donald Trump's 2016 victory, seeing that "someone without political experience could run for office and win" was chosen by the most respondents (29 percent) as the best descriptor of why they were thinking about becoming candidates (it was followed by inspiration from the Women's March at 19 percent) (Ibid.). Nontraditional political actors serving as role models indicates the value of changing the face of politics. As Republican pollster and author Kristen Soltis-Anderson describes, the increase in those without traditional experience and women running for office may have "the potential to become a self-sustaining cycle" as more and more nontraditional candidates are inspired to run by those who come before (Ibid.).

The Bustle Trends Group and Vote Run Lead survey above also found that motivation to run for office varied between racial groups. Although white women were much more likely to belong to the most-motivated group of women who voted for Trump, women of color overall were more motivated by the 2016 election than white women. 31 percent of women of color said that the result of the 2016 election made them more likely to run for office or become more involved, compared to 24 percent of white women. This indicates that seeing nontraditional candidates without political experience run and win may be particularly motivating for those who belong to historically excluded

and underrepresented groups. Yet women of color were also more likely to say that they "don't know where to start" when it comes to running for office (24 percent of women of color respondents as compared to 16 percent of white women respondents), highlighting their need for support and significant barriers to entry (Ibid.)

Women's Candidate Training as "Resistance"?

How might we understand the actions of those who participate in women's political leadership and candidate training in terms of resistance, and is there a benefit to such an approach? Reflecting their political party's cultural norms and friendliness to protest, discourses about "resistance" feature prominently among Democratic women and on Women's March signs, while many Republican women interlocutors reject the notion of "resistance" and question what the women whose central message seems to be fighting those in power will do once they are successful in becoming elected and achieving power themselves. As one MPLS leader put it, "it'll be interesting how candidates who are running as 'resisters,' when they then become part of the process. You know, outsiders are great. But at some point, they become insiders. Because you have to. If you're going to be part of the process, and you're going to get goals accomplished, and have successes, you're going to have to work within the process." This Republican leader questioned how effectively Democratic "resistors" would transition from outsiders to insiders. In her words, one must "work within the process" and become part of existing power structures. Is an action political "resistance" if the actor does not seek to change the structures of political power?

The views of Republican interlocutors who suggest that women who aspire to political leadership become "part of the boys' club" and more similar to those already in power resonate with postcolonial feminist anthropological theories of women's political involvement and participation in systems of power that force us to think beyond a binary of domination versus resistance (see Ginsburg 1989; Mahmood 2005; Bedi 2016). This more complex understanding is useful in considering how activists' strategies to achieve greater collective empowerment of women may nevertheless uphold patriarchal and neoliberal systems of power.

Individual candidate skills training for women in general may be understood as a way women seek to make themselves a better fit for the still male-dominated political arena that reinforces existing structures of power rather than seeking to change the political system more fundamentally through, for example, structural reform in how elections are run or gender quotas. But such characterizations must also take pragmatism into account. Members of a less-dominant group in any arena may be forced to take practical measures to protect themselves by going along with the dominant groups' practices and norms (see the intense discussion about whether advising women candidates about what clothes to wear is a helpful tactical consideration or serves only to uphold patriarchal norms and assumptions about what politicians look like in Raphael and Black's 2019 guidebook for women candidates, for example). Such a give-and-take is needed to exist in an environment that is not built for you, and regardless of one's

ultimate goals, it may be impossible to reimagine and rebuild a system without first participating in it.

Perhaps Step Up's call for radical structural change within the existing political system can be seen as a form of resistance, although one that does not necessarily seek to change fundamental aspects of American electoral politics such as the two-party system or plurality voting. Midwest Public Leadership Series participants, on the other hand, are critical of the very idea of "resistance" that is often held up as a rallying cry in progressive circles. Reflecting their party's conservative values, they do not advocate for changing the structures of political power. We might consider the notion of political "agency" as well. In her 2005 study of Muslim women's relationships with western feminism, agency, and politics, anthropologist Saba Mahmood describes the limitations of the binary of subordination and subversion that is "agency" in the typical western progressive view: human actions do not always fit neatly into a repression-and-resistance model. To understand agency within its cultural context requires a more particularized idea of feminism and power. Whether they consider themselves "feminists" or not, and whether they would consider their actions a form of "resistance" or not, what are all of these interlocutors doing if not resisting, in some way, the status quo of men-dominated politics?

In her 2018 book *Fragmented Democracy*, political scientist Jamila Michener discusses "resistance" and its lack of conclusive academic definition. She points out how social scientists locate resistance in a wide range of acts that include everything from

participation in public rallies and protests to personal hairstyle choices, artistic performances, and acts of deviance (Silva 1997; Weitz 2001; Cohen 2004; Hollander and Einwohner 2004). The breadth of these understandings has led scholars to see resistance everywhere or nowhere. In semiotic terms, the ambiguity surrounding terms like "resistance" stems from their enregisterment and use as "strategically deployable shifters" (Urciuoli 2003, 2008) without context-independent lexical meaning. Contextualization is especially crucial when investigating the changeable meanings of these terms. Yet Hollander and Einwohner (2004) point out two simple criteria by which to determine if an act may be identified as resistance: 1) action is taken by the resister, and 2) opposition to something the resister views unfavorably. According to those criteria, despite the fact that individual interlocutors' alignment with "resistance" and desire to work within existing political systems as opposed to dismantling them and creating new systems varies greatly with partisanship and political ideology, the act of working to elect more women is, indeed, resistance. Leaders and participants in women's candidate training programs across the political spectrum act to help more women get elected to office and oppose the current relative lack of women in office. Whether the goal is to be "one of the guys" once they get there and change the face of power but not the substance of its underlying systems, or to usher in different styles of leadership and policy priorities, is another matter entirely. While the existence of women's candidate training organizations indicates opposition to the relative over-representation of men in politics, there are many systems of power they reinforce by their very nature, including

binary gender ideologies, the ways elections and political parties are structured, and the neoliberal commitment to individual skills training as a path to equity.

"The Revolution Is Under Way"

In 2021, the national Democratic women's candidate training organization Emerge commemorated the 15th anniversary of their organization with a new promotional video. In the video, the narrator highlights alumnae and describes their accomplishments and the organization's goal to expand their reach to fill the political pipeline and "repower political structures" with Democratic women at all levels of government. The video ends with a call to the New American Majority of "Black, Brown and Indigenous women, LGBTQ+ women, unmarried women, and young women," and the narrator's final words are, "Emerge women are the future. The revolution is underway. Emerge" (Emerge America 2021). Clearly, this Democratic women's organization envisions a future where older, white, wealthy, cisgender, heterosexual men are no longer the norm in elected office, as they are no longer the most populous demographic in a swiftly-changing America. As discussed in greater detail in chapter three, the explicit call for "revolution" and change is reflected in Step Up participants' discourses as well. A focus on change aligns with progressive values and the Democratic Party's culture of protest and competition among different constituent groups who seek to have their voices heard and their concerns addressed.

Leaders of several organizations in California, including SU, are growing more powerful and banding together to put their combined labor behind their rhetoric of

revolution. A "political pipeline project" has recently been established that brings together an informal consortium of California organizations dedicated to recruiting, training, and/or funding women political candidates including Step Up, Close the Gap, and Fund Her, with the goal of combining forces to identify specific women around the state who are in positions to run for state-level office within the next few years and propelling them to victory. The first of their recruits was successfully elected to the state legislature in an April 2022 special election, and several more have stepped up to run in the 2022 general election. One SU leader jokingly described the project's conference calls as a new Democratic women's version of a cigar "smoke-filled back room," a political term used to describe a closed circle of power brokers who nominate candidates that originated with a legendary account of a small group of Republican senators arranging the 1920 nomination of presidential candidate Warren G. Harding in a closed room at Chicago's Blackstone Hotel (Thale 2005). The difference, of course, is that these women are not currently in formal positions of political power. They are attempting a new twist on the old "it's who you know" networking strategy and assisting women candidates from outside of existing political structures. Yet the strategy of a few leaders quietly conspiring to elect certain candidates is strikingly similar to "good old boys' club" modes of action. As highlighted in chapter five, SU is in effect working to establish a "new girls' club."

Republican women's political training organizations are adapting as well. After being disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, MPLS has re-tooled their training

from seven months to four months, and the President hopes to draw more participants to the program. They have received additional funding to open an office and have plans to hire a new staff member. Leaders of MPLS have also recently launched a new nonprofit initiative that offers resources and training for "center and middle right women to run for office at all levels in the state of Michigan." The new organization's website states, "In an era of extremes on the political spectrum, it is our goal to train women who want to find their voice and assist them as they seek having a seat at the table where policy discussions take place, and are made. We want to remove barriers and provide support for center and center-right leaning women seeking elected office and appointments." This language implies that centrist voices are especially needed in office to help moderate the increasingly extreme and polarized political climate. It is in some ways the polar opposite of SU's call for revolution and change, as the group seeks a return to a more politically moderate "normalcy." As outlined in chapter three, this stance is reflected in moderate Republican MPLS participants' discourses and aligns with a Republican party culture where power is more centralized and there is relative reluctance to engage in group interest politics or protest. Participants instead embrace the conservatism of maintaining systems as they are (it should be noted that this approach contrasts with more radical far-right populist attitudes and Tea Party strategies, which were not common among my interlocutors). Yet a call to elect more center-right and right-leaning women may itself be seen as a call for significant change in the highly gender-stratified Republican Party. The national success of Republican women legislative candidates in the 2020 election, the

emergence of new nonprofit organizations that support Republican women candidates, and increasing funding for these efforts indicates that Republicans' willingness to engage in identity politics may be growing, and that a – perhaps quieter and smaller but present and growing – revolution of sorts is brewing among women on the right as well as on the left.

Both MPLS and SU are looking towards the 2022 elections with an eye on state-level office. Due to term limits, there will be a large amount of turnover of state legislative seats in both Michigan and California. MPLS lays out the numbers of open state House and Senate seats on their website and encourages women to begin planning candidacies, stating that "As policy decisions continue to impact women, it is crucial the Republican Party has women ready and trained to fill those open seats in the state house in 2022. The [Midwest Public Leadership Series] wants to make sure CONSERVATIVE VOICES are heard." SU traditionally focuses on building the political pipeline of Democratic women in local-level office, but in 2021 launched their first-ever Legislative Boot Camp specifically for state-level candidates. Mirroring the MPLS call to action above, the SU website states, "In the next five years, because of term limits, more than 90 seats in the California State Legislature will open. This is a tremendous opportunity to make sure the seats opening up are filled by Democratic women, and [Step Up] wants to make sure you're ready when these opportunities arise!" These similar statements highlight how both groups are prioritizing propelling women into high-powered offices with significant policy influence.

Whether existing (still mostly male, white, wealthy, heterosexual, etc.) political leaders embrace them or not, grassroots organizations led by women across the political spectrum have determined, quietly or loudly, that the past and current gender balance of our elected representatives is unacceptable. Support is growing for these advocacy groups' goal to propel women – and on the Democratic side, especially women of color and members of other historically excluded communities – into positions of power. They are developing their own visions of the future of U.S. politics, and they are hard at work building the resources and networks needed to get there.

APPENDIX

Interview Questions

1) Please introduce yourself with some basic biographical information.

2) How did you become involved in this political training program?

3) What inspired you to become involved in advocating for women's political representation, or becoming a political representative yourself? What issues are most motivating for you?

4) What did you want to accomplish through your involvement in this political training program?

5) What have you gained through your involvement in the program? What did you like, and what did you dislike?

6) How do you feel about the program being limited to women?

7) What is the biggest challenge for women who seek to become involved in politics? What challenges or barriers have you encountered or witnessed?

8) Have you confronted stereotypes in your work or experience with women political leaders?

9) What differences, if any, do you think tend to exist between men and women's styles of leadership?

10) Have you had experience working with women in leadership positions? If so, what was that like?

11) Can you think of examples of women you think are or would be great leaders? Who are they and what are they like?

12) How would the government be different if it was mostly women in charge?

13) Where would you say you get most of your news?

14) What do you think about President Trump?

15) How do you feel about the term “safe space” in relation to the training program?

16) How do you feel about the term “feminist?”

17) How do you understand the relationship between constituents and candidates? What do you think voters look for in a candidate?

18) Do you have suggestions about what candidates should say or how they should act in order to be successful? Is it different for women?

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