

Personal Statement

I was a social psychologist before I knew what a social psychologist was. As a child, I quietly observed my family and friends, reluctant to participate until I understood the dynamics of any situation. My parents-- writers, teachers, and activists-- inspired in me a philosopher's spirit for truth-seeking and a drive for social justice. Still, I wondered what contribution I would make as a shy and bookish but hard-working and passionate woman of the twenty-first century.

Social psychology found me at Macalester College, but it took its time. I had declared a major in astronomy, a discipline that suited my mathematical talent and love of nature and seemed to address the fundamental questions of human existence. Within and beyond the science building, however, the Macalester community buzzed with debates about cultural differences, racial inequality, and gender dynamics. Between classroom discussions of racist undertones in classic American literature, benefits and dangers of cultural relativism, possibilities for global political solutions to the earth's environmental problems, and the persistence of social inequities in St. Paul and around the world, what was happening outside the earth's atmosphere didn't seem as compelling. My reserved personality had fooled me into thinking that my contribution would take place outside the human experience, in outer space. Instead, I was moved to turn my scientist's eye to the fundamental *social* questions of everyday life.

Inspired by my own experiences inside and outside the United States and ideas from Macalester's varied liberal arts curriculum, I became interested in the ways that culturally shared ideologies shape individuals' perceptions of themselves and others, and their view of what a fair society looks like. My undergraduate interests propelled me into graduate research on racial and ethnic prejudice, gender discrimination, and the psychological antecedents of political ideology. Over the past four years at the University of Minnesota, I have conducted survey experiments examining the psychological dynamics of Americans' mixed opinions of immigrants and their support for policies benefiting racial and ethnic minority groups. I have written for readers outside of psychology about the operation of gender stereotypes in the workplace and the use of scientific research in the courtroom, and I have conducted experiments on gender discrimination in legal decision-making. My research has explored conceptions of the ideal family and authoritarianism (i.e., an orientation toward conventional authorities and norms) as psychological antecedents of political ideology. Throughout my undergraduate and graduate training, I have studied social inequality and its roots in socially-constructed ideologies and individual psychology. My mission, which sustains my passion for social psychology, is to understand these dynamics and to conduct research to advance social justice.

After graduate school, I plan to pursue these research interests and to inspire and train the next generation of social psychologists in a faculty position at a research university. I will maintain the interdisciplinary focus that has been central to my graduate school experience by drawing on cross-disciplinary insights to inspire and inform my work. I will integrate my research with findings from other fields for a deeper understanding of social psychology and important social phenomena in politics, law, and gender studies. I plan to work for social justice causes in my personal life as well, as a volunteer and activist for gender and racial equality. I look forward to responding to these societal, educational, and scientific needs as a scientist and a participant.

The Psychological and Socio-Political Consequences of Maternal Appeals in Politics

Background: There is a history in politics of “maternal appeals” in which women appeal to popular ideas of motherhood in order to justify demands for political change. Despite the prevalence of maternal appeals by political actors and much debate about their consequences, no empirical research has examined their effect on voters’ impressions of candidates or their implications for gender stereotyping. Political psychology research indicates that female candidates fare as well in elections as their male counterparts, but that gender stereotypes continue to play a role in voters’ impressions of candidates (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). Theory and research in social psychology further suggest that women are less likely than men to be seen as good candidates for leadership positions, particularly when they exhibit characteristics like motherhood that are central to the female gender role (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Yet, both male and female political candidates claim to draw inspiration from their experiences as parents, and feminist and political theorists argue that appeals to nurturance and the family have the unique ability to usher in “a new kind of politics” built on values of compassion, generosity, and interpersonal connectedness, and to advance a liberal political agenda (Ruddick, 1989; Lakoff, 1996). With more women and mothers entering politics and family rhetoric a popular choice among candidates, it is time for a systematic examination of maternal appeals in order to better understand the operation of gender stereotypes among the voting public and to assess the effect of such appeals on electoral outcomes.

Goals and Objectives: The purpose of my dissertation research is to test a series of theory-based hypotheses about maternal appeals by political candidates: how they are used in real political contexts and their effect on voters’ impressions of candidates, voting decisions, and use of gender stereotypes. I expect candidates to use maternal appeals more often in the context of compassion issues (e.g., health care, education) than in the context of military and defense (*Hypothesis 1*). Women are perceived as better able to handle compassion issues because they are warm and empathetic (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993), and maternal appeals are likely to enhance perceptions of these traits such that politicians who use them will also be perceived as competent on compassion issues. I also predict that maternal appeals will be used more and used to greater advantage by male candidates (*Hypothesis 2*). Trait ownership theory claims that a candidate can benefit by “trespassing” on the “trait territory” of his or her opponent (Hayes, 2005). Male candidates, who already appear tough, are more likely than female candidates to benefit from cultivating a more compassionate image by using a maternal appeal. I predict that the effect of maternal appeals will vary based on several characteristics of the perceiver (*Hypothesis 3*). Individuals who are *gender schematic* are more likely to process incoming information in terms of gender roles, assimilating information into masculine and feminine categories; thus, they will respond better than others to maternal appeals by women, which are in line with traditional gender norms. Individuals high in *benevolent sexism* believe that women are morally superior to men, and should therefore be eager to endorse maternal appeals that invoke images of women as especially nurturing and virtuous. Individuals high in *social dominance orientation* see women and feminine characteristics as inferior and unsuitable for leadership positions, thus, they are expected to evaluate candidates who use maternal appeals negatively. Because they emphasize traits and behaviors that are central to the female gender role, I expect maternal appeals to bring to mind stereotypes of women and mothers (*stereotype activation*) and make it more likely that stereotypes will be used in a subsequent judgment (*stereotype application, Hypothesis 4*). Previous research on political priming has shown that when candidates focus on certain issues, the public increases the weight that they place on those issues

in their vote choice; thus, I predict that maternal appeals will increase the weight placed on feminine traits in vote choice (*Hypothesis 5*). Finally, maternal appeals are expected to produce more liberal political policy positions through their effect on George Lakoff's (1996) Nurturant Parent morality, a form of morality that emphasizes equality, connectedness, and mutual responsibility and thought to underlie political liberalism (*Hypothesis 6*). Maternal appeals should make Nurturant Parent morality more salient to perceivers and therefore more likely to guide individuals' political and social issue positions in a liberal direction.

I will test these hypotheses in three studies, designed to complement one another. Study 1 is a content analysis of campaign communications by candidates in recent U.S. elections designed to test *Hypotheses 1 and 2*. Study 1 will provide new information about candidates' use of maternal rhetoric in real elections, but it will not examine the causal effect of maternal appeals on perceivers' impressions of candidates and use of stereotypes; to do this, I will conduct two experimental studies. Study 2 will examine the effect of a maternal appeal on voters' impressions of candidates, vote choices, and policy positions: *Hypotheses 2, 3, 5, and 6*. Study 2 will be able to experimentally control for variables that are present in a real election, allowing me to draw causal conclusions about the effect of a maternal appeal on voter impressions and attitudes. However, it will *not* provide information about the implications of maternal appeals for continued gender stereotyping. Therefore, Study 3 will test *Hypothesis 4*. Together, these studies provide a substantial first examination of maternal appeals in politics and an integrative framework that can be used to guide my future research agenda.

Design and Methodology

Study 1: The full text of all available campaign speeches from U. S. elections between 1980 and 2008 will be obtained from newspaper archives available online from the University of Minnesota libraries (e.g., *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*) and public websites (e.g., www.presidentialrhetoric.com). For each speech, two research assistants who are blind to hypotheses will independently determine which political issue topics are addressed, whether a maternal appeal is present, the candidate's gender and political party affiliation, the gender of the candidate's opponent, as well as the date, electoral context, length, and audience of the speech. *Analysis.* I will analyze the data using logistic regression, which will allow me to assess whether a candidate's gender and the number of times s/he mentions compassion issues are associated with a tendency to use a maternal appeal, holding constant the effects of other coded variables (e.g., speech length). In addition, descriptive characteristics of the data (e.g., what types of maternal appeals are common) will inform the development of materials for Studies 2 and 3.

Study 2: *Participants and procedure.* Three hundred undergraduate participants will be emailed a link to an online survey. After their informed consent has been obtained, they will complete measures of gender schematicity, benevolent sexism, and social dominance orientation and indicate their political ideology, political party preference, age, gender, and race/ethnicity. In a second part of the study, participants will be randomly assigned to watch a 5 minute video of a campaign speech by a fictional political candidate. They will view one of eight versions of the video in which the gender and party affiliation of the candidate and whether he or she uses a maternal appeal will vary between participants. Next, participants will report their perceptions of the candidate's traits and his/her competency to handle compassion and military/defense issues, their likelihood of voting for him/her, a measure of their positive and negative feelings toward the candidate, a measure of Nurturant Parent morality, and their positions on various political and social issues. Participants will then be debriefed and thanked for participating.

Analysis. I will analyze the data using a series of ordinary least-squares (OLS) regressions, which will allow me to examine whether maternal appeals, the gender and party affiliation of the candidate, and/or combinations of these characteristics are associated with perceptions of the candidate's personal traits, competency on various issues, and the likelihood of voting for the candidate. Specifically, I will look at whether the male candidate who made a maternal appeal is more positively evaluated and receives more votes than other candidates, whether individuals who are gender schematic and high in benevolent sexism are more receptive to maternal appeals than other perceivers, and whether individuals high in social dominance orientation are less receptive to them. I will also assess whether maternal appeals bring to mind Nurturant Parent morality and sway perceivers toward liberal policy positions.

Study 3: Participants and procedure. Two hundred undergraduate participants will complete the online survey from Study 2. In a second part of the study, participants will be randomly assigned to watch one of the videos from Study 2. Next, they will complete a *lexical decision task* in which a computer will record the amount of time it takes them to strike a key in response to words related to stereotypes of women versus neutral words, a measure of stereotype activation. They will then watch another brief video of a woman taking a math test and report their perceptions of her traits and mathematical ability to determine whether participants who have seen a maternal appeal are more likely to apply stereotypes in a judgment of a target woman.

Analysis. As in Study 2, I will analyze the data using a series of OLS regressions to determine whether maternal appeals, the gender of the candidate, and/or a combination of the two are associated with stereotype activation and application. I expect that perceivers who see a female candidate make a maternal appeal will show more evidence of stereotype activation and be more likely to apply stereotypes in a subsequent judgment.

Potential Significance of the Research: My research has the potential to inform and integrate feminist theories of motherhood, social psychological theories of gender stereotyping, and political science theories of candidate appraisal. The empirical approach I adopt here can provide clarity to ongoing debates about maternal appeals in feminist political theory. In addition, my findings will illuminate the effects of maternal appeals on voter impressions and attitudes and the specific psychological process by which those effects occur. I expect that maternal appeals will be particularly effective in promoting liberal policies, with implications for the study of political persuasion. Further, my process-oriented analysis of candidate strategies and their effects will advance our understanding of the operation of gender stereotypes in politics and other contexts where women seek leadership positions. It also has the potential to guide politicians' campaign strategies, particularly those of mothers who continue to face complex obstacles at the polls.

Progress to Date and Schedule for Completion: My dissertation proposal was recently approved and I am now beginning my dissertation research. I will complete data collection and analysis for Study 1 by September, 2009, data collection and analysis for Study 2 and Study 3 by March, 2010, and defend the dissertation by the end of the summer of 2010.

References: Eagly, A. H. & Karau, S. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109, 573-598; Ruddick, S. (1989). *Maternal thinking: Toward a politics of peace*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press; Hayes, D. (2005). Candidate qualities through a partisan lens: A theory of trait ownership. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49, 908-923. Huddy, L. & Terkildsen, N. (1993). Gender stereotypes and the perception of male and female candidates. *American Journal of Political Science*, 37, 119-147; Lakoff, G. (1996). *Moral politics: What conservatives know that liberals don't*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.