Race and Gender and the Perception of Masculinity and Femininity of the American Political Parties

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Abstract

How Americans select and identify with a political party can have many different sources. One important source has been found to be the effects of gender and perceptions of masculinity and femininity on party identification. I look deeper into this phenomenon to analyze the effects of race on the perception of masculine and feminine traits within Democrats and Republicans. In order to study this, I analyze 2012 American National Election Study (ANES) data. I hypothesize that among whites the results will be similar to previous studies which found Republicans to be much more favorable of masculine traits and Democrats to favor feminine traits. However, given the strong Democratic leanings of African Americans, I anticipate my results to show that African American individuals do not apply gender aspects of masculinity and femininity nearly as much as white individuals. If this is confirmed, it suggests that gendered interpretations of the political parties are also subject to racial filtering.

Introduction

The way that political identifications are formed between different individual's can be based off of many different aspects of that person's life. These experiences are then expressed in an explicit way in our voting habits during political elections. However, there are also implicit ways that someone can express their preferences and opinions on political parties. This review will be specifically identifying the way that gender and race of an individual affect the way that they view political parties in relation to gender stereotypes.

The United States is predominately powered by the two-party political system, which many Americans are well aware of. However, what the general public is often unaware of is where these opinions are formed and how. This does not stop many voting Americans from identifying with a particular party. This is often assumed to be based on opinions of current issues and platforms used during the candidate's political campaign. In contrast to this widely held belief what if there were subconscious assumptions and connects being made based on gender stereotypes, femininity and masculinity, that are expressed in the directions that we vote.

My research aims to increase understanding of the roles that gender and race play in political identification and how current events may influence these relationships. This research will not only help create a better understanding of the choices of voters, but also the ways that psychology and your unconscious/ implicit thoughts effect the way that some people identify as Republican or Democrat.

Party Identification

Party Identification can be defined as "a long term psychological attachment to a political party" (Weinschenk, 2010). Many different theories of the development of the 'American voter' state that party identification is developed early and can be influenced through a variety of

different experiences. Campbell et al. (1960) found that party identification remains fairly stable throughout one's lifetime. Theories produced by Arroyo (2004) attempt to explain what political parties are doing that may cause some of the slight shifts seen in voter identity, which account for part of the changing in election of different political parties for the presidency. This theory finds that the changing internal conflicts going on within each political party results in some party candidates shifting from the norm of their parties and trying to maximize new party goals through media and campaign platforms (Arroyo, 2004). For example, the current presidential election taking place in the fall of 2016 candidates Trump and Hillary are excellent examples of how you prepare your platform effects how you come off to the voting public. This change in media and outward projection of party image changes the way that individuals perceive political parties through the gender stereotypes.

Gender Stereotypes

Even at a young age children begin to place gender stereotypes on a wide range of objects that do not actually have a literal sex or gender. For example, when colors or animals are seen as masculine or feminine to different individuals. Therefore, we can expect to see this association cross over and affect an individual's political cognition as well (Leinbach et al. 1997). Further research states that men are more frequently told to "prove" their masculinity, which then leads to the fear of being too feminine, which is called "femiphobia" (Ducat, S. J., & Gates, T. J. 2006)

Positive masculine traits are thought to be active, independent, decisive, aggressive, tough, hardworking and hierarchal. Whereas positive feminine traits are compassionate, devoted to others, emotional, gentle, submissive, and egalitarian. With these positive traits listed there are also negative connotations associated with each. Masculinity is linked with greed, hostility, and being self-interested. Femininity is negatively linked with traits such as being gullible and

spineless. These characteristics combined with gender associations made based on the issues that each part prioritizes extends this theory. For example, Republicans have been thought to handle issues such as defense, terrorism, and the war on crime and drugs. better than Democrats. However, Democrats prioritize and succeed in handling issues such as education, health care and poor assistance, the environment, and promoting peace (Winter, 2010)

Explicit Gender Stereotypes

Winter (2010) studied cross-sectional patterns to show the correlation between gender stereotypes and the actions taken by the public and and images that are being expressed by the media and the party candidates during the elections. Research conducted on party identification using the American National Election Survey (ANES) consistently finds that the cross-sections study regarding Republicans and Democrats remained fairly stable in the two months leading up to the 2012 presidential election (Winneg, Jamieson, Hardy, 2014). These findings consistently support the idea that we develop gender stereotypes at a young age and carry these ideas and concepts about what is masculine and what is feminine with us throughout our life and these and explicitly shown in our voting habits.

Gender

The gender of the voter can effect the party that they identify with in multiple ways. This research is attempting to understand how voter gender plays a role in that individual's gender stereotyping of political parties. Researchers Wolak and McDevitt (2011), used a phone survey panel of 950 high school seniors to show their believed cause of the gender differences in voting. The researchers believed the gender gap begins in late adolescence. This can be explained by the differences in political dispositions like interest, efficacy or attention to the news, as well as the degree of variation between males and females. The results of this study

were found to be highly significant. Of questions answered correctly females answered 5.1 correctly on average whereas men answered nearly one full point higher with six correct answers (Wolak, McDevitt, 2011).

 Another finding prior to this research, that is sited in Wolak and McDevitt's research, is that men possess a much higher level of political confidence. This is exhibited by the increased likelihood that women will respond "don't know" to political questions, whereas men are found to be more willing to guess on questions regardless of their understanding of the issue. Another causal link to the gender differences are the differing social roles and responsibilities than men and women have. Although, these differences are becoming less and less apparent in today's society (Wolak, McDevitt, 2011).

Researchers claimed that the lack of political confidence is a result of sociological demands such as caring for a home and children. That take away from time that could be spent understanding politics and leave women with a self-perceived inability to understand politics when compared to men (Gidengil, 2008). Thus, it can be assumed that women then vote more Democratic because this party supports family assistance programs and women's rights regarding their body.

Race

Recent political issues have been centered on race so it is realistic to assume that the race of an individual will effect the gender stereotypes formed on political parties. To understand this better, we must first understand what was meant by the term race. Race was originally used to solely categorize people based on skin color attributions. However, with the passage of time and cultural shifts race has become a way to not only categorize skin color but also other observable difference between races; such as the vast majority of American American voters identifying

with the Democratic party because of issue priorities within the party. This has become an abstract as well as mental construct for human beings (McIlwain, 2004). The Republican Party has yet to gain as much support amongst black individuals as the Democratic Party has. This may be because of the way that political platforms are shaped using certain words, colors, or images in the media, debates, and other forms of political campaigning during election season to demonstrate issues and ideas of the party. There is a lack of research on how race plays a role on implicit and explicit gender stereotypes on political parties. This research is essential because of the increasing diversity on American citizens as well as the increase is current issues surrounding the topic of race.

Method

Sample

This research study is composed of over 5,000 participants that were collected from the American National Election Survey (ANES). These participants were surveyed following the presidential election during 2012. All participant's responses were collected through phone surveys. Adults ages ranged from those individuals who are brand new to voting and politics and those who have voted in numerous elections

Variables

This study involved a total of nine variables that were analyzed from the ANES survey responses. I began by analyzing the demographics of the participants by studying their race, gender, and political party demographics. Race was separated into simply those respondents who identified as African American and those who identify as White. The purpose of this was to avoid sample sizes getting too small to accurately represent the portion of the population being

studied. As well as relevancy to the research question at hand. I was only studying the effects of Whites and African Americans. Similar to race the variable political party identification was isolated to only include Republican and Democrats. I choose to only analyze the two variable to represent the dynamics of the largely two-party system that the American system uses. The variable gender was also kept to only include those who identified as male of female.

The first of the six dependent variables used was abortion. This variable measured the participant's stance on a scale of 1-5 of support of a woman's choice to obtain a legal abortion. The second variable was in regard to women's roles similarly on a scale of ranking support. This gauged whether or not the participant felt that it was better for a woman to stay at home and a man to work. The final four variables are connected in a sense that they are all a comparison on childhood trait characteristics where the respondent was asked to select a rating of how much they preferred their child to posses one trait over the other. The first was independent vs respectful, followed by considerate vs well-behaved, next obedience vs self-reliance, and finally curiosity vs well-mannered.

By choosing these variables listed above as my dependent variables I believe that this will demonstrate a clear picture of femininity and masculinity within the parties being studied. Each of the variables has stereotypical gender attributes toward either women or men and by applying a third independent variable, race, we are able to look deeper within the causality of this trend that previous research has laid out for us.

Results

Hypothesis One

The first hypothesis that the researcher tested in this study was in regard to political party and gender stereotypes. It was hypothesized that Democrats will favor feminine variables whereas Republicans will favor masculine variables. A 3-3 factorial ANOVA was produced for abortion legality, which showed a significant difference between party identification with a significance of .000. This supports the hypothesis that when abortion is considered feminine, because more Democrats supported a woman's right to legally get an abortion whereas Republicans continued to reject this idea. There was also found to be a significant interaction between the respondent's political party identification and their race, which will be discussed further in hypothesis two below.

(Figure 1 & Table 1 about here)

The second variable analyzed in this study, women's roles, results are illustrated in table 2. This 3-3 factorial ANOVA supports the hypothesis, because a significant relationship is found between political party identification. I identified supporting women's roles within the home as a masculine trait or, traditional traits, and thus it was hypothesized that Republicans would support this positive variable, and Democrats would not support. It can be confidently said that there is statistical significance between party identification and this variable, .003, which means that it is unlikely to be resulting from chance. There were no further interactions between this dependent variable and any of combination of the independent variables.

(Table 2 about here)

The final variable studied in regard to preference of child's trait produced one statistically significant result to support this hypothesis. The preference for the trait independent vs respectful

has a significance score of .014 when a factorial ANOVA was preformed on the variable. These results support this hypothesis because more Democrat respondents identified that they would prefer their child to be more respectful, which can be assimilated to being feminine. However, the opposite was true of Republicans, who were found to be more in support of their child being independent, which can be seen as a masculine characteristic. There were no other significant interactions between other independent variable with this characteristic choice. The final three child trait choice variable failed to support the hypothesis. Thus in regard to considerate vs well-behaved, curiosity vs well-mannered and obedience vs self-reliance we must accept the null hypothesis.

(Table 3 about here)

Hypothesis two

The second hypothesis that was tested in this research was the effects of political party identification in combination with the participants race on their gender stereotypes, which is very similar to the first research question. The researcher hypothesized that in African American participants there would be little difference in their results meaning that these subjects will not be applying the gender aspects of masculinity and femininity to their responses. However, the second part of this hypothesis is that those respondents who identified themselves as white would show results similar to the first hypothesis. Which again would support the notion that Republicans favor masculine traits and Democrats favor feminine traits.

The results for the abortion legality question was found to have a statistically significant score, which is illustrated in the 3-3 factorial ANOVA (table 1 and figure 1). With a significance of .001 for an interaction between the effects of combining political party identification and race we can support the hypothesis being tested. This means that the results did not likely come from

chance, but were a result of the independent variables. Figure 1 depicts the dramatic change in opinion between white Republicans and white Democrats, however when examining African American Republicans and compare it to the results for African American Democrats there is little change in the statistics.

The second variable tested, better if women stay at home and men work, did not support the hypothesis and no significant interaction was found between gender, race or political party id. Thus, we must reject it and support the null hypothesis. This result is illustrated in table 2.

The first two characteristic comparisons in child trait preferences, independent vs respectful and considerate vs well-behaved, also showed no significant interactions between the three independent variables. These result mean that we must reject the hypothesis and accept the null. Both of the results of this table can be found in table 3 and table 4.

(Table 3 about here)

(Table 4 about here)

However, there was found to be a significant interaction between race and political party identification in the child trait preferences; curiosity vs manners. There was a significance score of .002 between the interaction of the two variable on this trait. This result supports the null hypothesis because within Republicans there is little change between the two races. Although, while analyzing Democrats there is a significant difference between white respondents and African American respondents. African American showed a stronger preference toward their child having good manners (feminine) over curiosity (masculine), which is similar to the responses of Republicans. White Democrats on the contrary preferred their child to be more curious over well-mannered. This is illustrated in table 5 and figure 2.

(Table 5 about here)

(Figure 2 about here)

The fourth child trait preferences, obedience and self-reliance, was also found to result in a significant interaction between the respondents race and political party identification. There is a significance score of .028 resulting in the interaction of the variables. This supports the researcher's hypothesis and thus the null hypothesis can be rejected. The results illustrated in figure 3 demonstrate that Republicans have very similar results despite race, however Democrats have differing results dependent on the race of the respondent. Those respondent who identified as both Democrat and white have much higher scores, correlated to the preference of the child being self-reliant (masculine). In contrast then the respondents who identified as being African American and Democrat were found with lower score showing support for obedience (feminine), which mimicked the scores of Republicans. However, this interaction disputes the original hypothesis once the variables interact with each other because more Democrats are favoring the traditionally masculine trait and Republicans are favoring the feminine trait. It is due to these mixed results that further testing on this interaction is advised before clear results can be determined. These results can be found in table 6 and figure 3.

(Table 6 about here)

(Figure 3 about here)

Discussion

The current research that has been completed regarding this topic has provided an excellent frame work and foundation for continuing this analysis of gender stereotypes and political parties. However, there is a need for new research that includes both aspects considering

race and gender and the effect they have on these stereotypes so the relationship correlation can be identified with more precision and statistical significance than piecing together. Party identification is arguably one of the most important aspect of a campaign or election because this 'straight ticket voting' has the ability to predict the outcome of many elections. This is exactly why this research is critical (Winneg, Jamieson, Hardy, 2014)

This research and the future research that I would like to conduct on this topic will provide campaigns with better knowledge about voting habits and how political identification if formed within individuals implicitly through gender stereotypes that they may be project on to potential party voters that are subconsciously effecting the way that they view that political party. By understanding this politician can present their campaign in a light that will promote the best image of their ideal candidate and thus receive more votes on election day. This research also incorporates a psychological aspect that provides further insight in implicit motivations and discriminations that are occurring in our society and a better understand of the variables effect each.

Appendix

Abortion (Table 1)

Abortion	F	Sig.
Party ID	39.862	.000
Gender	.177	.674
Race	.150	.699
Race + ID	.373	.541
ID + Race	10.574	.001
Gender + Race	.134	.714
ID + Gender + Race	.195	.659

Women Working (Table 2)

Women Working	F	Sig.
Gender	2.192	.139
Race	.019	.890
Party ID	9.056	.003
Gender + Race	928	336
Gender + ID	.023	.880
Race + ID	1.187	.276
Gender + Race + ID	.313	.576

Child Trait: Independent vs Respectful (Table 3)

Independent VS. Respectful	F	Sig.
Party ID	5.986	.014
Gender	1.720	.190
Race	4.307	.038
ID + Gender	2.594	.107
ID + Race	2.462	.117
Gender + Race	1.321	.251
ID + Gender + Race	2.093	.148

Child Trait Considerate vs Well-Behaved (Table 4)

Considerate VS Well-Behaved	F	Sig.
Gender	.628	.428
Race	22.555	.000
Party ID	.143	.705
Gender + Race	1.768	.184
Gender + ID	.051	.822
Race + ID	1.968	.161
Gender + Race + ID	.057	.812

Child Trait Curiosity vs Manners (Table 5)

Curiosity VS. Manners	F	Sig.
Gender	2.136	.144
Race	12.293	.000
Party ID	.279	.597
Gender + Race	.000	.993
Gender + ID	.013	.909
Race + ID	9.551	.002
Gender + Race + ID	.002	.969

Child Trait Obedience vs Self – Reliance (Table 6)

Obedience VS Self-Reliance	F	Sig.
Gender	1.636	.201
Race	9.844	.002
Party ID	2.531	.112
Gender + Race	.747	.387
Gender + ID	.407	.524
Race + ID	4.814	.028
Gender + Race + ID	1.020	.313

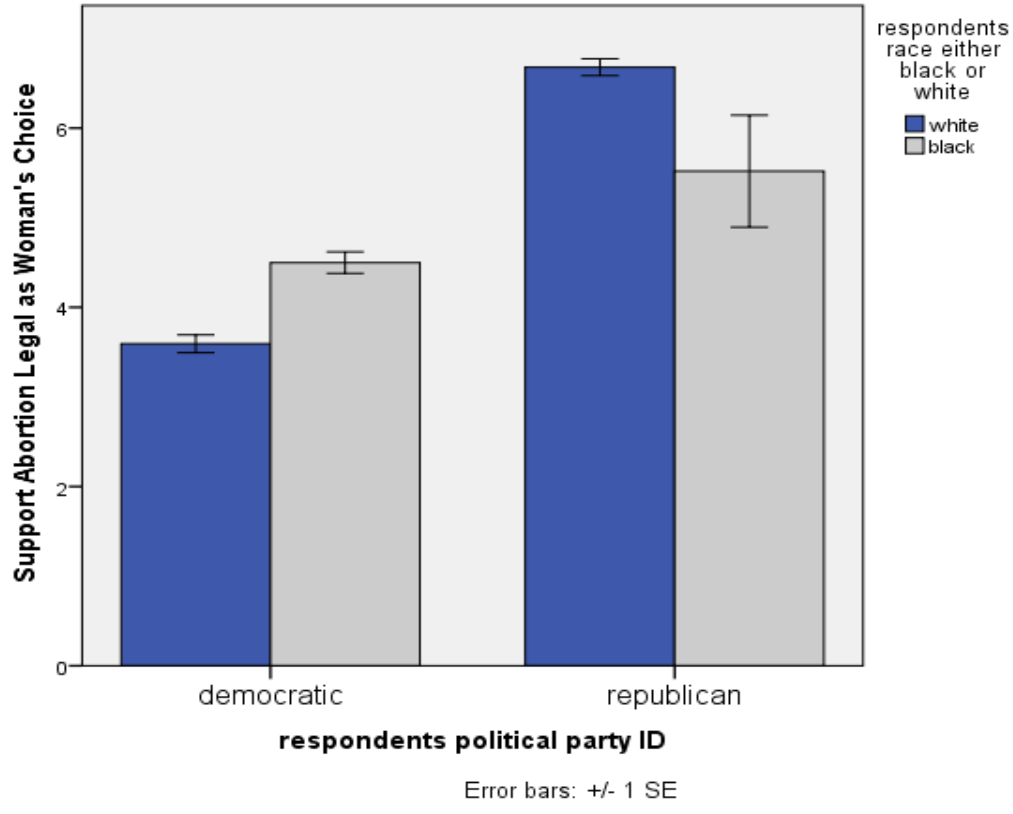Figure 1 - Abortion

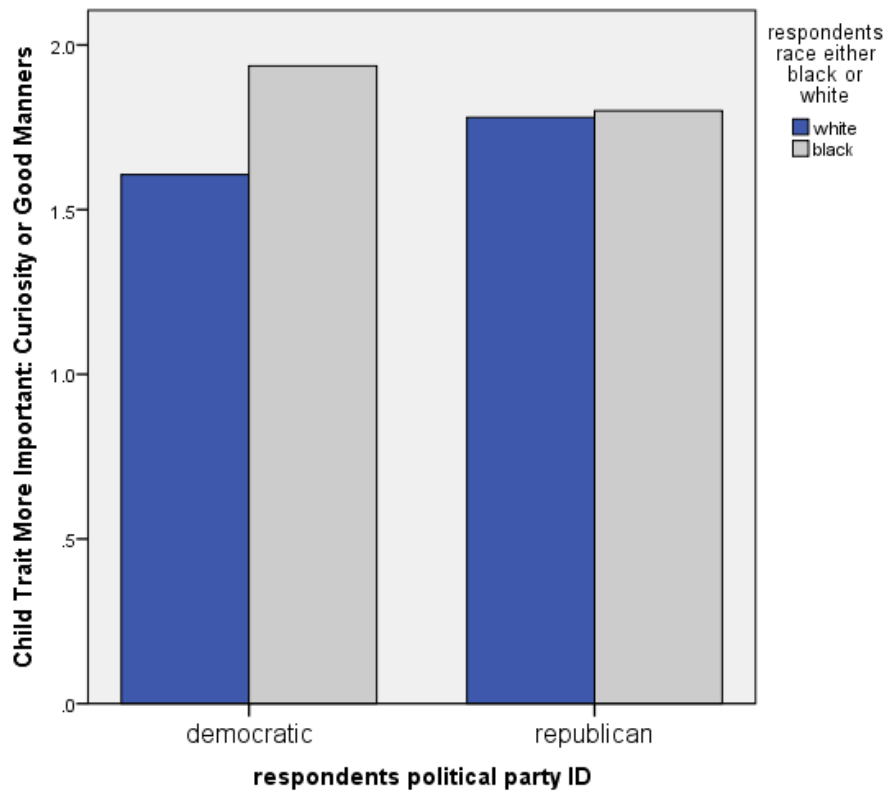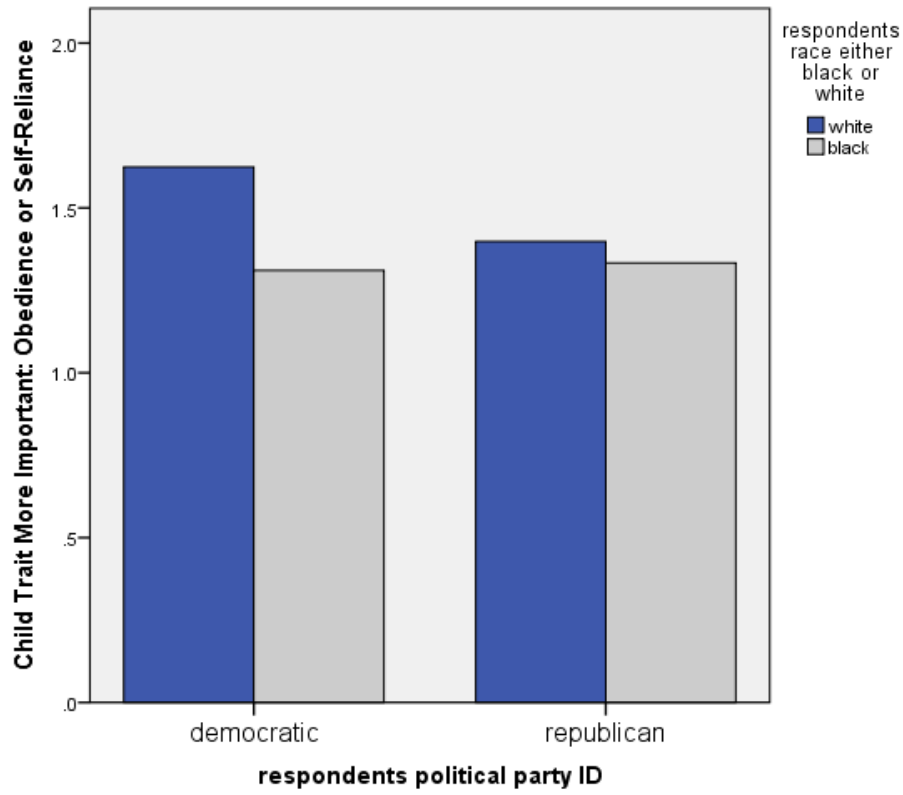Error bars: +/- 1 SE

Figure 2 – Child Trait: Curiosity vs Manners

Figure 3 – Child Trait: Obedience vs Self-Reliance

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