



White Evangelical Activism and the Gender Divide in the 2016 Presidential Election

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Abstract

Social scientists have proposed various explanations of why Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential election including racism, dissatisfaction among white collar workers—especially in rust belt states, Russian interference, Facebook ads, and Christian Nationalism. In the current work, we look to Donald Trump’s core base, white evangelicals, to better understand the 2016 election outcome. White evangelicals believe that men and women are different—and that men are natural leaders. Traditional white evangelicals, both women and men, accept the idea that women are responsible for home and family life and recognize male authority in both private and public spheres. Evangelical religious activism defines the Trump presidency and allows an understanding of why many women support this president and why the abortion issue is central to their cause. Evangelical religious activism brings two questions to the forefront: how do we understand the separation of church and state (as a religious precept—outlawing abortion aims to define a civic society) as well as how embedded sexism and misogyny are within our culture.

Keywords Elections · Evangelicals · Hillary Clinton · Gender

Since the early 1990s, more Americans have identified as conservative rather than liberal. In 2016, over a third (36%) of adults in the U.S. identified as conservative while 25% described themselves as liberal (Saad 2017). While this gap is narrowing, with fewer individuals embracing conservatism, conservative ideology remains dominant in understanding U.S. politics. In 2016, a little over a fourth (26%) of the U.S. electorate identified as a white evangelical Christian (Gonzales 2018). Exit polling data from the Pew Research Center shows that Donald Trump’s strongest support (81%), in the 2016 election, came from white evangelicals regardless of educational status (Smith and Martinez 2016; LeTourneau 2018). No other variable was a better predictor of support for the Republican candidate. Since taking office, Trump’s overall approval rating has varied little among this base (Newport 2019).

In 1976, Jimmy Carter called himself an “evangelical Christian” ushering in what *Newsweek* termed the year of the evangelical (Wong 2018). In the 1970s, many evangelical Christians were not politically active; however, by the turn of

the century they would reshape American politics (Merritt 2015; Wong 2018). Merritt (2015) writes that the most widely accepted definition of evangelical is one conceptualized by the historian Bebbington. Bebbington (1989) states that evangelicals are Christians who embrace four essential concepts: *Biblicism* (a high regard for the Bible), *Crucicentrism* (a focus on the crucifixion of Jesus and redemption), *Conversionism* (all need to be converted), and *Activism* (the belief that faith should shape one’s public life) (see too Wuthnow 1989; Marsden 2018). This definition is the only definition approved by the National Association of Evangelicals (Merritt 2015). The current work explores how white evangelicals, and other white Christian groups like white mainline Protestants and white Catholics (WCGs), shaped the 2016 presidential election. We focus on how evangelicals and WCGs understand the role of women in private and public life.

In *The End of White Christian America*, Jones (2016) writes that Trump attracted white evangelicals because these individuals feel vulnerable in terms of both race and religion (see too Wong 2018; Whitehead 2011). Jones (2016) maintains that Christian Nationalism best explains Trump’s support among this sector of the U.S. population because they saw him as a person who would embrace a Christian God and a white country. While the most rapid growth in the evangelical community is among Hispanics and African Americans, most

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of whom did not turn out to support Donald Trump, the vast majority of evangelicals in the U.S. are white (Fea 2018; Wuthnow 1989). Thus, Huskinson (2018) makes the argument that Trump enjoyed support along a race divide among U.S. conservatives identifying as evangelicals (see too Whitehead, Perry and Baker 2018). Indeed, Huskinson (2018) maintains that Trump appeals to conservative white voters in general who report a sense of white vulnerability. Many others have pointed to race as a factor in shaping Trump's support among conservatives; however, less work explores ties between conservatism and gender ideology. Modern conservatives, especially white evangelicals, embrace a particular understanding of the role of women in private and public life (Setzer and Yanus 2018; Breitbart News 2016; Young 2015; Fea 2018).

The Abortion Debate and Gendered Roles

The *core* issue among white evangelicals is a desire to ban abortion in the U.S. and short of that goal to place as many restrictions on abortion as possible (Beaty 2017; Fea 2018; Breitbart News 2016). In this regard, the Trump administration has been successful in getting two conservative Supreme Court judges confirmed as well as the appointment of judges, at all levels, who identify as conservatives (McCarty 2019). The 2016 Republican Party Platform advocated for the appointment of judges who respect traditional family values and the sanctity of innocent human life (RNP 2016). White evangelicals want states to deny federal family planning and Medicaid funding to Planned Parenthood, to loosen the Affordable Care Act's contraception mandate and allow providers the opportunity to refuse to cover contraceptives (Kuruville 2018; RNP 2016). Ealey (2019:1) writes that the Trump re-election campaign launch focuses on abortion painting rivals as "ripping babies straight from the mother's womb."

From the perspective of a white evangelical, there is no need for abortion or birth control because sex comes after marriage and only in heterosexual relationships (Beaty 2017; Fea 2018; Setzer and Yanus 2018). Evangelical white men are seen as Christian patriarchs in the family within a hegemonic masculine culture. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue, hegemonic masculinity—the collective embodiment of social practices that ensure domination of men over women, operates by subordinating the feminine as well as other forms of masculinity (Bartkowski 2001).

Almost half of those who identify as white evangelical Protestant Republicans believe that men are better leaders than women (Setzer and Yanus 2018). As Setzer and Yanus (2018) argue evangelical Protestantism is a strong predictor of whether Americans hold biases against female political leaders. This bias reflects in who represents republican voters. For example, the 116th Congress (2019–21) reflects a gender

party divide where 25 of 100 Senators are female (17 Democrat; 8 Republican). Likewise, in the House of Representatives there are 102 women who serve out of 435 (89 Democrat; 13 Republican). A religious belief, the idea that generally men make better leaders, has helped shaped gender diversity in Congressional representation among Republicans (see Marsden 2018; Burton 2018). On the other hand, many prominent evangelical women work, typically with their husbands, to spread the word of God (Ziegenhals 2009). Likewise, in 2008, with Sarah Palin's nomination for Vice President of the United States, white evangelicals embraced female leadership as this was for public service (Rosin 2008). Among evangelicals, Palin was further credited with having a Down syndrome baby and embracing her daughter's decision to keep her baby through she was not married (Rosin 2008). Thus, while there are prominent women within the evangelical community—they are the exception. Further, they tend to serve as auxiliaries to powerful men or are given an exemption (like serving the public) which allow a comfortable distance from being labeled a feminist or being seen as ambitious.

Zuckerman (2016) argues that save a few random Biblical passages that speak of gender equality, the reality is that male dominance is at the very core of the Bible (see too Marsden 2018; Wuthnow 1989). Within the evangelical community, there is an acceptance that God created men and women as equal in worth and value; however, they have different roles in life (Zuckerman 2016; Beaty 2017). Specifically, from a white evangelical perspective, the biblically assigned role for women is to submit to men—men that God placed in authority over their lives (see Setzer and Yanus 2018; Fea 2018; Beaty 2017). Evangelical Christian women cannot be ordained as pastors within the church (Fea 2018). As Beaty (2017) notes, evangelical women are reared to be God loving and take care of their families (Banerjee and Lintern 2000).

Six countries ban abortion entirely including Chile, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Malta, and the Vatican City; however, other countries, primarily in South America, Sub-Saharan and North African, the Middle East, Asian and the Pacific, allow abortion only to save a woman's life (Buchanan 2016). Global abortion rates are higher for married than single women (36 per 1000 vs. 25 per 1000 respectively). Notably, highly restrictive laws are not statistically associated with lower rates of abortion (Gutmacher Institute 2016). Save white evangelicals, other religious traditions including Catholics (Pew 2018), as well as the majority of the U.S. population, support abortion rights (Burton 2018; Bartkowski 2001; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Wuthnow 1989; Fea 2018). A pillar of white evangelical belief is activism—to be socially engaged and have faith inform their public life (Wuthnow 1989). In the case of abortion, a religious ideology—white evangelical activism—aims to make the private, civic, and very personal choice of whether to have a child a matter decided by the state.

Modern Sexism, Unconscious Bias, and the Appeal of Masculinity

Swim et al. (1995) argue that modern sexism is characterized by the denial of discrimination, antagonism toward women's demands, and lack of support for policies designed to help women. Dworkin (1974) posits that sexism is the foundation of all tyranny within society. If sexism encompasses the reification of "stereotypical or traditional" social roles, then the Clinton presidential campaign grappled with sexism. Notably, Secretary Clinton argues that sexism and misogyny are endemic in our culture—social problems which shaped the campaign (Clinton 2017; Kraychik 2017).

We reviewed articles published between 2018 and 2019 in four abstracted data bases, Science Direct, Political Science Direct, Sociological Index, Women and Social Movements International, and found that only eight articles focused on gender/sexism in understanding the outcome of the 2016 presidential election (out of $N = 79$). In other words, less than 10% of academic work published in this sample of journals recognizes gender or sexism as central to understanding the outcome of the election. Given that Trump puts abortion, the cause of white evangelicals, as central to his success—this is striking. Tweeting @realDonaldTrump on May 18, 2019, Trump writes: "for Life in 2020. If we are foolish and do not stay UNITED as one, all of our hard fought gains for Life can, and will, rapidly disappear." Yet, academics fail to appreciate the centrality of sexism in understanding the Trump campaign.

In their book, *The Long Southern Strategy*, Maxwell and Shields (2019) outline how the culture of the South has shaped an ideal of women as morally superior but fragile—individuals to be taken care of by men. White Southern women, Stout, Kretschmer and Ruppner (2017) argue, have linked voting fates where white conservative men pressure them to vote consistent with their conservative ideology. Thus, Maxwell and Shields (2019) make the argument that 78% of white women who self-define as Southern voted for Trump in 2016. These researchers admonish us to look closely at the gender voting gap. While a majority of women did support Clinton in 2016, most white women—especially white Southern women did not. Evangelicals, along with many WCGs, accept the idea that God's divine order is for women to be submissive to their husbands and that men are leaders (Zauzmer 2018). As Maxwell and Shields (2019) note, most extant research on voting patterns in the South focuses on men; therefore, our understanding of how women, especially white Southern women, vote is absent.

Trump aimed to present a masculinity during the 2016 presidential campaign that, we argue, appeals to conservatives in general. Trump was the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity—the norm or most honored way of being a man (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Kurtz 2008)—a man's

man, a real man. Trump was about winning, going so far as to fault McCain for being a prisoner of war, and rarely felt the need to apologize. Notably, Trump selected Pence as his running mate a man who believes homosexuality is a sin and advocates for conversion (Signorile 2016). One could argue that Trump is hyper-masculine (see Mosher and Serkin 1984). He often emphasized his physical strength for endurance over Clinton and flaunted his sexuality—for beauty pageant contestants, "locker room talk," labelling the hotness of women by numbers, and pointing to his younger beautiful third wife. In a 1991 interview with *Esquire* magazine, Trump related this feeling about the media: "You know, it doesn't really matter what (they) write as long as you've got a young and beautiful piece of ass."

Again, Trump made it clear during the campaign that Clinton did not have the look of a President nor the physical strength to do the job. Only he, a real man, could "make American great again" a posture he promised to take to the world stage—a message that resonated with Trump's base (Burton 2018; Young 2015; Fea 2018). As Steven Colbert gestured on the *Late Show*, the look Clinton was missing was in the genital area. Steve Bannon, an advisor and confidant to Trump, writes in his 2018 book "Devil's Bargain," that Trump is the ideal type patriarch who may prevent an "anti-patriarch" movement which would wipe out hundreds of years of history (Darcy 2018).

Selecting Mike Pence as his running mate, Trump solidified his appeal to white evangelicals. Pence adheres to the "Modesty Manifesto" a doctrine coined by Billy Graham in 1948. Graham, and other evangelical ministers who had been plagued by allegations of sexual impropriety, developed the idea of the Manifesto to ward off charges of sexual misconduct so that focus would be on the ministry and the charismatic and good-looking Graham. The Manifesto, who was never written down, included provisions for how the church should function as well as the idea that Graham would not be alone with a woman save his wife. Graham pledged not to eat, travel, or meet with a woman, except his wife, unless others were present. Pence, Trump's running mate, has embraced this Manifesto as well (Jardine 2017). Pence openly states that he is Christian, conservative and Republican—in that order (Young 2015; Fea 2018). He believes that abortion rights will disappear in the U.S. in his lifetime (Fea 2018; Young 2015; LeTourneau 2018).

Traditional Gender Roles—Making America Great Again

Patriarchy holds strong in many religious traditions around the world. We are taught that women are different from men—and not equal (Sawhill and Haskins 2003; Marsden 2018). Before birth, little girls are socialized by others to place importance

on their looks, behavior, and the ability to get along with others (Antill 1966; Daly 1973). They are read stories of being saved by someone else (a man) (Poarch & Monk-Turner 2001). In pre-school children's stories, boys hear and see stories about having adventures while girls look to others for relationship, connection, and validation (Firestone 1970; Albert and Porter 1988; Poarch & Monk-Turner 2001). Girls continue to be reared within a society and culture that instills in them that their role in life is to be of service to others (Albert and Porter 1988; Freeman 1979). Women bear children and continue to be their primary care giver in the family system (Freeman 1979; Poarch & Monk-Turner 2001). The gender wage gap continues to characterize the U.S. economy shaped in part by early beliefs that women just needed to earn pin money (money for something fun/something extra), the fact that girls are not raised to think of themselves as economically self-sufficient actors, continue to be raised to enter helping professions which do not pay as well as others, and discrimination (Blau and Khan 2016; Freeman 1979). The vision of a woman's lot in life, rooted in her biology, does not have a male equivalency (Banerjee and Lintern 2000). As a society, we would not condone racial stereotyping, prejudice, or discrimination; however, it is not taboo for a major social institution, in particular white evangelicals, to actively participate in the social construction and reproduction of inequality based on one's biological sex (Beaty 2017; Young 2015; Setzer and Yanus 2018). Next, we present a summary of voting differences in the 2016 presidential election highlighting variables that intersect with gender.

Factors Shaping the Presidential Election 2016

Notably, only 57% of eligible voters voted in this election (Pew Research 2016). Overall, we know that most (54%) women voted for Clinton and most men (53%) voted for Trump (Pew Research 2016; New York Times 2016). Only 43% of white women voted for Clinton (most 53% favored Trump). Non-college educated white women threw only a third (34%) of their vote to Clinton yet a slight majority (51%) of white female college graduates supported Clinton. Clinton swept the African American vote regardless of gender (88% voted her; 8% for Trump). Likewise, Clinton had majority support from both the Latino and Asian community (65% supporting). A significant number of Latinos voted for Trump (29%) which some found surprising given Trump's rhetoric of building the wall and deportation. Some note an exaggerated concept of masculinity (Gutmann 1996; Galanti 2003) in the Latino community. Further, it is worth noting that most Latinos identify as being Catholic—which is associated with being “prolife”—a Republican, and white evangelical, touchpoint (Cara 2017).

Most black women supported Clinton whether they had graduated from college or not (6% and 3% voting for Trump). The same pattern holds for Hispanic women where most non-college graduates (70%) and college graduates (28% for Trump) supported Clinton (Quartz 2016). Clinton's support from women did not generally come from white women, save those with a college degree, but rather from minority women regardless of educational attainment.

Few White Evangelical Protestants, mainline Protestants, or Catholics voted for Clinton (17%, 33%, and 40% respectively); however, a majority of those identifying as Jews, or declaring no religious beliefs voted for her (71%, 62%, and 68% respectively). Urban dwellers residing in cities over 50,000 preferred Clinton (59% voted for her) as well as half of those residing in the suburbs. Few (34%) of those living in a small city or rural area wanted Clinton to serve as President. Few (42%) Independents or married people (43%) supported her; however, most (55%) who of those who were single or gay (78%) wanted Clinton in the White House (New York Times 2016; Pew Research 2016).

Looking broadly at the effects of race, educational attainment and income, we know that most whites, regardless of educational attainment, voted for Trump (49–45% of college graduates and 67–28% among non-college graduates) while most non-whites, regardless of educational attainment preferred Clinton (71–23% of college graduates and 75–20% of non-college graduates) (Pew Research 2016; New York Times 2016). A slight majority of those earning less than \$30,000 supported Clinton (53–41%) as well as those earning between \$30,000 to \$49,999 (51–22%). Notably, the median income for black families is \$20,000 less than the national median income (Department of Labor 2016). Thus, it was Clinton who picked up more support among those who were least well-off earnings wise. People earning over \$50,000 voted for Trump over Clinton (50–46% for those earning \$50–99,999; 49–58% for those earning between \$100–199,999 and 48–46% among the highest earners over \$250,000). Viewed in this light, it becomes more difficult to argue that it was primarily workers in Rust Belt States that tipped the advantage to Trump as the lowest earners supported Clinton. Younger people preferred Clinton (55–37% of those under 29 supported her and half of those aged 30–44) while most (53%) of those over 45 voted for Trump.

A majority (62%) of voters in small cities or rural areas supported Trump while those living in suburbia (50%) and cities (59%) preferred Clinton. Much has been written about the rural/urban divide which has grown in the past several decades (Pew Research 2014). Those who identify as liberals prefer to live in cities and are less likely than conservatives to be married, identify as Christian, or live in a home with a gun (Pew Research 2014; Brownstein 2016). Conservatives report that it is not so important to them to live in communities of racial and ethnic diversity (Pew Research 2014). Gundy

(2016) notes that traditional industries in rural America are employing fewer people which means that traditional sources of livelihood are disappearing. Likewise, many note an “epidemic” of drug and alcohol use in rural American though illicit drug use is generally lower in rural than urban American (Gundy 2016; Linnemann and Wall 2013; Weisheit and White 2009). Unemployment and lack of education tend to be positively correlated with illicit drug use in rural America, save meth (Gundy 2016). Social and economic problems in rural America, along with what has been labelled and embraced as “redneck” culture, helped spur Trump’s win (McCormick et al. 2016; Bageant 2016). Bageant (2016) writes that rednecks prefer to live in less urban areas, believe in God, are hyper-patriotic, love guns, believe in hard work, feel that no one is better than they are, and that the U.S. is the only great and free country in the world. This mindset overlaps beliefs espoused by white evangelicals.

Comey and the Emails

Eleven days before the presidential election, Comey, head of the FBI, sent a letter to Congress stating that the FBI found emails that could be connected to the closed probe of whether Clinton had mishandled classified information. Comey failed to release information on Trump and investigations underway at the FBI involving his candidacy (Silver 2016). Shortly before the election, Clinton was once again cleared by the FBI; however, the damage was done. Historically, the FBI and other agencies do not release information that might sway a presidential election so close to election day. Notably, 83.2% of special agents in the FBI are white and over 80% male) (Baumann 2016). Analysts, including Nate Silver, maintain that without the Comey release, states including Florida, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania, might well have gone for Clinton. Comey, Silver concluded, had a significant impact on the outcome of the presidential election (Silver 2017). Clinton (2017) also faults Comey for her electoral college loss.

Facebook and Russian Interference in the Election

We now know that foreign money paid for Facebook posts in the 2016 presidential election. Solon and Siddiqui (2017) reported that 80,000 Facebook posts were viewed by at least 126 million Americans that were paid for by Russian operatives. These posts were viewed, shared, and liked by Facebook users. How much these Facebook posts were targeted audiences in states where the election was close has yet to be determined. Meko et al. (2016) write that the outcome of the election was decided by 107,000 people in three states (Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania). Analysts

generally agree that the presidential election was won by margins of less than 2% in six states (New Hampshire, Minnesota, Michigan, Florida, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania). Raju et al. (2017) found that Russian linked Facebook ads targeted voters in Michigan and Wisconsin—two key states that handed the election to Trump. We know that these ads aimed to further divide the electorate along gender and race lines (Setzer and Yanus 2018).

Peyser (2017) notes too that Russian President Putin was not a Clinton supporter. In 2011 at the start of the Arab Spring, Clinton, along with others, stated that every citizen should have the right to vote and elections should be fair and free. Some of the biggest demonstrations since the fall of the Soviet Union came after this statement was made (Peyser 2017). Zakaria (2017) suggests that it was after this point in history, Putin sought revenge against Clinton. As Peyser (2017) notes, the personal history between Clinton and Putin was particularly bad. Currently, investigations remain open as to whether Russian operatives cooperated with WikiLeaks to ensure only Clinton’s emails were released prior to the election.

Clinton—The Electoral College Loss

Hillary Rodham Clinton won the popular vote by a larger margin than any white male ever to run for President. Pundits, as well as Clinton herself, have put forward many ideas and theories as to why Clinton failed to win her bid for the White House (Clinton 2017). Gabler (2016) explores how the media helped manufactured a hatred of Hillary Clinton. For decades, her name has been associated with untrustworthiness. Thus, Clinton = untrustworthy. Initially credited with being a successful Secretary of State, her tenure there became the focus of much backlash. Numerous committees investigated her actions during the Benghazi crisis which led to the reveal of the email server. Benghazi became a rallying cry, embodying visceral disgust and hatred, spurring the slogan “lock her up.” Clinton appeared to be the sole focus of the Benghazi investigation not the Secretary of Defense or the Director of the CIA (Knox 2016). More than \$20 million has been spent investigating Benghazi; however, no charges were ever lodged against Clinton. Notably, no investigations emerged after 9/11 (Knox 2016) or in response to other foreign outposts where there was loss of life.

Van Lee attributed Trump’s win to a white-lash—a vote against our first African American President (Levine 2016). With poignancy, Van Lee grappled with the question: what do you tell the children? We tell kids not to be a bully or a bigot—to do their homework and be prepared—what do you tell the children about the rise of Donald Trump? Undoubtedly, race played a significant part in the intersectionality of understanding why Trump won the electoral college (Sides et al. 2017). From President Obama’s first win, his detractors continued to

question if he was born outside of the United States, aimed to prevent him from being a successful president, and failed to give him credit for bringing the U.S. out of the great recession. During Obama's Presidency, we saw images of a black man (as we typically define "race" in the U.S.) and his family in the White House. Many American's did not like to hear Michelle Obama remind us that the White House was built by slaves. Obama was a mild-mannered soft-spoken President—he did not embody an exaggerated masculinity. Instead, he could be described as a feminist (DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2007). He saw complexity in the Middle East and avoided labeling others as "radical Islamic Terrorists" or "radical Jihadist." He sympathized with the black lives matter movement while recognizing the need for supporting law enforcement. He advocated for the rights of girls and women. His two Supreme Court appointments were minority women. He enthusiastically supported Clinton for President.

The rise and presumed legitimacy "normality" of Breitbart news, and the AltRight into the White House, provides a stark contrast to Hillary Clinton's campaign sentiment "stronger together." Richard Spencer, an intellectual guru of the AltRight, advocates for an all-white America (Corn 2016). He envisions an ethnostate—an all-white America. Ideally, non-whites leave the U.S. voluntarily; however, if they do not the path "forward" is not clear. Trump, by embracing and bringing Steve Bannon into the White House and keeping him as a trusted advisor after his exit—though the relationship would eventually come apart, puts the AltRight agenda front and center (Breitbart News 2016). Critics identify and denounce the racism and Nationalism espoused by the AltRight. Less attention is given to overt sexism which the AltRight embodies. This is a movement that idealizes the image of woman as barefoot and pregnant—taking care of a man (Breitbart News 2016).

Many analysts were swayed by the story of the white working-class voter, especially male voters, in Rust Belt states putting Trump in the White House. The economic fallout from trade deals that did not compensate those harmed by trade coupled with the growing automation of manufacturing and other jobs, helped turn blue states into the red column (Poser 2016). Communities that were hit hard by the loss of manufacturing jobs surely liked to hear Trump say he would bring jobs back. From a sociological perspective, we know that when people feel insecure and vulnerable, the idea of having a scapegoat to place blame is appealing (Allport 1954). Thus, instead of aiming to understand the nature of work and the distribution of rewards, including the consequences of trade, automation, and our growing wealth gap, it is easy to blame immigrants and others for our problems. Instead, attention focuses on the plight and vote of white men in Rust Belt states. Clinton lost white non-college educated men and women by wide margins (49% among men and 28% among women); however, it was non-college educated

white men that fueled Trump's electoral college win (72–23% for Trump). Adding further complexity, we must keep in mind that the lowest earners (under \$50,000 a year) preferred Clinton. On average, white men out earn black and Latino men as well as all women (Patten 2016); however, minority men and women, as well as college-educated white women, supported Clinton. Thus, the vote in Rust Belt states intersects class, race, gender, and region. Williams (2016:3) writes, Clinton's "mere being rubs it in that *even women* from her class can treat working-class men with disrespect."

The Less Acknowledged Role of Sexism in American Politics

The work here aims to better understand the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. Many analysts have noted a race divide in shaping the election; however, fewer voices point to problems of gender bias in shaping the election outcome. Like others, we maintain that the expression of sexism, in the media and society at large, is more socially acceptable than racism while recognizing that racial prejudice remains basic to an understanding of American politics (Gilens 1999; Sniderman and Carmines 1999). Today, racism is veiled as support for traditional values and little desire to redress past injustices (Kinder and Sanders 1996; McConahay and Hough 1976; Sears et al. 1997). Likewise, McConahay and Hough (1976) observed that modern racism is not about segregation, discrimination, or biological superiority but persists in beliefs such as a perceived lack on the part of others to make a better life for themselves (Rosette et al. 2008; Hurwitz and Peffley 1997; Peffley et al. 1997). Alexander (2012:30) writes that as African Americans gained some political power after Reconstruction, whites reacted "with panic and outrage." Those with power and influence aim to consolidate their privilege thus today we have incarcerated black men in disproportionate numbers and aimed to disenfranchise them as well (Alexander 2012; Manza & Uggen 2008). Nevertheless, 95% of African American's helped elect Obama; however, only 54% of women supported Clinton (Jaffe 2018). Women do not perceive their interests as a group instead many, especially white Southern women, embrace the ideology that they are equal but different (Ziegenhals 2009). Overt and subtle sexism in our social world shapes how we vote. It also shapes, as Maxwell and Shields (2019) document, that we know much about how white men in the south vote; however, much less is understood about voting patterns of white women in the south.

We argue that the Trump campaign aimed to appeal to conservatives, especially white evangelicals. Trump promised to put "pro-life" judges onto the Supreme Court—a core issue among this base. White evangelical activists aim to restrict, or abolish, abortion rights because the right of a woman to control her body is not in line with their fundamental religious

belief. White evangelicals do not believe women are well suited to public, political life—this is not their natural role (Beaty 2017; Young 2015). Many find it difficult to understand why white evangelicals want to restrict access to birth control. Again, coming from a white evangelical activist position, the presumption is that sex occurs in heterosexual relationships after marriage (Young 2015; Beaty 2017). If this is your religious belief, and you embrace evangelical activism, then it makes more sense to restrict birth control. If the natural role of women is to be mothers, there is no need for birth control (Beaty 2017). White evangelical activists have adopted a religious belief that women and men have different roles in society and aim, via the courts, to restrict access to both birth control and abortion for all.

Trump is an exemplar of the benefit garnered by being male, straight, and Caucasian. Prior to his electoral college win, he managed a business, had television shows, and other capital venture investments. The press on his candidacy was not good. Trump ran as a man's man—loud and unapologetic. He can tell the big and small lie over and over and never be caught up in it. As Cohen (2017) writes, Trump muses that Clinton is no more honest than he. Truth is over. American's do not want truth rather they prefer excitement and disruption. They want authority, victories, to be led. In a complex modern world, many people chose the candidate that looked like a President.

Hillary Clinton won the popular vote. The rules, though, were not in her favor and like Al Gore, she lost the Electoral College. In the very bones and hearts of many, Clinton was simply not qualified for the job because she was a woman. They are *somehow* less. Within white evangelical tradition, women are not viewed overtly as less than but different. In the area of educational opportunity, we know the highest court ruled that different is not equal. The debate about abortion is a debate about the relationship between government, religion, and gender ideology. White evangelical activists manifestly aim to change laws, at all levels, in the U.S. so that our civil laws are in line with their religious beliefs.

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