“FOR ALL THE DOROTHIES”: MOTHERHOOD AS A CAMPAIGN STRATEGY IN HILLARY CLINTON’S 2016 PRESIDENTIAL TELEVISION ADS

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ABSTRACT
This paper looks at the television ad campaign for Hillary Clinton’s 2016 democratic nomination and specifically why children figure so predominantly in her television presence from April 2015 to February 2016. Focusing mainly on the early campaign for the democratic nomination rather than the actual presidency, children appear significantly more often in Clinton’s ads than in those of her opponent, Bernie Sanders. This paper argues that the difference here is due mainly to gender, specifically America’s perceptions of female gender roles and the predominantly male attributes associated with power. Children, in Clinton’s 2016 campaign, therefore act to associate Clinton with a traditionally more feminine sphere of power through motherhood, placing her in the position of nurturer for the USA through the presidency and consolidating her roles as both a woman and political leader.

KEYWORDS
2016 presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton, gender studies, American politics, television advertising

1. INTRODUCTION
Hillary Clinton’s early 2016 campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination heavily emphasized children in its television advertisements, starkly contrasting her male opponent for the nomination, Bernie Sanders. In the past, Geraldine Ferraro and Sarah Palin ran for vice president with major political parties (Democratic and Republican) in 1980 and 2008, respectively. However, Hillary Clinton was the first woman to run for president with a major political party in the United States, starting in 2008 with her failed bid for the same Democratic nomination against Barak Obama. In 2016, however, Hilary Clinton successfully secured the democratic nomination, later losing the presidency to republican Donald Trump. In looking closer at the campaign that ultimately led to her winning the nomination, one finds Hillary for America’s 2016 campaign
replete with children. The ads often include her political history of working for children’s rights, her personal family’s history, and general visual accompaniments to otherwise unrelated policy information. Further, Hillary Clinton’s 2016 campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination’s emphasis on children in television advertisements starkly contrasted her male opponent for the nomination, Bernie Sanders.

On average, Clinton’s television ads in 2016, up until February, either showed or discussed children for eleven seconds, taking up roughly a third of their typical 30-second duration. Although her ads “Children” and “Every Child” highlight Clinton’s history working for children’s rights, childhood references are not always confined to directly focusing on children themselves. Commercials about general policy also heavily feature images of children to illustrate verbal points. “Fighting for You,” about income inequality, and “Getting Started,” Clinton’s ad announcing her run for president through a montage of “average American” anecdotes, are clear examples of the use of children to illustrate topics that are not directly related to children themselves. Additionally, these first ads, which generally let the public know who their candidate is, end with a picture of Clinton and her husband and former-president Bill Clinton joyfully holding a baby while a male voice-over claims that Hillary Clinton has taken on the new role of grandmother. “Dorothy,” one of Clinton’s early ads, tells the story of her mother’s rough childhood and talks about how “Dorothy” is an inspiration for Clinton’s political work today.

In all, for the first major female presidential campaign, children are a controlling theme in Clinton’s initial television presence, whether through directly discussing her relationship to children, or merely using them as an illustration for other points.

Gender in Clinton’s 2016 campaign, it seems, was a defining factor in this focus on children. Despite being an accomplished and well-known politician—she has been in the public eye as first lady, senator, presidential candidate, and Obama’s Secretary of State—Hillary Clinton is not a well-liked candidate. According to a national poll taken by Quinnipiac University in September 2015, 51% of voters express an unfavourable opinion of Clinton and only 40% favourable, only 37% saw her as “honest and trustworthy,” and 52% said that she does not care about the needs and problems of people like them (Stevenson, 2015). Additionally, an Internet search in 2008 on Hillary Clinton and the word “bitch,” a historically sexist term, resulted in more than 9,000 hits, and a YouTube search 427 videos (Falk qtd. in Campus, 2013, p. 70). Today, the search results in over 530,000 Google results and 91,600 YouTube videos. It is possible that this general dislike for Clinton is due to her history of struggling with gender norms and power. Women in politics generally must contend with what Kathleen Jamieson has dubbed the “femininity-competence double bind,” where a woman must balance both stereotypical feminine norms and the more masculine stereotypes associated with leadership (Campus, 2013, p. 54).

Clinton’s campaign attempted to rectify this problem by casting her in a feminized and maternal light during the initial period of re-establishing her in the election spotlight. While Clinton is a politician, the ads seem to say, she is a politician who can mother and nurture the United States if elected president. Her policy is constantly accompanied by images of children, and she is depicted as someone who fights for children’s rights through politics. These ads allow Clinton to hold onto her accomplishments as a leader and a politician while also embracing her identity as a woman. Motherhood, in this way, provides a familiar role for female leadership in the political realm.
Hillary Clinton’s 2016 television ad campaign’s effort to feminize the politician through children and motherhood, therefore, can be read as a reflection of American perceptions of female power.

2. FEMALE POLITICIANS, GENDER STEREOTYPES, AND CHILDREN

According to Nannerl Keohane in Thinking about Leadership (2010), American society considers positions of power in terms of more masculine traits since, historically, these roles have been held almost exclusively by men. Good leadership is characterized by strength, force, and authority, characteristics which are considered masculine and therefore deviant in women, the exercising of power and authority being “a man’s prerogative” (Campus, 2013, p. 10). In the past century, women have had to negotiate these masculine perceptions of power and authority in their efforts to break into holding political office (Witt, Mathews, and Paget, 1994, p. 104). Often, when women have held similar credentials as their male opponents, they have still been considered less qualified due to an American mindset that denies women the characteristics of power and authority (Witt, Mathews, and Paget, 1994, p. 103). Women running for office have had to fight for the authoritative image that is naturally awarded to men while maintaining their societal expectations as women, overstepping their membership to their sex being possible cause for offense and dislike.

According to Leonard Williams in his study “Gender, Political Advertising, and the ‘Air Wars” (1998), gender roles, which demand both feminine and authoritative characteristics from political women, force female campaigns to adopt two simultaneous and contradicting narratives. Gender roles and stereotypes encourage “women seeking office [to speak] in two distinct voices. On the one hand, they speak in a woman’s voice that focuses on an ‘ethic of care,’ which emphasizes nurturant symbols and stresses social welfare issues. On the other hand, they must also speak in a more masculine voice that emphasizes strength and competence” (1998, p.50). Women’s unique need to balance masculinity and femininity can also be seen in William’s evaluation of political ads by both male and female candidates for their advertisement of masculine and feminine traits (see table 1). Men exhibit masculine traits (as defined for Williams by Richard Joslyn’s 1986 study of personality attributes) in their advertisements 66% of the time, while only emphasizing feminine qualities 16% of the time. Clearly, it does not benefit men politically to feminize themselves. Women, on the other hand, display masculine qualities in their advertisements nearly half the time at 49% while emphasizing feminine attributes nearly twice as much as men at 33%. Men and women are about the same with displaying neutral gender characteristics, 18% and 23% of the time respectively. Thus, Williams’s coding for gendered traits in political campaigning demonstrates how women are forced to exhibit both masculine and feminine traits in ways that male candidates are not.
According to Kathleen Jamieson, as discussed in Donatella Campus’s Women Political Leaders and the Media (2013), this requirement for women leaders to fulfill both the masculine and the feminine for their public image creates a kind of “femininity-competence double bind,” where a woman is stuck between traditional female-stereotyped attributes and the masculine stereotypes associated with leadership: “women running for high-level office feel obliged to deny the stereotype of women as typically compassionate and warm. … However, if any aspirant to political leadership acts too assertively, she will run the risk of being criticized as too aggressive” (Campus, 2013, p. 54). Thus, women are forced to present themselves as both fitting feminine stereotypes as well as traditionally masculine leadership stereotypes. Voters often expect their female candidates to exhibit qualities related to caring, compassion, and empathy, limiting women to the expectation that they only pursue political roles in accordance with these stereotypes, such as the politics of social work. However, when women attempt to enter other spaces in politics, especially positions seen as ambitious (for Hillary Clinton, the presidency resides in this problematic space) or tough (particularly foreign policy and war. Clinton’s former position as Secretary of State is, again, deviant) which are considered attributes for men, but threatening in women (Campus, 2013, p. 54).

American perceptions of power and gender roles thus inevitably bleed into political strategies concerning the use of children in campaigns. In contemporary American society, children are generally considered a source of sentimentality, family, love and the like (see, for example, Sternheimer (2010), Heins (2010), Fass and Mason (2010), Buckingham (2010), and Zelizer(1981)). Specifically, in politics, this sentimentality translates to “convenient symbols for our better selves. …We use them to make points, make laws, win elections” (Fass and Mason, 2010, p. 45). How children are used to “win elections,” though, differs vastly for men and women, who are already required to approach campaigning differently in regards to American perceptions of power and authority. For men, being a family man generally carries positive connotations for them as politicians who will care about the future. For women, pursuing a political career is read as neglectful towards their families.

Although expectations for the breadwinning father and homemaking mother have shifted towards an equal share of responsibility in recent decades, America still leans towards these gendered expectations in parenthood. According to a Pew Research Center poll from 2013, women still spend twice as much time as men on childcare—14 hours per week as opposed to 7 (see Figure 1), and only 16% of the public think that it is ideal for children to have a mother who works full time,
42% thinking part-time work is ideal, and a third saying that mothers should not work outside of

![Image of a bar chart titled "Moms and Dads, 1965-2011: Roles Converge, but Gaps Remain" showing average number of hours per week spent on paid work, housework, and child care for mothers and fathers in 1965 and 2011.](image_url)

the home at all (Parker and Wang, 2013).

Figure 1. (Parker and Wang, 2013)

Thus, in addition to female candidates needing to navigate gender stereotypes in how they present their character, women also must confront the potentially dangerous space of motherhood and children in their campaigns. It is common for male candidates to off-handedly show pictures of themselves with their families in their campaign ads. For example, in the 2016 election, early ads for Bernie Sanders discussing his history and accomplishments as a politician end by showing three pictures of him with his growing family saying “Bernie Sanders: husband, father, grandfather” (“Real Change,” “Rigged Economy,” and “Real Change #2”, 2015). According to Celinda Lake, a Democratic pollster, “For male candidates, people think having young children is a total plus—people think, ‘Oh, this is great, he’s going to be concerned about family issues, he’ll be more future-oriented.’… A male with young kids, everyone likes it” (Hall, 2009, p. 113).

For women, on the other hand, families act as a space of contention. Women with families are often considered neglectful of their expected duties towards their children by pursuing their career, but, at the same time, female politicians without families are considered deviant: workaholics, cold, unwanted by men (Williams, 1998 and Witt, Mathews, and Paget, 1994). In fact, the very concept of a woman running for office is difficult in relation to children, as women are typically supposed to dedicate themselves to their families, and interests outside of this realm are considered a rejection of their expected roles (Williams, 1998, p. 46). Women, therefore, are generally supposed
to avoid the topic of their families in their campaigns, despite this aspect of personal life acting as a bonus for men.

Despite women in politics generally avoiding the topic of children and families, Clinton’s 2016 campaign instead relied on their image to navigate the double bind facing female politicians and cast her in a mothering role through politics. Motherhood is a normalized space for female leadership in the Western world (Hall, 2009, p. 115 and Campus, 2013, p. 62), and it allows the politician to establish her authority through rather than despite her femininity.

2.1. Children and Motherhood in Hillary Clinton’s 2016 Campaign

From the start of campaigning for the democratic presidential nomination, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders took starkly different approaches to gaining public support. Bernie Sanders, Clinton’s main 2016 democratic opponent, focused most of his early ads on his political history and work as a former mayor and senator. Among these early ads, a few briefly show Sanders as a child while discussing his upbringing as part of an immigrant family and end with a presentation of the family for which he now serves as patriarch; he is a “husband, father, [and] grandfather”, according to the ads’ narration (Bernie 2016, 2015). Sanders, in his campaign, followed a more traditional campaign arc: introducing himself and presenting his resume for the job initially (Stevenson, 2015) before moving on to more idealized, commercial presentations of his policies and ideas (Coffee and Richards, 2016). Later ads, incidentally, featured children considerably more often than his earlier ads, even though they did not directly talk about children as Clinton’s ads did. For example, “It’s Not Over” from March 2016 focused on images of Eric Garner’s granddaughter while discussing race in America (Bernie 2016, 2016).

Clinton, on the other hand, steadily featured children throughout her campaign, skipping introductions in favour of children-heavy ads—in both image and topic—whose focus was usually on building Clinton’s character and discussing policy. “Family Strong” almost even interrupts a discussion of Clinton’s resume to say, “You probably know the rest: the senator…the Secretary of State…and now a new title: grandma” (2015, 0:35). This difference most likely comes down to the fact that Clinton was already in the public eye for so long—starting in the 1990s as first lady—that she did not need to introduce herself to America as Sanders did, but instead needed to reinvent the unpopular image reflected in Quinnipiac University’s poll (Stevenson, 2015). Hillary for America, Clinton’s campaign group, has primarily done this using children in her television campaign.

Table 2. Seconds of Children Appearing in Clinton and Sanders’ 2016 Television Ads.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Seconds of Children in Clinton’s Ads</th>
<th>Percentage by Second of Children in Clinton’s Ads</th>
<th>Seconds of Children in Sanders’ Ads</th>
<th>Percentage by Second of Children in Sanders’ Ads</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jul</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>0</td>
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Across seventeen major advertisements in the Clinton campaign (determined by their presence on Hillary Clinton’s YouTube channel and Clinton specifying “I am Hillary Clinton and I approve this message,” rather than just her campaign funding the ad) and eighteen major ads in Sanders’s campaign (determined by their presence in Sander’s YouTube playlist “Campaign Ads”), Clinton’s ads, on average, feature children for eleven seconds (17.6%), while Sanders’s only do so for six (2.2%) seconds (see Table 2). Referring to Figure 2, Clinton more consistently used children throughout her campaign than Sanders. For Sanders’s campaign, children did not appear until January, 2016 with the ad “America”, an idealistic representation of the US referencing Sanders’s socialist plan. Children also appeared, to an even greater degree, in February 2016 with the ad “It’s Not Over”, which discussed civil rights through an interview with the daughter and granddaughter of Eric Garner, an African American man whose death sparked controversy when he was killed by a police officer for illegally selling cigarettes via a chokehold in July 2014. Reinforcing Fass and Mason’s argument that children are used as tools for adult idealism (2010), these later ads resemble the more idealistic approach—as opposed to the concrete, resume-like beginning of Sanders’s campaign—used by Clinton at the beginning of her campaign.

The point of using children in Clinton’s campaign, though, was not to directly affect her polling numbers—there is no direct correlation between the appearance of children in her ads and Real Clear Politics (RCP)’s poll averages (“2016 Democratic Presidential Nomination”, 2016) (see figure 4) but is instead a means for retaking control of her underlying, “bitchy” image.
Political ads have a history of not actually directly influencing voting behaviour. There is some evidence, instead, that political ads alter underlying views about the candidates, eventually affecting the vote in this way (Williams, 1998, p. 50). The underlying view about Hilary Clinton that her campaign tried to convey was that Clinton is not, in fact, a bitch, but instead a potential mother figure for America.

Across the seventeen ads approved by Hillary Clinton, children function either as the subject of the ad itself or as a consistent visual illustration for otherwise unrelated discussions of policy. Clinton’s most popular topic throughout her campaign was overwhelmingly that of income inequality, most likely as a reaction to Bernie Sander’s popularity running on this topic. Together, her ads “Get Ahead,” “Every Child,” “Stretched,” “Reshuffle the Deck and Rebuild the Middle Class,” and “Fighting for You” feature children for a combined 52 seconds (29% of the time). Most of these appearances take the form of either familial imagery accompanying verbal discussion of the American dream or, in the case of “Every Child” and “Fighting for You,” directly referencing government’s obligation to allow children to live up to “their God-given potential,” presumably through the economics of the “American Dream” (Hillary for America, 2016).

Other topics in the campaign rely almost exclusively on images of children to accompany voice-overs on policy. The ad “Broken,” about race in America, features children for eight seconds (27% of the time). “Equal,” on marriage equality shows children (mostly appearing to have been adopted by gay couples) for three seconds (2%), and “Overnight,” about rising drug costs, features children for two seconds (7%). The ads “I’m with Him” and “Together”, on the topic of gun control, show children for a combined two-seconds (3%). Her ads “Children” and “Make a Difference”, about Clinton’s political resume, directly reference her work for children for a combined 56 seconds (47%). “The Same,” about equal pay for equal work, features a little girl at a Clinton rally asking her if she would be paid the same amount as a male president if elected. The ads “Compact,” about student debt, and “Admit,” an attack ad on the Republican candidates, are the only two that do not
feature children (Hillary for America, 2016). Nearly all of Clinton’s policies—except the one concerning (mostly) childless college students—are illustrated through children to some extent. Even when children appear minimally in an individual ad, their presence throughout the campaign is overwhelmingly consistent.

Table 3. Children’s Appearance in Clinton’s 2008 and 2016 Television Ads.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jul</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>7%</td>
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This feminized presentation could be a reaction to Clinton’s failed 2008 campaign which followed the more conventional wisdom regarding female politician’s approach to campaigning. According to Tamara Keith, Clinton has generally played up her gender in a way she didn’t in 2008 to garner women’s vote (2015) (see fig. 4). While Clinton’s 2016 ads have featured children for, on average, eleven seconds (17.6%), her commercials in 2008 only did for an average of two seconds (5.7%) (see Table 3) per commercial in her sixty-one television ads between August 2007 and February 2008 (“Campaign 2008”).
This overall campaigning shift in 2016 was set up by Clinton’s first three ads, “Dorothy”, “Family Strong”, and “Getting Started”, which set the tone for the rest of the campaign. All three focus heavily on ideas of childhood. Clinton’s portrait as mother is most clearly represented in the early ad, “Dorothy”, about her mother’s difficult childhood. In this ad, Clinton appears talking directly to the camera telling her audience about her mother, Dorothy’s, childhood in which she was abandoned by her parents at age 8 and forced to live with “un-wanting” grandparents. In this ad, Clinton focuses on her mother’s humble roots to tap into the common American narrative of the self-made man and elide Clinton’s own privileged upbringing. Clinton also claims her mother’s childhood as the inspiration for her own political work: “When I think about why I’m doing this,” Clinton says in the ad, “I think about my mother, Dorothy... I think about all the Dorothis all over America who fight for their families, who never give up. That’s why I’m doing this. That’s why I’ve always done this. For all the Dorothis” (2015, 0:53).

Children are the controlling factor of this introductory ad with the discussion of her mother as a child and with the depiction of children today. Clinton aligns herself with the motherly female protagonists in this ad who “fight for their families,” and she indicates with an unspecified “this”—not “politics” or “presidency” specifically—that she is ready to fight for them as her metaphorical children. Clinton indicates that she has spent her life inspired by an effective mother, and she has prepared herself to “do” motherhood herself in the White House.

Clinton, however, does not completely ignore her established, “bitchy” perception as a strong female politician with the sentimentality of motherhood, but, again, tries to reinvent her audience’s perception of that strength. Dorothy, the child and the mother, is clearly a strong figure; she works her way up through traditionally feminine means from economic and social hardship by being a mother to others’ children to eventually earn the traditional reward of raising her own loving family. The feminine sphere here becomes one of strength in and of itself, and Clinton emphasizes this with her last line where she uses phrases like “fight,” “never give up,” and the action verb “do” persistently attached to “always.” Clinton is strong in the way her traditional mother was strong; the ad reassures the audience.

The schoolteacher figure that appears in the ad, while brief, also acts as a subtle but significant influence in the ad’s underlying message. When Clinton mentions her, she says, “When [Dorothy] needed a champion, someone was there” (2015, 0:42), giving the impression that, beyond just the nuclear family, Dorothy’s community raised her, a small-scale metaphor for extending the notion of family beyond the confines of the home. This metaphor also encompasses the idea that government raises and protects its citizens like children. Clinton, as first lady in 1996, even wrote a book called It Takes a Village in which she highlights her beliefs about society’s intrinsic role in raising children and government’s obligation to be a positive influence (Gordon, 2007). For Clinton, the government is a sort of parental figure to the metaphorical children found in its citizens. Clinton is offering herself to be the matriarch of that American family, like the schoolteacher offered help to Dorothy when she was young and, like contemporary America, experiencing financial hardship. The fight Clinton highlights in “Dorothy” is one fought for her national family, rather than just demonstrating the threatening deviance of a powerful woman.

In the ad “Getting Started,” her very first ad announcing her 2016 candidacy, Hillary for America created an image of Hillary Clinton that seems hyper-aware of the femininity-competence double-bind against which she had trouble in the past. “Getting Started” features several “everyday”
Americans starting new chapters in their lives. The ad features a woman retiring, a woman moving so her daughter can start kindergarten at a good school, two brothers starting a business together, a woman going back to work after raising her children, a young couple having a baby, a woman graduating college, a homosexual couple getting married, a little boy performing in a school play, a couple renovating their home, and a man continuing his family’s small business. The ad directly confronts one of Clinton’s greatest problems throughout her political career: her difficulty connecting with the average American (i.e. 52% of people believing she does not care about them) (Stevenson, 2013). This montage of anecdotes conveys Clinton’s breadth of understanding for what the average American life looks like, even if she herself is viewed as elitist and separated. Each story also blatantly conveys a greater political issue at its core from social security to public schools to marriage equality. Further, out of the ten stories in the ad, four include children. The ad ends with Clinton announcing her candidacy, claiming, “When families are strong, America is strong” (Hillary for America, 2015), a line which later appears throughout her campaign ads.

With this line, the ad confronts more general problems that the female politician faces. The idea that “when families are strong, America is strong” recalls ideas concerning women’s incapability to be strong, as it is a male characteristic. With this tag, Clinton is not only associating herself with strength, but also more generally associating families, and by extension the feminine, with strength. The ad repurposes strength as, indeed, a feminine quality, and this too is backed up in the ad’s numerous strong, female characters who remain in the traditionally feminine sphere: the mother who is moving so her daughter can go to a better school, the mother who is going back to work after five years of raising her children, the woman getting ready to retire and “reinvent” herself.

Further, this ad proposes Clinton as “mother” for the United States, the theme of new beginnings that runs throughout the ad recalling ideas of birth and, by extension, motherhood.

After the economic hardship Clinton mentions, the American people “need a champion, and I can be that champion” (2015, 1:46). A new country is born with each new election, and, in this instance, Clinton wanted to be its mother. The narrative offered here positions Clinton in a more nurturing, caring, empathetic, and “feminine” role than her popular perception has been in the past, and proposes to the public, above all else, to offer her, too, a fresh start and to reconsider their perception of her “bitchiness.”

These problems concerning her “bitchy” image are also confronted through the lens of family in her ad “Family Strong,” presumably named after the original tag. “Family Strong” mentions Dorothy again as her inspiration and continues by discussing what Clinton has done specifically for children. This ad tellingly includes the line “after law school, she could have gone to a big firm, but instead went to work for the children’s defence fund” (2015, 0:20), which, in addition to humanizing the politician as someone who makes sacrifices for others, also feminizes her. Like many of her female voting peers, Clinton claims to have given up career for children and downplays the fact that the decision resembles a politician advancing their career. While reinforcing the idea that the feminine sphere is itself strong, “Family Strong” also emphasizes the idea that Clinton has a history of pursuing motherhood through politics, the presidency being the next logical step in this narrative.

Although Clinton’s later ads focus more on policy illustrated by images of children, a direct reversal of Sanders’s campaign, the introductory ads put conscious effort into associating Clinton with childhood. “Dorothy” depicts Clinton as a daughter of the American dream, while “Getting

Int. j. soc. sci. humanit. educ. ISSN 2521-0041
Started” and “Family Strong” show that she wants to inherit a motherly position for the nation that fostered that dream. Although it is against conventional wisdom for a female candidate to present herself through a motherhood lens due to the danger of being read as a nagging shrew (Campus, 2013, p. 63-64), the Clinton campaign takes care to emphasize the nurturing aspects of motherhood in the campaign using children’s sentimental associations.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Hillary for America’s use of children in the 2016 campaign was part of an effort to feminize, in a positive manner, a female politician, and reflects American preference for depictions of female power via the familiar lens of motherhood. Female politicians have a history of having to face impossible expectations concerning male and female stereotypes and leadership that men do not, and politics, here, act as a reflection of the American mind-set that is a telling characterization of its culture’s attitudes towards women. While Hillary Clinton, and other female politicians, must carefully present themselves in a conflicting space of female expectations and male norms, women inhabiting the same culture in realms outside of politics must deal with similar issues. Whether among television, books, movies, or everyday interactions that take place in American society and culture, women are expected to perform roles outside of what is considered normal and non-typed in men. In story-telling, women usually are only allowed leading roles to tell romance stories, while “normative,” non-gendered stories are told through male characters. Women in their everyday workplace must grapple with similar issues concerning family and work that female politicians face. Speech patterns that are generally associated with women, such as “like” or up-talking, are read as stupid and ignorant. Power, in the end, is only one facet at work in the everyday occurrences of the patriarchal mind-set of American society.

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