

PUBLIC OFFICE OR PRIVATE MARRIAGE? AN EXAMINATION OF THE INFLUENCE
OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PRESIDENT AND FIRST LADY

BY

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ABSTRACT

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This study examined the impact of president and first lady interaction on presidential image, including competency, favorability and homophily. A pre-test and post-test design was used to examine the changes in participants' perception of the President Barack Obama's image and competency, participants' favorability ratings of Obama, and participants' homophily ratings after viewing photos of the Barack and Michelle Obama in either professional settings or personal settings. Statistical analysis indicated that no significant differences between the groups existed, suggesting that voter perception of the president may remain constant regardless of how the president interacts with his wife. Content and thematic analyses of open-ended questions suggest that voters are more likely to view the president's relationship with the first lady in personal terms rather than professional terms, regardless of the type of image (personal or profession) viewed. Additionally, young voters were more likely to expect the first lady to engage in familial duties rather than work- or image-related duties, confirming previous research on first lady scholarship.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

As technology rapidly changes the way our society functions, politics has adjusted and adapted to our increasingly mediated world (Nimmo & Combs, 1990). People can find information and hear about the latest news with the click of a mouse. Political figures at all levels have evolved from representatives of their respective constituents in relative anonymity to celebrity-style public figures under the scrutiny of the press. Even if the President of the United States is on the other side of the world, Americans are aware of his or her actions and activities on a minute-by-minute basis. The Internet has connected the worlds of entertainment, celebrity, and politics, allowing anyone and everyone to see and form opinions about public figures and their day-to-day lives.

This increase in media exposure has affected the way people view public figures throughout the world, transforming ordinary people into political celebrities. These political celebrities in turn are both scrutinized and idolized by the public. Nimmo and Combs (1990) describe how celebrities are made "...into heroes, villains, and fools; fans follow their on-screen and off-screen romances; they gossip about them, daydream about them, and on rare occasions see them, touch them, even get their autographs" (p. 91). Perhaps the public looks to these celebrities because of their need to indulge in a world more glamorous and surreal than their everyday life. These celebrities "represent values (or the lack of them), personify characters and roles (as good or bad), and enact dramas (for good or ill)" (Nimmo & Combs, p.93). The crossover from Hollywood celebrity to political work in Washington, D.C. has become easier than ever, and it is no longer an anomaly to see a celebrity in both a movie theatre and on C-SPAN. For example, Ronald Reagan, Clint Eastwood, Sonny Bono, Jesse Ventura, and Arnold

Schwarzenegger are just a few that have used their celebrity status to jump into United States politics. The trend has also occurred all over the world: film star Fernando K. Poe, Jr. ran for the presidency in the Philippines; Katerina Bochnickova (better known as pornography star Dolly Buster) ran a candidacy for the European Union parliament; actress Glenda Jackson served as a Labour Member of Parliament in Great Britain; and Indian actress Jayalalitha Jayaram was chosen as chief minister of a southern Indian state (Babcock & Whitehouse, 2005).

Indeed, the transition to politician often appears more natural for a celebrity than for an individual who has not had prior media exposure. The ability to manipulate and manage an image has already been fine-tuned; the celebrity has already learned how to put on a public persona and how to portray a particular image in front of a camera. This is crucial to becoming a powerful politician because the job requires “celebrity management, that is, orchestrating times, settings, and events to enhance the personal celebrity of a political leader...” (Nimmo & Combs, 1990, p. 103). Additionally, celebrities have better access to some of the most used media outlets, especially television programs, which might normally be detached from the political sphere. These shows include *Saturday Night Live*, various MTV programming, and many of the late-night talk shows, including *The Late Show with David Letterman* and *The Tonight Show* (Babcock & Whitehouse, 2005).

Ultimately, the prominence of media has made the transition from politician to celebrity almost inevitable (Genovese, 2005; MacPherson, 1975; Nimmo & Combs, 1990; Street, 2003, 2004; Van Zoonen, 2005). Politicians, especially those in higher ranking positions, such as the president, are scrutinized both professionally and personally. The ability to know where the president is, who he is with, and what he is doing has created a sense of entitlement to know all about his life regardless of whether or not the information relates to his official position. For

example, President Barack Obama was selected to throw out the first pitch at the Major League Baseball's All Star game on July 14, 2009 – a gesture more commonly reserved for a television or movie star than a political figure (Walker, 2009, July 15). However, immediately following this event, the public focused more on the president's athletic ability and choice of apparel – more specifically, his choice to wear “jeans of middle-aged dads who have thrown in the towel” (Givhan, 2009, July 26) – than his ability to complete his official duties as president.

The president's family is also vulnerable to this increase in the personalization of politics (Nimmo & Combs, 1990). A first lady is criticized or praised for her fashionable style (Rubenstein, 2009, April 27), involvement in politics (Clark, 2009, April 28), and parenting skills (Ortiz, 2008, December 14). Web sites and magazines follow the whereabouts of presidential children, including how they spend their summer vacation (Reston, 2009, August 17) and what they do for fun (Bartolomeo, 2009, January 21). The barrage of videos and photos from media outlets creates an opportunity for the public to get acquainted with every detail of the first family's private life, even when it is irrelevant to running the country.

While garnering all of this attention may seem to be positive, the unofficial title of celebrity can bring negative light on the individual as well. Nimmo and Combs (1990) argue that because celebrities are under so much scrutiny in their public and personal lives, politicians must avoid the negative aspects of celebrity, including association with drugs, inappropriate marital actions, and living an over-luxurious lifestyle. Additionally, politicians should avoid obtaining the reputation that they are more concerned with “the glitterati of Hollywood” than political influence (p. 92). Failing to strike a balance between active politician and public icon can prove detrimental to the influence and reputation of a president.

Yet, politicians can use this power of celebrity to engage the average citizen in important political and policy decisions. Politically savvy presidents will use this bridge between politics and Hollywood to grab voters' attention at critical points in their term. As Street (2003) describes, "[i]t is about deciding on what interviews, with whom, when and managing the supply to coincide with the release of the latest record/policy initiative" (p. 92). This is best illustrated by the appearance of President Barack Obama on *The Late Show with David Letterman* on September 21, 2009. The president used this prime-time appearance to discuss a few hot-button topics, including the war in Afghanistan and his health care proposals (Cooper, 2009). President Obama was able to talk about important and relevant political issues while also being relatable and personable to the public in a familiar and relaxed setting. In 1983, First Lady Nancy Reagan was able to use this same concept when she appeared on the sitcom *Diff'rent Strokes* as a platform for her anti-drug campaign (Rosebush, 1987).

Ultimately, one of the most important tasks a celebrity politician must undertake is to "commute constantly between the different requirements of politics and entertainment in order to maintain their position and status in the political field, as well as their relevance to the everyday culture of their constituents" (Van Zoonen, 2005, p. 69). It is this tension that creates the most trouble for his/her image. In order to relate to his or her constituents, the politician must be able to easily and seamlessly transition from politician to everyday person and must be able to intertwine the political self with the personal self, showing off the ability to be both emotional and rational (Van Zoonen, 2005). Street (2003) describes the trend of politicians to portray themselves as 'cool':

This is not just a matter of being popular, but of being popular in a particular way. They want to be stylish in the way that stars of popular culture are stylishly cool...The reasons

politicians want these associations derives from the general cultural value placed on cool, and the notion of ‘authenticity’ associated with it. ‘Cool’ represents being in charge *and* in touch... This sense of being in charge and in touch chimes with criteria that define someone as authentically representative. (p. 96, emphasis in original)

Being “authentically representative” is one of the best ways to boost a politician’s image; the public is more likely to support the actions of the politician if they feel he or she is genuine and just like them.

Many scholars and critics are quick to condemn the personalization of politics, arguing that it detracts from the rational, intellectual aspects of the process. However, others point out that it is this personalization that draws in voters. Street (2003) argues against this condemnation:

To see politics as coterminous with popular culture is not to assume automatically that it is diminished, any more than associations with marketing necessarily diminish it. The point is to use this approach to discover the appropriate critical language with which to analyse it. Just as there are good and bad performances in popular culture, so there are good or bad political performances... Disillusionment with politics has, by this account, less to do with some inevitable social trend or structural change, and instead has more to do with the performances given by politicians. (pp. 97-98)

In this way, it is better to look at how the relationship between politics and popular culture can appeal to the mass audience and encourage more political activity in those less inclined to do so otherwise, and perhaps even lead to “democratic renewal” (Couldry & Markham, 2007, p. 405), an idea characterized by an increased interest in government and civic involvement.

The blending of pop culture and politics has made the president and first lady more visible than ever before. Voters base their opinions of the president not only on actions and

decisions in the political sphere, but also on the actions and decisions made in his or her private life. The things said and done by the president can be disseminated to the entire globe in a matter of minutes via the internet. Because of this, every action and every statement made by the president can cause voters to alter their opinions of competency, favorability, image, and homophily. This increase in media has made it necessary to examine how *all* actions of the president, not just those political in nature, affect public opinion. Because the relationship between the president and first lady is so personal and visible, the present study seeks to analyze how this relationship affects public opinion of the president. More specifically, this study examines the relationship between President Barack and First Lady Michelle Obama and how their interaction influences voters' opinions and views of the Barack's ability to complete his official duties as president.

In order to better understand how voters form opinions of political figures, including the president, the next chapter presents a review of the literature studying various aspects of presidential image, along with a review of the literature studying the first lady, and research questions emerging from this material. Chapter Three presents the methodology for this study, followed by Chapter Four which presents the results. Finally, Chapter Five provides a discussion of the findings, limitations, and directions for future research, and Chapter Six offers final conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The Presidency and Voter Perception

Perhaps the most prominent and important job in the history of the United States is that of the president. The president serves as a symbol of the nation and its people. Expectations for the role of the presidency are idyllic and unique to each individual (Brownlow, 1969). That is, these expectations stem from characteristics and issues immediately relevant to the officeholder, and are based on the actions and characteristics of past presidents and media agenda-setting (Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986). Because the public has high expectations for how the president behaves, an expectations gap exists (Waterman, Wright, & St. Clair, 1999) that "...makes individuals less likely to approve of the president's job performance" because the current president will not match up to this ideal concept of a perfect president (Waterman, Jenkins-Smith, & Silva, 1999, pp. 963-964).

Although individual citizens' concepts of an ideal president are all different, there are certain qualities universally expected from this symbolic leader, which focus on issues of personality, virtue, and leadership abilities (Herzik & Dodson, 1982). In this context, the president is viewed more as a person than as a politician, and

[w]hen people are asked to indicate what they like or dislike about the President, they most commonly refer to aspects of his personal image – for example, his sincerity and integrity, his conscientiousness, his warmth or coldness, his physical vigor, his religious background and practice. (Greenstein, 1965, p. 526; see also Graber, 1972; Hall, 1979; Miller et al., 1986)

Hellweg (1979) found that most voters deemed personality characteristics such as competence and character as more important in an ideal political leader than more specific traits such as extroversion, composure, or sociability. Because expectations have remained similar for all modern presidents, the climate in which these individuals have come into office has remained relatively stable over time (Alsina, Davies, & Gronbeck, 2001; Miller et al., 1986; Trent, Mongeau, Trent, Kendall & Cushing, 1993).

One of the most effective ways to examine the president's image and character is to look at his relationship with his family (Marton, 2001) because "...presidents send messages regarding family values and their own emotional priorities in how they treat their wife, their children, and their relatives" (Gould, 1990, p. 678). Indeed interactions among members of the First Family can give the impression of order and normalcy, an assurance that is expected of the president. In addition, observing the way the president relates to his wife and children gives the public a way to relate to him better and can cause the public to feel comfortable with his authority (Gillespie, 1980). In fact, this relationship is so important to the image of the president that the American National Election Survey (ANES) specifically mentions the president's family when polling for favorability ratings (Miller et al., 1986). Observing the relationship between the president and first lady is particularly important because it sets the tone for the administration and gives the public an impression about how he relates to people (Gould). Additionally, "[t]he president's character, beliefs on the family, and commitment to women's issues might be examined through his relationship with his wife" (Watson, 1997, p. 806). The president's relationship with the first lady is so important that Marton states "[p]residents need to be married... The public expects it" (p. 6).

However, previous research has not empirically examined how this necessary need to be married impacts an administration. While the public expects a president to be married and interact with his wife, existing literature on the president, the first lady, and marital interaction has failed to examine the effects this marriage has on perceptions of presidential capabilities. People expect the president to be married, but why? How would the president's ability to complete his duties be different if he was not married? It is possible that the interaction of the president and first lady influences public opinion of the president's professional abilities. Thus, the current study seeks to address these questions and examine how interaction within a presidential marriage influences how people think of and perceive the president.

The role of the presidency receives much attention from scholars and public. The current research examines several ways the public evaluates the president. Three important aspects of our evaluation of the presidency center on the president's competency, favorability ratings, and overall image.

Presidential Competency

Presidential scholarship has found that competency is one of the most important image traits for a president or presidential candidate to display. Competency is especially important to highly educated voters. Kinder, Peters, Abelson, and Fiske (1980) describe competency as "...not only [being] technically adept...but also capable of facing hard choices and tackling formidable problems" (pp. 319-320), and stress that knowledge, courage, open-mindedness and the ability to inspire are key traits of competency. Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu (2002) describe competency in terms of confidence, independence, intelligence, capability, and skillfulness. In fact, competency is so significant that Kinder et al. postulate that it may be equally as, or even more important, than trust when citizens evaluate sitting presidents. Often the relationship

between solving problems and presidential competency emerges as the ability to solve important issues. For instance, Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson (2002) argue that presidential competency is linked to issues such as foreign policy or the economy, and that the successes and failures in these areas lead people to believe that a president is competent or not.

Competency also appears to have a personal aspect about which we make judgments when evaluating others. Recently, scholars have linked two social cognitive dimensions – competence and trustworthiness – with positive feelings about an individual (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). In other words, individuals perceived as both competent and trustworthy are perceived more positively and more favorably than those lacking one or both of these dimensions. Prior research describes the dimensions and characteristics of presidential competency, such as being intelligent and demonstrating the ability to make decisions, but does not describe how competency is affected by the interactions of the president with other people. It is possible that the way the president behaves directly and indirectly with other people influences how he is perceived by the public. Therefore, the literature remains uncertain as to what extent the president's interactions with the first lady affect public perception of his competency.

Presidential Favorability

Candidate favorability is one of the most common topics on which voters are polled during the campaign and election season. Most major polling organizations, including Gallup, and major news sources, including *The Washington Times/ABC News*, *The New York Times/CBS News*, and FOX News, ask voters how favorably they feel toward specific candidates. Scholarly research on presidential favorability is quick to distinguish it from presidential job approval or competency ratings. Research by McAvoy (2008) found that dimensions of favorability look more at the personal factors of a president, such as honesty and

values, not policy decisions. In fact, McAvoy found that voter perceptions of favorability may actually influence evaluations of job performance, which is particularly important since they are not measured by the same dimensions; favorability is based on public reactions to the president as a person, while job performance is based on public perceptions of the professional capabilities of the president. Research by Cohen (1999) corroborates this finding, also noting that favorability ratings can be affected by things such as scandal and crisis. However, Cohen disagrees with McAvoy's findings of causality, arguing that the relationship between favorability and job approval is much more complicated than simple statistics can show.

Since research demonstrates that voter favorability ratings are based on personal traits, such as honesty and values, rather than perceptions of competency or evaluations of job performance, it is important to examine the president in personal settings. Prior research has not looked specifically at how the interaction between the president and first lady affects favorability. It is possible that voters could be persuaded to feel more favorably toward a president if they see personal traits enacted in interactions with his wife. Therefore, this study also seeks to examine how marital interactions between the president and first lady affect voter ratings of favorability.

Presidential Image

In order to win an election, a presidential candidate must put forth an appealing image to voters; this image must conform as closely as possible to the constituents' notions of an ideal candidate. But what exactly constitutes an 'image'? Stephen, Harrison, Husson, and Albert (2004) describe image as a candidate appearing to have "...mastery of a broad interactional range; a healthy, balanced demeanor; and considerable oratorical facility" (p. 187). In a study of ideal presidential candidates, Kjeldahl, Carmichael, and Mertz (1971) found that genuineness

and leadership were the two most important characteristics in describing an ideal president.

While the particulars of what makes an ideal presidential candidate may vary with time and voter demographics, it is important to acknowledge that images, more so than reality, decide whether a candidate will win or lose an election:

If presidents are to succeed, then, they must present an appropriate image of leadership to the American people, an image that meets the needs of the time when the president governs and also fits the personality of that president...Reality thus becomes secondary and image is everything (Waterman, Wright & St. Claire, 1999, p. 15).

Images are particularly important because of their salient role in the election process. Keeter and Zukin (1982) report that voters are eager to like a new, relatively unknown candidate in a race. However, that candidate's favorability almost always declines after the initial introduction because people realize that the candidate is not exactly like the ideal candidate they were hoping for. It is during this process that the candidate's image begins to form, an image that will likely not change over time; "Once the image is established, [mediated] stories may be briefer, simpler, and more self-contained by 'accessing' the established image" (Keeter & Zukin, p. 79). Political events that occur after the initial image formation, such as candidate debates and party conventions, are also crucial in the image formation process, because voters are more attentive to image issues during these events (Keeter & Zukin).

Early theories on image formation have focused on two different ideas. The first revolved around the idea that image is created by the candidate and his or her team. It is their responsibility to form a public persona of the candidate that fit the ideals of relevant voters. In some cases this involves completely creating an image; in other cases this requires merely focusing attention on pre-existing and positive traits of the candidate. The words of a candidate

and his/her opponent is a major source for this type of image creation. Brummett (1981) argues that synecdoches (a rhetorical tool originally developed by Kenneth Burke) can be used to help the audience create positive or negative images of a candidate. Brummett describes the use of this tool:

Rhetors using [synecdoches] employ all sorts of signs drawn from the everyday actions and objects that surround public figures. The actions and objects are made to represent the figures, and thus create their public images in the popular mind. Synecdoche should therefore be recognized as a...central strategy in the rhetorical construction of public images (p. 145)

Specifically, Brummett talks about how synecdoches relating to food can shape a candidate's image: for example, calling a candidate "Joe Six-Pack" infers that he does not belong to the upper-class. Synecdoches, used strategically or even 'off-the-cuff' can be used positively or negatively, and discretely help shape a voter's image of a particular candidate. Politicians also use speeches to craft a particular image of themselves, and the content of this strategy changes based on time and political environment. Overall, morality seems to be of most importance to candidates in creating an image and is discussed far more than any other character trait (see also Benoit & McHale, 2004).

The other image formation theory described in early literature focused on voter perception and how each candidate measured up to the voter's idea of an ideal candidate. Husson, Stephen, Harrison, and Fehr (1988) found that voters "...have very distinct behavioral images of political candidates, ...[and] that these images are significantly correlated with those individuals' candidate preferences" (p. 417). Earlier research by Carlson and Boring (1981) also concluded that voters perceived images differently for winning candidates and losing candidates.

Regardless of the sex of the candidate, voters attributed more masculine traits to winners of election and more feminine traits of losing candidates. However, this effect was much greater for the male candidates. In fact, Carlson and Boring definitively state: “Losing is feminine and winning is masculine in every instance” (p. 489). Research by Stephen et al. (2004) expanded on this finding, arguing that “winners appear to respondents to communicate in a more self-contained, secure, relaxed, and interpersonally functional manner...Next to them, losers are perceived in ways that appear to be somewhat overbearing, tense, contentious, histrionic, and serious” (p. 185).

However, Nimmo (1976) postulates that the most accurate theory of image formation is one that takes both prior theories (candidate focused and voter perception focused) into account. In Nimmo’s theory, it is the job of the candidate to put his or her best foot forward, but it is also important for image-makers in a campaign to evaluate how a voter will see the candidate as a political figure (including partisan tendencies and history of voting and policy) and as a person (including political style and personality traits). Looking at image from both voter and candidate perspectives allows us to see the discrepancies found in image literature. For example, Benoit and McHale (2004) found that candidates and voters may not agree on what is most important in a campaign message; voters in this study rated sincerity as the most desired trait in a potential candidate, but candidates utilized sincerity the least in their campaign messages.

A long line of prior research on candidate image has examined the tendencies of voters to focus on personal attributes of candidates more than issues in the election. Keeter and Zukin (1982) found that voters’ favorability ratings for a particular candidate were based on personal attributes early on, but became more issue-focused as Election Day approached, a tendency that they attributed to increase in party loyalty. However, the authors also found that some voters

“base their evaluations of candidates upon perceptions of the candidate’s successes or failures in the campaign, rather than upon personal qualities or ideological positions” (p. 77). Despite these findings, Hacker, Zakahi, Giles, and McQuitty (2000) demonstrated that issues and candidate attributes are related to one another, suggesting that both are critical in the development of candidate images. A common myth advanced in this area of study is that voters with higher educational background are more likely to focus on issues during an election cycle than personal attributes. Research by Glass (1985) did not confirm this, and actually found that highly educated voters were actually *more* likely than less educated voters to focus on the personal attributes of candidates. More specifically, he found that highly educated voters were just as likely to focus on superficial aspects of a candidate’s personal attributes, such as appearance. In Glass’ study, the same emphasis was put on issues during the campaign regardless of educational level.

Davis (1981) suggests a more complicated relationship between issues and personal attributes in image formation. In his research, Davis gave information regarding potential candidates to voting-age participants and asked them to choose which candidate they would most likely select in an election. When asked why a particular candidate was chosen, most respondents gave a reason related to a personal attribute – especially personality characteristics related to integrity – despite the fact that the only information given to these participants was issue-related. Thus, Davis suggests that voters use issue-related information to make inferences or explain perceptions about a candidate’s personal attributes. Rudd’s (1986) research on television advertisements during a campaign echo these ideas. Rudd argues that labeling commercials as either issue-oriented or persona-oriented may be false because the line between them is blurred. Sometimes image commercials masquerade as issue commercials by mentioning salient election issues, but only in general terms and without specifying positions or policies; the only reason for

mentioning the issues is to make the candidate appear to be issue-concerned. These blurred commercials allow “the candidate to fulfill the pragmatic and ritualistic demands that he express concern with policy issues” (p. 107) while still creating an image of positive persona. Rudd also argues that television has “resulted in political campaigns centered around images rather than issues and information” because “it conveys images and emotions more effectively than information” (p. 113).

As voter expectations and political environment change, image may be looked at in new ways. Carlson (1984) argues that the influence of party affiliations will decline in future elections, allowing more influence of other factors such as ethnicity. Additionally, Waterman, Wright, and St. Clair (1999) argue that, while images are critical to the success or failure of a candidate, they are also disposable and can be changed as needed. If one particular image is failing for a particular candidate, advisors can easily reassess and begin building a more successful image for that candidate.

Prior research on presidential image has demonstrated several important facts. First, it is important for presidential candidates and their media consultants to construct an image of the candidate that is favorable and positive, and it is also important for them to take into consideration the voters that they are trying to attract. Presidential candidate image should be looked at from the perspective of both the candidate and the voter. Secondly, voters are more likely to focus on personal attributes rather than issues when creating an image of a political figure. Finally, while image is an important component to voter choice, it is also disposable when necessary; images can be adjusted or completely discarded if necessary. The prior literature does not, however, address the way presidential image can be affected by the interaction between the president and those around him.

Competency, favorability, and image are all important components of voter perceptions of the presidency. Because ratings of these are affected by presidential behavior, the present study examines how competency, favorability, and image are influenced by the president's interaction with the first lady, and poses the following overarching research question:

RQ1: Do voter perceptions of the president change based on exposure to interaction with the first lady?

To more specifically address the literature's conceptualization of how voter's perceive presidential candidates, and therefore more directly address the above research question, the following sub-questions are posed:

RQ1a: Do perceptions of President Obama's competency differ based on exposure to interaction with the first lady?

RQ1b: Do President Obama's favorability ratings differ based on exposure to interaction with the first lady?

RQ1c: Do President Obama's image ratings differ based on an exposure to interaction with the first lady?

Presidential Homophily

Research on interpersonal communication demonstrates that homophily is an important component of positive and effective communication. Rogers and Bhowmik (1970-1971) describe homophily as "the degree to which pairs of individuals who interact are similar with respect to certain attributes, such as beliefs, values, education, social status, etc." (p. 526). In fact, the authors argue that homophily is critical for effective communication and each, in turn, encourages the other; that is, the more two individuals feel they are similar, the more effective their communication will be, and will, therefore, be more likely to feel more similar. Other

research confirms these claims, adding that the relevance of homophily is an important indicator of the persuasive ability of a communicator. A study by Berscheid (1966) found that persuasive efforts were more effective if the two communicators were homophilous on relevant factors (such as beliefs) rather than homophilous on superficial factors (such as appearance). Brock (1965) agrees with this idea, stating that "...the recipient changes toward the position of a communicator to the extent he perceives that he shares with the communicator on an attribute pertinent to the dimension along which change is advocated" (p. 653). Rogers and Bhowmik are quick, however, to point out that some heterophily is important to the communication process, as *too* much homophily can create redundant and unnecessary communicative situations. Therefore, they recommend that the most effective communication occurs when dyads are homophilous in factors relevant to the communication situations, but are heterophilous in other less-relevant factors, such as background or personality.

In the political sphere, researchers have examined homophily with respect to candidate similarity and voting behavior. Research varies on how influential homophily is in voter decision-making, with some arguing that it is the most important factor (Andersen & Kibler, 1978) and others arguing that it is less important (Hellweg, 1979). Two types of homophily are noted in this literature: *observed* homophily, or the degree of similarity between two people observed by a third party, and *perceived* homophily, or the amount of similarity *perceived* by the communicators involved. Andersen and Todd de Mancillas (1978) argue that perceived homophily is particularly important in political and public interactions because it is the perceptions of the parties involved that dictate their behavior.

Previous research that has examined how homophily influences voter choice with the issues of ethnicity (Carlson, 1984; Mueller, 1970; Wolfinger, 1965) and religion (Stokes, 1966)

overwhelmingly demonstrates that voters favor candidates similar to themselves. Additional research has also indicated that voters are just as likely to *not* vote for a candidate that may be different as they are to vote for a candidate that is similar (Andersen & Kibler, 1978). In their creation of a scale measuring homophily with public figures, Andersen and Todd de Mancillas (1978) dissected homophily into two distinct categories: attitude homophily and background homophily; both played a role in predicting voter choice. The work by Andersen and Kibler explored this further, and found that attitude homophily was the best predictor of voter choice and it alone accounted for over half of that choice (see also Allen & Post, 2004). However, it is important to note that research by Hellweg (1979) at approximately the same time yielded different results. While homophily did play a part in voter choice, voters preferred candidates with ideal qualities over candidates similar to themselves.

Homophily is critical to the current study because of its effect on voter choice. When voters see the president and his wife interacting in a particular way, they may feel more or less similar to the First couple. Greater levels of homophily between the president and voters can also be linked to greater levels of favorability, and increased opinion of his competency and image. This study seeks to examine whether perceived homophily is different when the Obamas act in a more personal or more professional manner. Therefore, this study poses the following research question for analysis:

RQ2: Does exposure to interpersonal interaction between President Obama and his wife affect ratings of perceived homophily among voters?

To more specifically address the above, the following sub-questions are posed:

RQ2a: Does exposure to interpersonal interaction between President Obama and his wife affect ratings of perceived attitude homophily among voters?

RQ2b: Does exposure to interpersonal interaction between President Obama and his wife affect ratings of perceived background homophily among voters?

RQ2c: Does exposure to interpersonal interaction between President Obama and his wife affect ratings of perceived issue homophily among voters?

The First Lady

Like her husband, the image of the ideal first lady is unattainable; regardless of her actions or personality, she will be criticized (Troy, 2003). In fact, Brady (2006) compares the office of first lady to that of a “bizarre Mrs. American pageant in which contestants are judged for womanly perfection and everyone comes up losers” (p. 21). The first lady must be “apolitical and nonassertive” (Knickrehm & Teske, 2006, p. 247) so as not to “emasculate” her husband (Mayo, 1993; Troy, 2000); must avoid negative attention that would reflect poorly on her husband, but also be able to woo the press (Knickrehm & Teske; MacPherson, 1975); must show an interest in and be well-informed about all types of people (Rosebush, 1987); must host a variety of social and political gatherings (Allgor, 2006; Mayo, 2000); and must be willing to give up nearly all of their privacy, living in a “fishbowl-like” environment (Rosebush, p. 86; Watson, 2000). Perhaps the role of the first lady is best summarized by Troy (2000):

A first lady is supposed to be a spouse, a mother, a queen, a campaigner, a movie star, a model, an author, a lobbyist, a hostess, a do-gooder, an unflappable, savvy, eloquent, hip, glamorous, accessible, substantive, effective, independent yet deeply dependent, and traditional yet progressive. She has to avoid offending feminists and cultural conservatives, all the while playing to the great American middle (para. 45).

Simonton (1996) summarizes ideal first ladies as “...those who are outstanding political colleagues and autonomous personalities claiming their own opinions and aspirations” (p. 331).

It is critical for a first lady to fit this role, but not overstep her boundaries; otherwise she may face intense criticism (Rosebush, 1987).

The role of the first lady presents unique challenges because it is representative yet unofficial. Like an Ambassador's wife, the first lady's responsibilities, restrictions, and privileges come directly from her husband's position, and thus "there is a blur between official and unofficial life" (Hochschild, 1969, p. 75) for these women. Because her position is not officially elected, she must learn to communicate through indirect channels, ensuring that she not appear too powerful (Hochschild; Watson, 2000). How well she fulfills these expectations can either strengthen or weaken her husband's image (Beasley, 2005). However, while the role is unofficial, it is also a "well-defined position with powerful constraints" (Troy, 2000, para. 5), though she has little or no accountability for her actions (Rosebush, 1987; Winfield, 1994). Because of these constraints, the decision of how to act is largely taken away from the first lady (MacPherson, 1975). However, Rosebush opposes this argument, saying that because there is no job description, a first lady is able to "write her own job description" (p. 16). Her life becomes a "game that must be learned and adhered to if the President's spouse is to play a consistently influential role within an Administration" (Wekkin, 2000, para. 32). She becomes a public wife (Gillespie, 1980; Rosebush) and a symbol of her husband's private life, especially with the advent of newspapers and photographs. She becomes a "moral and cultural absolute" (Gillespie, p. 116), and a "vehicle for imparting to her husband's public image legitimacy for leadership deriving from a primary source of societal authority and power: the family," and eases concerns about her husband's sexual normalcy (Gillespie, p. 111).

Some research suggests that the role of the first lady is comparable to that of the vice-presidency. The two offices have evolved in a similar fashion, and, like a first lady, the vice

president's power is derived specifically from the president himself. Additionally, both roles have developed into policy making positions from the strictly ceremonial positions that they were at inception (O'Connor, Nye, & Van Assendelft, 1996). The first lady is "potentially the second most powerful person in the federal government, in most cases more influential than the vice-president, an equal partner beyond electoral accountability" (Winfield, 1994, p. 66). The first lady has, in some cases, been given the unofficial title of "associate president" and "has surpassed the vice president and even the most senior advisers and cabinet secretaries in terms of visibility and perhaps even power and influence both in and out of the White House" (Watson, 1997, p. 814; see also Hay, 1988). However, unlike the vice-president, the first lady must exercise most, if not all, of her influence behind-the-scenes. Her influence is derived from the simple fact that she is "the president's partner, lover, and confidante. Here, the home and family life, social interests, and moral beliefs of the first ladies have influenced the president" (Watson, 1997, p. 815; see also Gould, 1990). This influence must be hidden from public view so that she cannot be accused of overstepping her boundaries (Wekkin, 2000) because, as Troy (2000) argues, "Americans [do] not want a zealot lobbying the president in bed" (para. 29). Nancy Reagan reportedly used indirect channels to facilitate the termination of Chief of Staff Donald Regan:

"Here's how it works," Fitzwater continued. "Mrs. Reagan tells Paul Laxalt, the president's oldest friend, that Regan is hurting Ronnie and has to go. Laxalt calls Stu Spencer, the California political consultant who has advised all the Reagan campaigns, and says Regan has to go. Spencer tells Lou Cannon of *The Washington Post*, his old friend from California campaigns, and says Regan has to go. Cannon writes that close Reagan friends and associates feel Regan has to go." (Clark, 1996, p. 511)

First lady power also commonly takes place through the role of social hostess, because they “have influenced presidential politics from lobbying, under the guise of entertaining, for their spouses’ political agendas” (Mayo, 2000, para. 56). The simple presence of the first lady at an event often was enough to ease tensions between the United States and a foreign country, and created stronger relationships with allies (Rosebush, 1987).

The way the public and the press view the first lady can serve as an indicator of the current roles of women in society (Rosebush, 1987). Watson (1997) describes the first lady as a “barometer” for how society believes women should act (p. 808). Because of this, women in society are more likely than men to support and feel favorable towards a first lady (Wekkin, 2000). The 1992 election serves as an excellent example of the “barometer effect,” as it pitted the traditionalist Barbara Bush against the more modern Hillary Clinton and how they each influenced their husband’s campaign (Mughan & Burden, 1995). Additionally, the first lady serves as a symbol of the feminine role in the much more complex world of politics, which faces the same tensions that women in society do between balancing a career and home life (Clark, 1996). The ideal first lady must balance that tension, giving the impression of traditional feminine roles, but also undertaking charitable causes in a nonpolitical manner (Rosebush). These feminine roles are commonly personified through the role of social hostess to foreign and domestic guests, and by overseeing the day-to-day operations of the White House (O’Connor et al., 1996; see also Mayo, 2000; Mughan & Burden, 1995). The charitable causes the first lady becomes involved with should bring “positive media and public relations for the White House” (Watson, 1997, p. 814). These causes are commonly related to feminine issues such as literacy, education, and health care (Wekkin, 2000). However, these causes should not cause her to be perceived as having equal decision-making powers as her husband (Troy, 2000).

Approval ratings for first ladies are independent of those of her husband, but can certainly affect how the public views him. Popularity of first lady candidates can even decide whether or not a particular candidate is elected to the presidency (Rosebush, 1987). Some of the most popular first ladies, such as Jacqueline Kennedy and Barbara Bush, gave their husband a popularity boost through their own reputations (Watson, 1997, p. 815). However, negative press concerning the first lady can also be negative for the president, as evidenced by Nancy Reagan and her open use of astrology (Knickrehm & Teske, 2006; Troy, 2000; Watson, 2000). Therefore, balancing the traditional roles with involvement in charitable causes can boost public opinion of the president. For example, approval ratings for Hillary Clinton were more positive when she gave off a “stand-by-your-man” attitude rather than the “two for one” attitude she and her husband originally embodied (Troy, 2000). Additionally, the first lady’s approval ratings are much less affected than her husband’s by political party affiliation, giving her the ability to reach across party lines and bring support to an administration from those who might not otherwise give it. Therefore, a first lady “can be an asset or a liability but is not automatically either” (Mughan & Burden, 1995, p. 144).

Because of a blurring of pop culture and politics, the role of the first lady has become more important than ever. Troy (2000) argues that “America’s celebrity-obsessed political culture...confuses fame and power” (para. 6). This is beneficial to the position of first lady, because the greatest source of her power comes from her fame (Troy, 2000). Hillary Clinton has been credited with being one of the first to change the way the public looks at the first lady because of her increased visibility and refusal to conform to the traditional public standards, as well as her pursuit of political office after her husband’s tenure as president (Troy, 2003).

This investigation seeks to examine how young voters in today's world look at the office of the first lady. Current college students grew up under the tenure of President Bill Clinton and his wife, Hillary. Their marriage, plagued with scandal and at the forefront of media attention from the beginning of his term in office, became a common water-cooler discussion topic. Shortly after leaving the White House, Hillary Clinton was elected as a senator in New York, marking the first time a former first lady took office after leaving the White House ("Hillary Clinton", 2000). Additionally, many of these students were newly-eligible voters when Hillary Clinton ran her own major democratic campaign for the presidency in 2008. Because of all of these factors, current college students are an ideal population to use to examine how the office of first lady is shifting in the minds of young voters. As a secondary research area, this project seeks to examine how young voters view the relationship between the current president and first lady, and how young voters view the office of first lady, and poses the following:

RQ3: How do young voters describe the relationship between the current president and first lady?

RQ4: How do young voters perceive the office of the first lady in today's political environment?

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Participants

Participants included 202 undergraduate students enrolled in communication courses at a large Midwestern university. Students received extra-credit for their participation. Participants ranged in age from 18 years to 53 years, with a mean age of 19.69 years ($SD = 2.97$). Males comprised 40.6% ($n = 82$) of participants and females comprised 59.4% ($n = 120$) of participants. Non-Hispanic Whites made up 80.7% ($n = 163$) of the participant population; other ethnicities represented included: 7.4% ($n = 15$) Asian or Pacific Islander, 4.5% ($n = 9$) African-American, 4.0% ($n = 8$) Multi-racial or mixed race, and 3.5% ($n = 7$) Other. Additionally, political party was distributed as follows: 37.6% ($n = 76$) Republican, 34.7% ($n = 70$) Democrat, 18.3% ($n = 37$) Independent, and 9.4% ($n = 19$) Other. Of the 202 participants, 67.3% ($n = 136$) were registered to vote.

A series of five questions were asked to measure baseline attitudes of participants towards the president and his relationship with the first lady: “I believe the President of the United States should be married”; “It is important to me to see the President being a traditional husband and father”; “I believe the First Lady should not have influence over her husband’s policy positions”; “I like to see the President doing ‘everyday’ things like going on a date with his wife or going to his child’s soccer game”; and, “It is important to me to know that the President is happily married.” For each statement, participants were asked to indicate whether they “Strongly Agree,” “Agree,” “Have No Opinion,” “Disagree,” or “Strongly Disagree.” Because the purpose of these questions was to establish baseline attitudes of the participants,

percentages for each statement were calculated and the responses for “strongly agree” and “agree” were collapsed, as were the responses for “strongly disagree” and “disagree.”

Based on the percent of responses, slightly more participants had no opinion (44.1%) as to whether the president should be married, followed closely by those who agreed (37.1%); less than one in five (18.8%) did not agree that the president should be married. However, almost half (46.5%) of participants agreed that it is important to see the president as being a traditional husband and father, whereas 27.7% had no opinion and 25.8% disagreed. The sample was more likely to disagree (42.6%) with the statement that the first lady “should not have influence over her husband’s policy positions,” while 34.7% agreed that she should not have influence, and 22.8% had no opinion. A strong majority (73.3%) reported liking to see the president doing everyday things like going on a date with his wife or going to his child’s soccer game, while 17.8% had no opinion, and 9.0% disagreed. Finally, almost half (49%) reported having no opinion about the importance of knowing the president is happily married, while 35.1% agreed this is important and 15.8% disagreed.

Procedures

Data was collected through an online survey administered by the researcher on campus over the course of a week (see Appendix A for survey). Approval from the university’s Institutional Review Board was obtained (see Appendix B for HSCL approved consent form). Participants were asked to complete pre-test measures gauging demographic information, political preferences, and measures of favorability, presidential competency, political homophily, and image (described below). After completing pre-test measures, participants were randomly assigned to watch one of three photo slideshow conditions. Participants then were administered post-test measures similar to those in the pre-test.

Slideshow conditions

A pilot test was completed prior to conducting the primary research to aid in selecting photos for each of the three photo slideshow conditions randomly assigned to participants. One-hundred thirty-four undergraduates enrolled in communication courses viewed a random assortment of 70 photos of Barack and Michelle Obama. Participants were instructed to indicate whether they thought each photo depicted the Obamas in the role of the President of the United States and First Lady or whether they thought the picture depicted them as a husband and wife. Following this pilot study, agreement among the participants was calculated for each photo. The 20 photos with the highest percentage of agreement among participants (at least 70% agreement for all photos) that showed the Obamas as President and First Lady were selected for the “First Lady” stimulus, and the 20 photos with the highest percentage of participant agreement that they showed the Obamas as husband and wife were selected for the Wife condition. A third Control group condition was added to the primary study; this group viewed scenic photos unrelated to the research questions.

Instrument

Presidential Competency

A seven-item scale was developed based on a review of literature (Erikson et al., 2002; Fiske, Cuddy & Glick, 2007; Kinder et al., 1980) to measure voter perception of presidential competency. Items on this scale included the following statements: “Communicates effectively to keep citizens informed on important issues”; “People like him”; “Respected by other countries”; “Is intelligent”; “Has control over the job as president”; “Understands what it takes to do the job”; and “Works to solve the country’s problems.” Participants were asked to rate Barack Obama on each of these statements on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (“Not very

well”) to 7 (“Very well”). Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was high (pre-test = .90; post-test = .93).

Favorability

Participants were asked to rate a set of national and state-level political leaders, including Barack and Michelle Obama, using a feeling thermometer used in prior scholarly research (see Banwart & Bystrom, 2005) and in research conducted by the American National Election Study (ANES). This thermometer asked participants to rate political figures on a scale from 0 to 100, with 0 representing the most negative (or cold) feelings, 50 representing neutral feelings, and 100 representing the most positive (or warm) feelings. Participants completed this measure on the pre-test and post-test.

Presidential Image

Presidential image was measured using the semantic differential scale developed by Kaid (2004). Participants were asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale whether they felt Obama was: unqualified/qualified, unsophisticated/sophisticated, dishonest/honest, believable/unbelievable, unsuccessful/successful, attractive/unattractive, unfriendly/friendly, insincere/sincere, calm/excitable, aggressive/unaggressive, strong/weak, inactive/active, and competent/incompetent. Reliability tests indicated that this measure was reliable; the pre-test $\alpha = .86$ and a post-test $\alpha = .83$.

Homophily

Perceived homophily was measured with the scale used by Allen and Post (2004). These items were created to measure both attitude homophily and background homophily. Attitude homophily items included the following statements: “Thinks like me/Doesn’t think like me”; “Behaves like me/Doesn’t behave like me”; “Similar to me/Different from me”; and “Unlike

me/Like me.” Cronbach’s alpha for attitude homophily was acceptable (pre-test = .80; post-test = .84). The background homophily items did not achieve reliability and therefore were excluded from the present analysis.

Four more items were created in a similar manner to measure participants’ perceived issue homophily with Obama. Issue homophily items included the following statements: “Agrees with me on how to solve the economic crisis/Disagrees with me on how to solve the economic crisis”; “Agrees with me on issues important to me/Disagrees with me on issues important to me”; “Has the same position on the issue of healthcare as I do/Has a different position on the issue of healthcare than I do”; and “Cares about the same things as me/Cares about different things than me.” Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was .87 for the pre-test and .86 for the post-test.

Open-ended measures

In addition to the quantitative measures previously described, participants were asked to complete two open-ended questions: “Please describe below what you think the current roles and responsibilities of the first lady are in the United States”; and “Please give at least three adjectives to describe the relationship between the president and first lady in the segment that you viewed.”

The latter question was developed to aid in the exploration of RQ3, which asked participants to describe the relationship between Barack and Michelle Obama according to the photos they saw. Because the Control group was not exposed to the presidential relationship in the stimulus, only the results of the First Lady and Wife conditions are included in this analysis. A content analysis was conducted by placing each adjective into one of four general categories. The categories developed by Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk (1986) to examine presidential

candidate image were used as the basis for this categorization. In their study, the authors used American National Election Survey (ANES) data from 1952 through 1984 to develop general categories of presidential candidate image. This prior research offered three applicable categories to the current research: adjectives describing the *reliability* of the relationship; adjectives describing the *integrity* of the relationship; and adjectives describing the *personal* nature of the relationship. One other category was developed based on the data: those adjectives describing the *loving* or *warm* nature (or lack thereof) of the relationship (see Table 4 for examples of each category).

In order to explore RQ4, which asked participants to describe the roles and responsibilities of the first lady, thematic analysis was used to categorize the open-ended responses. Owen (1984) describes thematic analysis as a way to “[allow] salient meanings to be discovered in the foreground...while other meanings [remain] in the background” (p. 275), allowing the researcher to interpret texts and categorize them based on their meaning rather than the words used. Through this analysis, appropriate categories were designated in which to organize each of the responses. Multiple key words and phrases were identified in each response and placed into one of five categories: 1) those responses identifying duties primarily related to the first lady’s *family life* (from now on referred to as “familial duties”); 2) those responses primarily related to the *political and social job* of being first lady (referred to as “work duties”); 3) those responses primarily concerned with *image* (referred to as “image”); 4) those responses primarily concerned with *representative or mediated duties* (referred to as “representative duties”); and 5) other responses (including statements such as “No political obligation” or “No specific role”).

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

To answer RQ1a – which asked if interactions between President Obama and his wife affected voter perception of competency – a repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted with the independent variable of stimulus condition (First Lady, Wife, or Control) and the dependent variable of image evaluation before and after viewing the photos (see Table 1 for means and standard deviations). Results indicated no within subjects significant effects, Wilks's $\Lambda = .98$, $F(2, 199) = 2.05$, $p = .131$, $\eta^2 = .020$. The repeated measures statistic also indicated no between subject effects, $F(2, 199) = 1.04$, $p = .35$, $\eta^2 = .010$

To answer RQ1b – which asked if favorability ratings of President Obama differed based on exposure to interaction with his wife - a repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted with the independent variable of stimulus condition and the dependent variable of favorability ratings before and after viewing the photos (see Table 1 for means and standard deviations). Results indicated no significant within subject effects, Wilks's $\Lambda = .99$, $F(2, 199) = .81$, $p = .447$, $\eta^2 = .024$. The repeated measures statistic also indicated no between subject effects, $F(2, 199) = 2.42$, $p = .09$, $\eta^2 = .024$.

To answer RQ1c – which asked if image ratings of President Obama differed based on exposure to interaction with his wife - a repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted with the independent variable of stimulus condition and the dependent variable of image ratings before and after viewing the photos (see Table 2 for means and standard deviations). Results indicated no significant within subjects effects, Wilks's $\Lambda = .998$, $F(2, 199) = .18$, $p = .83$, $\eta^2 = .002$. The repeated measures statistic also indicated no between subject effects, $F(2, 199) = 2.73$, $p = .067$, $\eta^2 = .027$.

To answer RQ2a – which asked if attitude homophily ratings of President Obama differed based on exposure to interaction with his wife – a repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted with the independent variable of stimulus condition and the dependent variable of attitude homophily ratings before and after viewing the photos (see Table 3 for means and standard deviations). Results indicated no within subjects significant effects, Wilks's $\Lambda = .995$, $F(2,199) = .55$, $p = .58$, $\eta^2 = .005$. The repeated measures statistic also indicated no between subject effects, $F(2, 199) = 1.46$, $p = .24$, $\eta^2 = .014$.

To answer RQ2c – which asked if issue homophily ratings of President Obama differed based on exposure to interaction with his wife – a repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted with the independent variable of stimulus condition and the dependent variable of issue homophily ratings before and after viewing the photos (see Table 3 for means and standard deviations). Results indicated no within subjects significant effects, Wilks's $\Lambda = .996$, $F(2,199) = .404$, $p = .668$, $\eta^2 = .004$. The repeated measures statistic also indicated no between subject effects, $F(2, 199) = .175$, $p = .177$, $\eta^2 = .017$.

To answer RQ3 – which asked how young voters would describe the relationship between the current president and first lady – participants were asked to provide three adjectives to describe the relationship. The adjectives were each put into mutually exclusive categories. Percentages for each category were calculated. The majority of adjectives fell within the category of “loving/warm” (52%, $n = 215$), and almost a quarter of the adjectives (23%, $n = 95$) fell within the “personal” category.” The rest of the responses were divided between “reliability” (15%, $n = 60$) and “integrity” (10%, $n = 40$).

When separated based on stimulus condition, results for RQ3 remain nearly the same. For the First Lady condition, 49% ($n = 101$) of responses were categorized as “loving/warm,” while

22% ($n = 45$) were categorized as “personal”, 20% ($n = 41$) as “reliable”, and 10% ($n = 20$) as “integrity.” For the Wife condition, 56% ($n = 114$) of responses were “loving/warm,” while 25% ($n = 50$) were categorized as “personal,” 9% ($n = 19$) as “reliable,” and 9% ($n = 20$) as “integrity” (see Appendix C, Table 4 for examples of adjectives).

In order to answer RQ4 – which asked participants to describe the role of the current First Lady – participants were asked an open-ended question to describe what they thought to be the roles and responsibilities of the current first lady. Of the 464 coded responses, 39% ($n = 179$) fell into the category of “familial duties,” 35% ($n = 164$) fell into the “work” category, and 17% ($n = 80$) fell into the “image” category. Less frequent responses included those describing representative duties (7%, $n = 33$) and other (1%, $n = 8$) (see Appendix C, Table 5 for examples).

When separated based on stimulus condition, results for RQ4 were more pronounced, but showed similar patterns. For the First Lady condition, 43% ($n = 71$) of the responses referenced familial duties, 33% ($n = 54$) referenced work duties, 18% ($n = 29$) referenced image, and 5% ($n = 9$) referenced representative duties. In the Wife condition, 42% ($n = 59$) referenced familial duties, 32% ($n = 45$) referenced work duties, 16% ($n = 22$) referenced image, 6% ($n = 8$) referenced representative duties, and 4% ($n = 5$) referenced other duties. Finally, in the Control condition, 30% ($n = 49$) referenced familial duties, 40% ($n = 65$) referenced work duties, 18% ($n = 29$) referenced image, 10% ($n = 16$) referenced representative duties, and 1% ($n = 2$) referenced other duties (see Table 5 for statement examples).

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The primary purpose of the present research study was twofold. First and foremost, this study sought to explore how interactions between President Barack Obama and his wife affect public opinion of his abilities as president. Secondly, this research study explored the views that young voters hold about both the relationship between the president and first lady, and the office of the first lady itself. Previous research has examined the subjects of presidential image, anecdotal evidence of the first lady, and marital interaction in general. However, until now research has not examined the interplay of all of these variables. By studying the marital interactions of the president and how they affect public opinion, we not only gain more knowledge about the most prominent American political offices and those who hold them, but also gain a glimpse into how the minds of voters work.

The first research question sought to examine how the first lady's interaction with the president would affect voter perception of competency. Though no significant results were found, an interesting pattern was evident in the results of the repeated-measures ANOVA. As evidenced in Table 1, the means of both the Control group and the First Lady groups increased from pre-test to post-test. This increase to the Control group suggests that the mere act of thinking about politics and political figures can increase the perceived level of competency, even when no other stimuli are present. Additionally, the fact that the First Lady group showed a similar pattern to that of the Control group suggests that they made approximately the same impact on the participants. It is possible that voters are so accustomed to seeing photos of the president and first lady interacting within the sphere of their political duties that these photos make very little impression on voters. However, competency ratings of the Wife condition did

not follow this pattern, but rather stayed consistent between the pre-test and post-test. Perhaps voters who are exposed to constant images of the president in a role more consistent with a husband than a president will view a political figure as less competent at his job.

While the results of the analysis concerning competency were not significant, the present study does make a contribution to presidential competency literature in the form of a quantitative scale. The scale in the questionnaire (see Appendix A) achieved a reliability rating on Cronbach's alpha scale of at least .9 for each of the pre- and post-test measures. This study added a comprehensive scale of voter perception of presidential competency that can be used in further research.

The first research question also examined the impact that president and first lady interaction has on favorability ratings. Though not statistically significant, the mean score of favorability did increase for each of the three groups at least 1 point from the pre-test to the post-test, and each mean score fell in the "warm" or "favorable" range. The fact that each group increased approximately the same amount indicates that experimental condition did not play a role in this change. Like competency, it may be that the act of thinking about the president and politics causes a slight increase in favorability among voters in general.

The second research question, which looked at the presidential couple interaction and its effects on image ratings, did not obtain significant results. However, the data from the statistical analyses still show interesting findings. Regardless of the experimental condition participants were exposed to, the mean score for President Obama's image was high (see Table 2 for all mean scores); participants in each condition rated the president at around a 5 on a 7-point Likert scale. Additionally, the mean scores for image follow a pattern similar to that of the competency scores: the First Lady and Control groups each went up approximately .1 points, whereas the Wife group

did not change. Further research should examine the relationship between the competency variable and image variable more closely. It is possible that competency should be measured as one component of image rather than as a separate category.

The third research question dealt with how the interaction between the president and his wife affected perceived homophily, or similarity, among voters. As demonstrated in Table 3, means for issue homophily stayed consistent for all three experimental conditions, indicating that the photo slideshows shown may have had no affect on perceptions of issue homophily. However, means for attitude homophily did change, though those changes were statistically insignificant. The images of the Obamas in either a professional or personal setting may have had an effect on perceived attitude homophily, because the means of the First Lady and Wife groups both increased, while the means of the Control group stayed the same. Both experimental groups increased approximately the same amount, suggesting that seeing any kind of image of the president and first lady may make voters feel more similar toward them. This result is not surprising since baseline attitudes indicated that the majority of participants enjoy seeing the President in personal situations with his family. Perhaps participants who view the president in conjunction with his wife or children feel more akin to the First Family. Since Andersen and Kibler (1978) found that attitude homophily is the best indicator of voter choice, it is critical that future research examine this finding.

The open-ended responses used to analyze RQ3 broadened prior research on presidential image into the realm of presidential relationships. Extending previous research conducted by Greenstein (1965), Hellweg (1979), Keeter and Zukin (1982), and others, the present study found that voters more often think of the president and his relationship with his wife in personal terms rather than professional terms. Regardless of whether participants were shown pictures

emphasizing the personal (Wife condition) or professional (First Lady condition) relationship between Barack and Michelle Obama, approximately 75% of the responses reported described the relationship with warm or personal adjectives rather than in terms of its professionalism, integrity, or reliability. This finding is not surprising, given the baseline attitudes of participants. Since the majority of participants indicated that they like seeing the president interact with his wife in a personal setting, it is appropriate that their descriptions of the relationship be primarily of a personal or warm nature. If the majority of participants did not like seeing the president with his wife, the adjectives they used to describe the relationship would most likely be that of a “cold” nature. Thus, this research project extends Miller et al.’s (1986) prior research to include not only individual political figures, but also the president’s relationship with his wife.

In addition to confirming the personal nature of political image, this analysis also confirms prior research on the role of the first lady in political society. Gillespie (1980) discusses the importance of the first lady as representation of the normality of the president, both sexually and socially. Open-ended responses demonstrated that this is true; in particular, one participant confirmed that the role of the first lady is to “show that the president isn’t gay.” Other statements also supported this idea of the representation of normality, including that the first lady should “[make] the President seem more like a normal citizen.” These responses also demonstrate the most young voters maintain the opinion that the first lady is primarily responsible for taking care of her family and the White House rather than other work-related duties, such as traveling and speaking.

These responses also confirmed the notion that the ideal first lady is unattainable (Knickrehm & Teske, 2006; MacPherson, 1975; Rosebush, 1987; Troy, 2000; Watson, 2000), as responses indicated that participants expect the president’s wife to: give her opinion, yet not be

involved in final decisions; be competent and media savvy, yet stay out of the press; and put her family first and foremost, yet still spend her time traveling and spearheading important charitable and community causes. Although greater numbers of women are becoming active on the national political scene, it appears that voters still expect the first lady to be a wife first and foremost and a political figure second.

The present study also confirms the mixed results researchers have reported concerning the influence of the first lady. Baseline attitudes confirm that the majority of participants (42.6%) disagree that the first lady should not have any influence over her husband's decision-making. However, qualitative data indicate that this should not be her main priority. As previous research by Watson (2000) and Hochschild (1969) indicated, the first lady may be required to exercise her power through indirect and private channels rather than publicly. This study indicates that, while voters don't mind the influence the first lady may have on the president, they do not believe it should be publicly exercised.

Conversely, this research study did not confirm other prior research on first ladies. The majority of participants in the current study (44.1%) did not agree that the president needed to be married, contrary to previous research by Marton (2001). In fact, an even greater majority (49.0%) had no opinion on whether or not the president should be happily married. It seems that, although previous research has stressed how important it is for the president to be married, this participant group was not particularly interested in his marital status. The frequency of the "no opinion" option in these questions is especially indicative because the group of participants were not apolitical; in fact, on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being very weak and 10 being very strong), 75.8% of participants indicated that they identified with their respective political parties at a 5 or above.

Limitations

As with almost all research, it is important to note that the political environment during the time surveys are administered can play a role in the results. During the time this survey was administered (Spring 2010) a considerable partisan divide dictated the political environment of the nation. President Obama persistently emphasized and pushed for controversial health care reform to pass in the House and Senate. Additionally, a group of fiscally conservative protestors, known as the “Tea Party” movement, were publicly denouncing this health care reform, causing polarity among many in the voting population. In fact, just a few days after this survey was administered, the House of Representatives voted to approve a contentious health care reform bill proposed by President Obama (Bazinet & McAuliff, 2010). It is important to keep in mind these events and the state of the political environment when considering these results. It is possible that participants in this study were less likely to change their opinions of President Obama because the nation was in such a state of partisanship.

Further, the experimental design of this study in and of itself is a limitation, with regard to both external and internal validity. In everyday interactions, it is rare that a voter would be exposed to as many images of the president and first lady as were used in this study. Most people are exposed to brief glimpses into the First Family’s life on a daily basis, and this glimpse is oftentimes accompanied by a politically mediated message (perhaps a new piece of legislation or historical event), also affecting the image that is seen. It is important to voice the fact that the exposure to the interactions in this study are more focused and isolated than those witnessed in everyday life. Additionally, participants were not asked to indicate whether or not they had previously viewed the photos in each experimental condition. It is possible that the participants were exposed to the photos on prior occasions and were therefore less affected by viewing them.

It should also be acknowledged that a two-minute slideshow of photos may not have been a strong enough intervention to cause a significant change of opinion. Future research should replicate the current study with a stronger intervention, engaging either previously unreleased photos of the president and first lady, those with documented low public exposure, or pre-test the photos among a random sample to determine a likelihood for exposure among the sample.

Additionally, the participant demographics of this study may have affected the outcome of the statistical-tests. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions, and because of this, political party was not consistent for each stimulus group. The participants identifying as Republican were evenly split between the three groups, but those identifying as Democrat were more prominent in the First Lady group (43.5%, $n = 30$) than either the Wife group (35%, $n = 24$) or the Control group (24.4%, $n = 16$). Similarly, participants identifying as Independent were more prominent in the Control group (24.6%, $n = 16$) than the Wife group (17.6%, $n = 12$) or the First Lady group (13%, $n = 9$). Because of partisan opinion and loyalty, results may have been different had the groups been more evenly matched according to political party.

Suggestions for Future Research

Because prior research on voter perceptions of political interaction is extremely limited, this study should serve as a springboard for replication and further research. Through his role as the leader of the United State, the president interacts with a variety of people from different countries, backgrounds, and lifestyles on a daily basis. Future studies should examine the effect that interactions with their children, members of the media, foreign dignitaries, and even presidential pets have on voters. Additionally, as women become more involved in politics at the national level, it is important for scholars to research the differences between male and female

political figures in the minds of voters. Therefore, future research should examine the difference between voter perceptions of the interaction between a male political figure and his wife and a female political figure and her husband; at some point, the current study could be compared to a study examining the relationship between a female president and her husband.

Additional future research in interpersonal communication should also examine how the nonverbal cues sent between a husband and wife (who are not public figures) affect how they are perceived by others around them. In addition to further study of the presidency, this could be examined in the context of other professions. For example, do interactions between a business owner and his/her spouse affect the way the employees view him/her? Do interactions between a teacher and his/her partner affect the way he/she is seen by students or colleagues? Future research should address these relationships as well.

Replication of the present study is needed to confirm the results, and should include populations with a variety of age, backgrounds, and political affiliations in order to generalize the results to the larger voting population. Future studies could compare opinions of participants who view photos of the president and first lady with those of participants who view photos of the president alone. It is possible that there would be a more pronounced difference in image, competency, favorability, and homophily ratings of the president if one group was exposed to the presidential couple and the other was not.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Despite the lack of statistically significant findings, this study does provide important contributions to presidential and first lady scholarship. First and foremost, this research study sheds light on whether or not presidential and first lady interactions affect public perception of his abilities as president. Although they were shown different images emphasizing either the professional or personal relationship with his wife, voters did not view President Obama's competency, favorability, or image differently. This suggests that the political opinions of young, inexperienced voters are fairly constant and are not subject to change based on exposure to a few photos. This also suggests that, regardless of how the president tries to increase homophily with voters through interaction with his wife, opinions of him will stay generally consistent.

The open-ended measures analyzed confirm prior research that voters are more likely to view the president in personal terms rather than professional terms. This research study also extended research on presidential image to include interaction with the presidential spouse. Regardless of the images they were exposed to, voters were more likely to think of the Barack and Michelle Obama's relationship in personal terms rather than professional terms.

Additionally, this study concluded that young voters appear to have the same opinions of the first lady as those of voters twenty or thirty years ago. Even though women are becoming more prominent on the national political scene, and, in the case of Hillary Clinton, even making a bid for the presidency, young voters still believe that the first lady's role first and foremost is that of wife and mother, not as a partner to the president.

Because mediated society will continue to be a driving force in the everyday lives of Americans, it is important that the president be aware of how his personal actions affect the

voting public. Though his interactions with his wife are important, they do not seem to be a force for change of public opinion of his ability as president.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Please answer the following questions about yourself:

1. Please mark one: _____ male _____ female

2. Age _____

3. Which of the following best represents your ethnic background (*circle one*):

(1) Asian or Pacific Islander (2) Non-Hispanic White (Caucasian) (3) African-American

(4) Spanish or Hispanic origin (5) Multi-racial or mixed race (6) Native American

4. Please place yourself on a scale from 1 to 10 with *1 extremely liberal* and *10 extremely conservative* (*circle one number*):

extremely liberal

extremely conservative

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. Which of the following best represents your political beliefs? Circle **ONE** of the following:

(1) Democrat (2) Republican (3) Green Party

(4) Libertarian (5) Independent (6) Other

6. How strongly do you identify with this political party or political stance? Use a 1- to 10-scale with 1

meaning *weak identification* and 10 meaning *strong identification* (*circle one number*):

weak identification

strong identification

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. Are you registered to vote? (*circle one*) (1) YES (2) NO

8. How many days a week do you read a newspaper? _____ (*0 to 7*)

9. How many days a week do you watch the **NATIONAL** network news on television?
_____ (*0 to 7*)

10. How many days a week do you watch the **LOCAL** news on television? _____ (*0 to 7*)

11. How informed do you think you are about politics?

Very Uninformed 1:___:___:___:___:___:5 **Very Informed**

12: How interested would you say you are about politics?

Not Interested at all 1:___:___:___:___:___:5 **Very Interested**

13. Following is a list of nationally known political figures. For those that you know, please indicate your feelings toward each by using the “feeling thermometer” below. Ratings between 50 and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward a particular person. Ratings between 0 and 50 mean that you don’t feel favorable toward the person and that you don’t care too much for him/her. If your feelings are neutral (not particularly warm or cold), you would rate the person at the 50-degree mark. If you have not heard of this person, please check “Don’t Know.”

Unfavorable/Cold
Favorable/Warm

Neutral

0-----50-----100

	Rating	OR	Don’t Know
Barack Obama	_____	OR	_____
Mark Parkinson	_____	OR	_____
Sam Brownback	_____	OR	_____
John McCain	_____	OR	_____
Kathleen Sebelius	_____	OR	_____
Pat Roberts	_____	OR	_____
Michelle Obama	_____	OR	_____
Sarah Palin	_____	OR	_____

14. Next, please evaluate each of these individuals on the scales below. For example, if you think (s)he is **very pleasant** you would check the **UNPLEASANT-PLEASANT** scale as follows:

UNPLEASANT: ___:___:___:___:___:___:___: **X**:PLEASANT

On the other hand, if you think (s)he is **very unpleasant** you would rate them as follows:

UNPLEASANT: **X**:___:___:___:___:___:___:PLEASANT

If you think (s)he is somewhere between the two extremes, check the space that best represents your reaction on the scale. If you feel you have **no reaction** to the person on **any one scale**, check the middle space on the scale (as illustrated) to indicate your neutrality.

UNPLEASANT: ___:___:___: **X** :___:___:___:PLEASANT

BARACK OBAMA

UNQUALIFIED:___:___:___:___:___:___:___:QUALIFIED

UNSOPHISTICATED:___:___:___:___:___:___:___: SOPHISTICATED

DISHONEST:___:___:___:___:___:___:___: HONEST

BELIEVABLE:___:___:___:___:___:___:___: UNBELIEVABLE

UNSUCCESSFUL:___:___:___:___:___:___:___: SUCCESSFUL

ATTRACTIVE:___:___:___:___:___:___:___: UNATTRACTIVE

UNFRIENDLY:___:___:___:___:___:___:___: FRIENDLY

INSINCERE:___:___:___:___:___:___:___: SINCERE

CALM:___:___:___:___:___:___:___: EXCITABLE

AGGRESSIVE:___:___:___:___:___:___:___: UNAGGRESSIVE

STRONG:___:___:___:___:___:___:___: WEAK

INACTIVE:___:___:___:___:___:___:___: ACTIVE

COMPETENT:___:___:___:___:___:___:___: INCOMPETENT

MICHELLE OBAMA

UNQUALIFIED: _____:QUALIFIED

UNSOPHISTICATED: _____:SOPHISTICATED

DISHONEST: _____:HONEST

BELIEVABLE: _____:UNBELIEVABLE

UNSUCCESSFUL: _____:SUCCESSFUL

ATTRACTIVE: _____:UNATTRACTIVE

UNFRIENDLY: _____:FRIENDLY

INSINCERE: _____:SINCERE

CALM: _____:EXCITABLE

AGGRESSIVE: _____:UNAGGRESSIVE

STRONG: _____:WEAK

INACTIVE: _____:ACTIVE

COMPETENT: _____:INCOMPETENT

15. On the scales below, please indicate your feelings about the individual indicated. Circle the number that best represents your feelings. Numbers "1" and "7" indicate a *very strong* feeling. Numbers "2" and "6" indicate a *strong* feeling. Numbers "3" and "5" indicate a *fairly weak* feeling. Number "4" indicates you are *undecided* or *don't know*. Please work quickly. There are no right or wrong answers.

BARACK OBAMA

- | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1. Doesn't think like me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Thinks like me. |
| 2. Disagrees with me on how to solve the Economic crisis. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Agrees with me how to solve the economic crisis. |

3. From social class similar to mine.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	From social different from mine.
4. Behaves like me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Doesn't behave like me.
5. Disagrees with me on issues important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Agrees with me on issues important to me.
6. Economic situation different from mine.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Economic situation like mine.
7. Similar to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Different from me.
8. Has the same position on the issue of healthcare as I do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Has a different position on the issue of healthcare than I do.
9. Status like mine.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Status different from mine.
10. Unlike me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Like me.
11. Background different from mine.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Background similar to mine.
12. Cares about the same things as me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Cares about different things than me.

MICHELLE OBAMA

1. Doesn't think like me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Thinks like me.
2. Disagrees with me on how to solve the Economic crisis.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Agrees with me how to solve the economic crisis.

3. From social class similar to mine.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	From social different from mine.
4. Behaves like me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Doesn't behave like me.
5. Disagrees with me on issues important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Agrees with me on issues important to me.
6. Economic situation different from mine.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Economic situation like mine.
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11. Background different from mine.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Background similar to mine.
12. Cares about the same things as me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Cares about different things than me.

16. On the scales below, please indicate how well you feel the individual indicated fits the statement. Circle the number that best represents your feelings. Use a 1- to 7- scale with 1 meaning *very well* and 7 meaning *not very well*.

BARACK OBAMA

	Very well					Not very well	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Communicates effectively to keep citizens informed on important issues.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People like him.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Respected by other countries.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Is intelligent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Has control over the job of President.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Understands what it takes to do the job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Works to solve the country's problems.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

17. Following are some feelings about politics and politicians. For each one, please circle whether you strongly disagree, disagree somewhat, have no opinion, agree somewhat, or strongly agree.

a. One never knows what the President really thinks.

Strongly Disagree *Disagree Somewhat* *Have no Opinion* *Agree Somewhat* *Strongly Agree*

b. I believe the President of the United States should be married.

Strongly Disagree *Disagree Somewhat* *Have no Opinion* *Agree Somewhat* *Strongly Agree*

c. The President is more interested in power than in what the people think.

Strongly Disagree *Disagree Somewhat* *Have no Opinion* *Agree Somewhat* *Strongly Agree*

d. It is important to me to see the President being a traditional husband and father.

Strongly Disagree *Disagree Somewhat* *Have no Opinion* *Agree Somewhat* *Strongly Agree*

e. One can be confident that the President will always do the right thing.

Strongly Disagree *Disagree Somewhat* *Have no Opinion* *Agree Somewhat* *Strongly Agree*

f. I believe the First Lady should not have influence over her husband's policy positions.

Strongly Disagree *Disagree Somewhat* *Have no Opinion* *Agree Somewhat* *Strongly Agree*

g. It is inappropriate for the President to spend time doing activities such as being on late night talk shows.

Strongly Disagree *Disagree Somewhat* *Have no Opinion* *Agree Somewhat* *Strongly Agree*

h. During his time in office, it is not important for the President to take family vacations.

Strongly Disagree *Disagree Somewhat* *Have no Opinion* *Agree Somewhat* *Strongly Agree*

i. I like to see the President doing "everyday" things like going on a date with his wife or going to his child's soccer game.

Strongly Disagree *Disagree Somewhat* *Have no Opinion* *Agree Somewhat* *Strongly Agree*

j. People like me don't have any say about the decisions the President makes.

Strongly Disagree *Disagree Somewhat* *Have no Opinion* *Agree Somewhat* *Strongly Agree*

k. It is important to me to know that the President is happily married.

Strongly Disagree *Disagree Somewhat* *Have no Opinion* *Agree Somewhat* *Strongly Agree*

**STOP HERE. DO NOT REMOVE THE STAPLE OR LOOK AHEAD
TO THE NEXT SECTION OF THIS SURVEY
UNTIL INSTRUCTED TO DO SO.**

18. Following is a list of nationally known political figures. For those that you know, please indicate your feelings toward each by using the “feeling thermometer” below. Ratings between 50 and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward a particular person. Ratings between 0 and 50 mean that you don’t feel favorable toward the person and that you don’t care too much for him/her. If your feelings are neutral (not particularly warm or cold), you would rate the person at the 50-degree mark. If you have not heard of this person, please check “Don’t Know.”

Unfavorable/Cold

Neutral

Favorable/Warm

0-----50-----100

	Rating		Don’t Know
Barack Obama	_____	OR	_____
Mark Parkinson	_____	OR	_____
Sam Brownback	_____	OR	_____
John McCain	_____	OR	_____
Kathleen Sebelius	_____	OR	_____
Pat Roberts	_____	OR	_____
Michelle Obama	_____	OR	_____
Sarah Palin	_____	OR	_____

19. Next, please evaluate each of these individuals on the scales below. For example, if you think (s)he is **very pleasant** you would check the **UNPLEASANT-PLEASANT** scale as follows:

UNPLEASANT: ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : **X** : PLEASANT

On the other hand, if you think (s)he is **very unpleasant** you would rate them as follows:

UNPLEASANT: **X** : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : PLEASANT

If you think (s)he is somewhere between the two extremes, check the space that best represents your reaction on the scale. If you feel you have **no reaction** to the person on **any one scale**, check the middle space on the scale (as illustrated) to indicate your neutrality.

UNPLEASANT: ___ : ___ : ___ : **X** : ___ : ___ : ___ : PLEASANT

BARACK OBAMA

UNQUALIFIED: ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : QUALIFIED

UNSOPHISTICATED: ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : SOPHISTICATED

DISHONEST: ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : HONEST

BELIEVABLE: ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : UNBELIEVABLE

UNSUCCESSFUL: ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : SUCCESSFUL

ATTRACTIVE: ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : UNATTRACTIVE

UNFRIENDLY: ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : FRIENDLY

INSINCERE: ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : SINCERE

CALM: ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : EXCITABLE

AGGRESSIVE: ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : UNAGGRESSIVE

STRONG: ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : WEAK

INACTIVE: ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ACTIVE

COMPETENT: ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : ___ : INCOMPETENT

MICHELLE OBAMA

UNQUALIFIED: _____:QUALIFIED

UNSOPHISTICATED: _____:SOPHISTICATED

DISHONEST: _____:HONEST

BELIEVABLE: _____:UNBELIEVABLE

UNSUCCESSFUL: _____:SUCCESSFUL

ATTRACTIVE: _____:UNATTRACTIVE

UNFRIENDLY: _____:FRIENDLY

INSINCERE: _____:SINCERE

CALM: _____:EXCITABLE

AGGRESSIVE: _____:UNAGGRESSIVE

STRONG: _____:WEAK

INACTIVE: _____:ACTIVE

COMPETENT: _____:INCOMPETENT

20. On the scales below, please indicate your feelings about the individual indicated. Circle the number that best represents your feelings. Numbers “1” and “7” indicate a *very strong* feeling. Numbers “2” and “6” indicate a *strong* feeling. Numbers “3” and “5” indicate a *fairly weak* feeling. Number “4” indicates you are *undecided* or *don’t know*. Please work quickly. There are no right or wrong answers.

BARACK OBAMA

- | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1. Doesn’t think like me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Thinks like me. |
| 2. Disagrees with me on how to solve the Economic crisis. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Agrees with me how to solve the economic crisis. |
| 3. From social class | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | From social |

similar to mine.									different from mine.
4. Behaves like me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		Doesn't behave like me.
5. Disagrees with me on issues important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		Agrees with me on issues important to me.
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MICHELLE OBAMA

1. Doesn't think like me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		Thinks like me.
2. Disagrees with me on how to solve the Economic crisis.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		Agrees with me how to solve the economic crisis.

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11. Background different from mine.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Background similar to mine.
12. Cares about the same things as me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Cares about different things than me.

21. On the scales below, please indicate how well you feel the individual indicated fits the statement. Circle the number that best represents your feelings. Use a 1- to 7- scale with 1 meaning *very well* and 7 meaning *not very well*.

		BARACK OBAMA					
		Very well			Not very well		
Communicates effectively to keep citizens informed on important issues.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People like him.		1	2	3	4	5	6
7							
Respected by other countries.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Is intelligent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Has control over the job of President.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Understands what it takes to do the job.		1	2	3	4	5	6
7							
Works to solve the country's problems.		1	2	3	4	5	6
7							

Please describe below what you think the current roles and responsibilities of the First Lady are in the United States.

Please give at least three adjectives to describe the relationship between the President and First Lady in the segment that you viewed.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

It will take approximately **30 minutes** to complete the online questionnaire. Below you will see an Information Statement. This statement is required to be presented to all participants and informs you about the survey. At the bottom of this page you will see a **line for your signature**. Signing this line indicates your agreement to participate.

Information Statement – Agreement to Participate Research Conducted at the University of Kansas – Lawrence Campus

Sponsor: Department of Communication Studies
Principal Investigator: Lacey Hall
Faculty Advisor: Mary Banwart, Ph.D.

This form represents the participant's informed consent to participate voluntarily in a research project on political communication. Participants will complete pre-test measures, view a political video, and respond to post-test questions. The research will require from 30 minutes of time. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

The Department of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. You may refuse to participate in this study. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time; however, completion of the online survey is required in order to receive participation points. If you choose not to complete this study you will have other options to obtain the required research credit. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

This research involves no risk to subjects. Benefits of the study may involve analyzing your opinions of the political process and leaders of the political system.

All records and data related to this research shall be confidential, and subjects or their responses will not be identified by name.

For any additional information on this research or your participation in it, you may contact Lacey Hall, lahall@ku.edu, or Mary Banwart, Department of Communication Studies, 864-5681.

APPENDIX C: DATA TABLES

Table 1: Mean ratings for competency and favorability pre- and post-test (with Standard Deviations in Parentheses) (See RQ 1a and RQ 1b)

<u>Stimulus Condition</u>	Competency		Favorability	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Control	5.36 (1.20)	5.47 (1.15)	57.83 (26.52)	59.22 (26.48)
First Lady	5.55 (1.03)	5.65 (1.16)	67.97 (26.97)	69.61 (26.31)
Wife	5.34 (1.07)	5.33 (1.15)	62.28 (28.72)	64.71 (27.71)

Note: N = 202

Table 2: Mean ratings for image pre- and post-test (with Standard Deviations in Parentheses) (See RQ 1c)

<u>Stimulus Condition</u>	Image	
	Pre-	Post-
Control	5.01 (0.91)	5.06 (0.77)
First Lady	5.31 (0.90)	5.32 (0.80)
Wife	4.99 (0.98)	5.03 (0.84)
Total	5.11 (0.94)	5.14 (0.81)

Note: N = 202

Table 3: Mean ratings for attitude homophily and issue homophily pre- and post-test (with Standard Deviations in Parentheses) (See RQ 2a and 2c)

Stimulus Condition	Attitude Homophily		Issue Homophily	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Control	3.65 (1.25)	3.71 (1.35)	3.83 (1.32)	3.75 (1.44)
First Lady	3.86 (1.32)	4.03 (1.42)	4.23 (1.45)	4.25 (1.46)
Wife	3.98 (1.23)	4.11 (1.32)	4.06 (1.48)	4.04 (1.46)
Total	3.83 (1.27)	3.96 (1.37)	4.04 (1.42)	4.02 (1.46)

Note: N = 202

Table 4: Examples of responses in each category from open-ended question: "Please give at least three adjectives to describe the relationship between the President and First Lady in the segment that you viewed." (See RQ 3)

Warm or Loving	Personal	Reliability	Integrity
Affectionate	Active	Committed	Fake
Caring	Easy-going	Dedicated	Genuine
Close	Funny	Dependable	Honest
Cute	Happy	Faithful	Partnership
Loving	Playful	Hardworking	Real
Passionate	Serious	Loyal	Respect
Romantic	Wealthy	Strong	Sincere
Timeless	Well-dressed	Supportive	Trusting

Table 5: Examples of responses in each category from open-ended question: "Please describe below what you think the current roles and responsibilities of the First Lady are in the United States." (See RQ 4)

Familial Duties	Work Duties	Image	Media/Representative Duties	Other
"be a good wife"	"advocate and raise awareness"	"dress well"	"stay...out of the press"	"it is up to the individual first lady"
"be a good parent"	"give the president advice on tough issues"	"be a role model for all Americans"	"represent the country"	"no specific political roles"
"keep her husband happy"	"organize charity events"	"be a role model for women"	"speak on important issues"	"she doesn't have to do anything"
"reinforce family values"	"promote community involvement"	"make the President look good"	"represent women"	"she should be the same as always"
"take care of the White House"	"keep people informed and safe"	"be a fashion icon"	"travel to schools and educational institutions"	
"make her husband's life easier"	"promote education"	"maintain a respectable image"	"make public appearances"	
"be faithful to her husband"	"focus on smaller issues that the president is too busy to handle"	"portray a strong image for the family"	"represent the ideals of the president"	
"support her husband"	"she should not make major decisions"	"maintain a domestic image of the country"	"represent her husband in a...respectable way"	