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April 8, 2019

“Who let her out of the kitchen?”

Gender and Discourse in the 2018 United States Midterm Elections

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Abstract

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Sociological theory and research has established gender as an important social construct that influences individuals, groups, and discourse about women and men. Expanding on Doing Gender Theory (Zimmerman and West 1987), Social Role Theory (Meeks 2012), and the prevailing body of research on gender, politics, and media discourse, I investigate the gendered discourse around two political candidates in the 2018 United States midterm election. Specifically, I look at the discourse on the social media (Instagram) accounts of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Beto O’Rourke during their congressional campaigns. I gathered all of the comments on all of the Instagram posts of each candidate, and I analyze the effect gender has on discourse. Given past empirical research findings, I predict that Ocasio-Cortez will receive a higher percentage of negative comments than O’Rourke and that she will receive more comments about her physical appearance and lack of competence than O’Rourke. I predict that O’Rourke will receive more comments calling for him to run for president than Ocasio-Cortez. Through a content analysis of Ocasio-Cortez and O’Rourke’s Instagram comments, I find support for my hypotheses. I find that discourse differs by gender in a few key ways: Ocasio-Cortez’s posts have a higher percentage of negative comments than O’Rourke’s posts. Ocasio-Cortez receives more positive and negative comments about appearance and negative comments about competence than O’Rourke. Ocasio-Cortez receives a degree of violence in the comments not found in O’Rourke’s comments at all. According to my analysis, gender affects discourse most often when candidates “do gender” incorrectly.

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I. Introduction

“All would laugh with glee as they gang-raped her and then bashed her bagel eating brains in,” “silly girl,” “monster” and “where’s your husband,” are a few of thousands of comments that led Erin Schrode to end her 2016 campaign for the United States House of Representatives (Astor 2018). Two years later, candidates in the 2018 midterm elections, the most diverse set of female candidates to run in United States history (K 2018), experienced this kind of harassment daily (Astor 2018). “In the 2018 midterms, the harassment [was] ubiquitous and frequently sexualized...and [came] to the fore this election cycle, partly because so many women [ran] and partly because more of them are discussing their experiences” (Astor 2018). On November 6, 2018, 117 of these women were elected to the United States Congress, more than had ever been elected before (Jordan 2018), entering into a space men overwhelmingly dominate (Salam 2018).

Now that these women are in Congress, what insight can be gleaned from the harassment they faced to better interpret the discourse surrounding them now and discourse that will surround female candidates in the 2020 elections? What exactly did harassment look like in the 2018 midterm elections, and how did it differ by gender? What are the differences between discourse about female candidates and male candidates and are these differences gendered, or are they simply more extreme when directed at females?

In order to answer these questions, I conduct a content analysis of all Instagram comments that two candidates who ran two of the highest profile campaigns of the 2018 midterm elections received during their campaigns. The female candidate, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, ran to represent New York District 14 in the House of Representatives, and the male candidate, Beto O’Rourke, ran to represent Texas in the Senate. In analyzing and comparing the comments both

candidates received during their campaigns, I can discern how their genders affected discourse about them. Drawing on these results, it can be better understood how gender not only continues to dictate how people vote, but also continues to determine how people express opinions.

II. Research Questions

1. How does discourse about the candidates differ by gender?
 - a. How positive or negative is discourse, and how does that vary by gender?
 - b. What are the specific themes in the discourse and how does that vary by gender?

This study aims to better understand how gender affects discourse. First, I explore the body of theoretical research on gender, gender and politics and media discourse. I include multiple examples of empirical research that has been done on gender and politics. I explain the current state of discourse in the media as related to my study and provide several studies that have aimed to uncover the intersection of online discourse and politics. I formulate my hypotheses based on this body of research. Next, I outline the methods I used to answer my research question, how I selected politicians and what their backgrounds are, and the processes I employed to collect and analyze Instagram comments. Following this, I present my findings and discuss patterns I find in analyzing the comments. I finish with an analysis of those findings, the limitations of my study, and potential opportunities for further research.

III. Theoretical Framework and Empirical Research

Gender

Doing Gender

To answer my research question, I employ Candace West and Don Zimmerman's theoretical framework of gender. Their theory, Doing Gender Theory, explains that gender is not a fixed assignment. Instead, it is an accomplishment carried out through various tasks that people

perform (Zimmerman and West 1987). West and Zimmerman make the distinction between sex, which is the “socially agreed upon criteria” for being male or female usually assigned at birth based on genitalia, and gender, which is the degree to which an actor is feminine or masculine (Zimmerman and West 1987). The way that human beings enact their gender makes it seem that it is naturally occurring, whereas instead, it is a concerted performance that is socially constructed by individuals and the society surrounding them (Zimmerman and West 1987). These behaviors are assessed by others and are either accepted or rejected as the correct behaviors. When females engage in activities that are socially coded as feminine, they receive rewards, as do males when they engage in activities socially coded as masculine. The reactions of others reify gender as a social construction (Zimmerman and West 1987). Acting out of one’s gender, therefore, is an act of deviance (Zimmerman and West 1987).

Around a decade after Zimmerman and West published “Doing Gender,” Candace West and Sarah Fenstermaker added a new dimension to the Theory. “Doing Difference” acknowledges that just as gender is an essential framework in understanding social mechanisms and inequality, so are race and class (West and Fenstermaker 1995). West and Fenstermaker theorize that gender, class and race all have confounding effects on each other (West and Fenstermaker 1995). For many people, their experiences of gender and race are intimately tied together (West and Fenstermaker 1995). When an individual acts out of their assigned race category, it can be examined as socially deviant in the same way gender is examined (West and Fenstermaker 1995). Adia Harvey Wingfield, in her study of black college men, draws upon Doing Difference Theory to explain that at that point of intersection is a separate set of rules much like those that govern simple gender norms (Jackson and Wingfield 2013). Wingfield explains that white men have more “freedom” to express anger, whereas when black men are

angry they are perceived as “scary,” and thus, are pressured to “curtail emotional expression” as to not be perceived as a threat (Jackson and Wingfield 2013). It is essential to adopt an intersectional approach in examining the social contexts and experiences of individuals as the constructs of femininity and masculinity are racialized (West and Fenstermaker 1995).

Social Role Theory also expands upon Doing Gender Theory in examining gender in the context of specific roles. Social role theory asserts that people expect men and women to fulfill certain gender-role expectations and stereotypes which are tied to specific occupations (Meeks 2012). When the assigned gender of a professional role is incongruent with the gender of the person seeking or occupying the role, discrimination can occur (Meeks 2012). Research has found that “women who pursue careers in male-dominated fields, such as politics, may face an uphill battle” (Mendoza and DiMaria 2019). This discrimination may happen because there is a perceived incongruence between the attribute of their gender group and the requirements of the job (Mendoza and DiMaria 2019). The male gender typically has attributes of “agenic” traits, like independence and assertion, which are believed to be important for leadership positions, while female attributes are often centered around communal abilities, like warmth and compassion (Mendoza and DiMaria 2019). When women succeed in typically masculine roles, people assume that this must be because they lack feminine traits and for this they are penalized and viewed as “unlikeable” (Mendoza and DiMaria 2019). This is especially relevant to my research as women in the United States running for office, a masculine domain, are potentially then more likely than men to be met with negative sanctions.

Gender and politics

Women in Politics: Trends Based on Gender

There is a wide variety of literature covering the dearth of female representation in the United States government (Men 2011). The first female was not elected to the United States Senate until 1978 (Men 2011), and still, 41 years later, when Congress met in January of 2019, it was 76 percent male (DeSilver 2018). Though previous studies have found that women historically have a more difficult time running for office and securing office, today's sociologists find that when women run for office, they are just as likely as their male counterparts to win (Men 2011). However, female candidates still end up standing out as outliers, often being emphasized over male candidates for their "uniqueness" (Dolan and Lynch 2016).

In two surveys of 4,000 potential female candidates for election from the years 2001 and 2011, Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox try to understand why women are continually underrepresented in American politics (Men 2011). They find that this underrepresentation is because not enough women run for office (Men 2011). In the decade between 2001 and 2011, the gender gap in political ambition, measured by the question "have you considered running for office?" stayed the same with men in their study being 16 percent more likely to answer "yes" (Men 2011). Women were more likely than men to perceive the campaigning environment as too competitive, with odds stacked against female candidates (Men 2011). After the 2008 presidential campaigns of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin, two widely publicized campaigns, women were much less likely than men to believe they were personally qualified to run for any public office; men were 60 percent more likely to believe they were qualified (Men 2011). These statistics remained the same across men and women with identically high levels of political

experience (Men 2011). Lawless and Fox claim that such female doubts speak to “deeply gendered perceptions” (Men 2011).

Voter Reception of Female Candidates

The existence of gender stereotypes is another culprit for the difference in political representation between men and women (Dolan and Lynch 2016). The world of politics is gendered as masculine, so femininity has frequently been exiled (Dolan and Lynch 2016). Voters who believe in gender stereotypes, who believe that females are more compassionate and census-oriented and males are more strong and leadership-oriented may have difficulty accepting female candidates for election given that they go against those stereotypes (Dolan and Lynch 2016). Expanding on these stereotypes, women are evaluated for their appearance more often than men (Heflick and Goldberg 2010), and if they receive negative appearance coverage, it can negatively affect their perceived competence (Hayes et al. 2014). Any doubt for female competence in leadership can decrease support for female candidates, as can any overt display of a masculine trait, like outspokenness, a stereotype often held by voters about liberal females (Dolan and Lynch 2016). However, in their two-wave panel survey of American adults voting in mixed-gendered races during the 2010 midterm elections, Dolan and Lynch found little evidence that voters were still leaning on gender stereotypes in voting other than in voting against Republican women. Rather, it was the political context and party match that mattered more (Dolan and Lynch 2016). Lawless and Fox’s 2011 finding that there is now an “absence of overt gender bias on election day,” may hold.

Even if voters do not consciously consider gender stereotypes while voting, the world of politics is still gendered as male (Meeks 2012). In understanding this, female candidates have begun to choose a mix of feminine and masculine traits instead of choosing masculine or

feminine when they “do gender” in their campaigns (Meeks 2012). Given that political office consists of “the most manly jobs on the planet,” there is a “double bind” for women (Meeks 2012) that forces such compromise. In this gender management, female candidates have to emulate the perfect amount of masculinity or else they risk negative sanctions for being too masculine (Meeks 2012). Men, however, have had more success in recent years with the concept of “the new man,” who can be family-oriented and compassionate, like Barack Obama (Meeks 2012). These men have incorporated feminine traits into their masculine identities while they “do gender” on the campaign trail (Meeks 2012).

Given how monumental the 2018 United States midterm elections were for females in politics, research is needed to understand if the groundswell of support for female candidates was an anomaly or the new norm. Since the campaigns ended five months ago, there is scant scholarly research on the outcome of the elections. This lack of literature makes social media an attractive data source at which to look to better interpret what the elections meant.

Discourse and Media

Traditional Media and Politics

Public discourse is communication that draws on a vocabulary—a collection of symbols, ideas, and accepted words that constructs meaning about an issue—to create different frames for understanding particular issues (Misra 2015). Mass media is a unique medium for analyzing the gendered nature of politics presented through discourse. In the recent past, analysis of political discourse in the media has been of traditional news media like television and newspapers (Meeks 2012, Bystrom and Dimitrova 2014). Most of the literature on this has found that female candidates for election are covered differently from how their male counterparts are covered (Meeks 2012, Bystrom and Dimitrova 2014).

Bystrom and Dimitrova's research on political discourse in mass media tracks the nature of Republican presidential candidate Michele Bachmann's news coverage against that of her male challengers (Bystrom and Dimitrova 2014). Bystrom and Dimitrova conducted a longitudinal, panel study of individuals in a content analysis of transcripts for all TV news stories aired on ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, FOX and MSNBC between August 2011 and January 2012 (Bystrom and Dimitrova 2014). They find that Bachmann received less coverage overall and that her coverage was mostly in a "game frame," which presents her campaign as a game, expressing that women have a harder time winning so there is a heavy emphasis on strategy (Bystrom and Dimitrova 2014). Within this game frame, Bachmann was portrayed as "struggling" and was described as "batty," "kooky," "crazy," and "a joke" (Bystrom and Dimitrova 2014).

Meek's 2012 study of eight mixed-gender United States elections in eight newspapers between 1999 and 2008 finds similar results. The candidates in the study, Elizabeth Dole, Claire McCaskill, Hillary Clinton, and Sarah Palin, received more gendered coverage than men, often through a "uniqueness" frame that emphasized the novelty of their candidacies (Meeks 2012). Meeks finds that newsworthiness is made of a combination of social significance and deviance, and candidates need both to be covered (Meeks 2012). Female candidates are deviant because by running for election they are "norm breakers" (Meeks 2012). Therefore, mass media assigns novelty labels like "the first ever," to female politicians which either frames their moments as positive ones for history or as abnormalities (Meeks 2012). Meeks also finds that females received better coverage in the news when they were presented alongside gender-congruent issues (Meeks 2012). Gender congruent issues for men include national security and the economy; gender congruent issues for women include healthcare and family issues (Meeks

2012). Though people still use the news to decide whom they will vote for, many people now look to social media for the news instead (Milkman 2017).

Use of Social Media Data

Social media played a powerful part in influencing the outcome of the 2008 Presidential election (Milkman 2017). Primarily because of that, almost no political campaign post-2008 has gone without a social media presence (Milkman 2017). Social media websites like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter provide platforms for candidates to connect with potential voters as well as “real-time, two-way channel[s] to continuously monitor and measure public reactions” (Yaqub 2017).

Sociologists have made great use of Twitter as a way to study societal patterns (Yaqub 2017, Flores 2017, Ince et al. 2017). Recent studies find that analysis of Twitter “tweets” has become as accurate as official public opinion polls (Yaqub 2017). Jelani Ince and Fabio Rojas use a sample of 66,159 tweets to see how Twitter users define the Black Lives Matter movement through varied use of #BlackLivesMatter (Ince et al. 2017). In his 2017 study on whether Anti-Immigrant Laws Shape Public Opinion, Rene Flores conducts sentiment analysis on more than 250,000 tweets by defining tweets as “specific types of speech acts that are produced in an online public arena...where opinions are exchanged between individuals and groups.”

A Twitter study especially helpful for my study is Yaqub et al.’s study of citizen participation in the political discourse that took place on Twitter during the United States Presidential Elections of 2016. In an analysis of over 3.1 million tweets by random users mentioning the election and tweets made by Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton that were collected from October 29, 2016, to November 18, 2016, they try to understand if sentiments on Twitter are indicative of actual opinion (Yaqub et al. 2017). Yaqub et al. find a high correlation

between a tweet's sentiment and the approval rating of a particular candidate (Yaqub et al. 2017). Overall sentiment in the sample is negative for the 21-day period, which matches actual happenings, properly reflecting the election as one of the most negative in United States history (Yaqub et al. 2017). Most significant to my research is their finding that tweets about Trump are significantly less negative than those about Clinton (Yaqub et al. 2017). It is crucial to analyze negative sentiment since social media content is online and available for all to see, and negative comments can decrease the credibility of any given message (Waddell 2018).

There are few studies of the social media platform, Instagram. Founded in 2010, Instagram is “a popular social networking service developed for smartphones and other mobile devices that allows users to share photographs and short videos” (Gibbs et al. 2015). Users can “view, comment and like posts shared by their friends on Instagram (Instagram). As of 2017, it is the second-most popular social network in the United States, behind Facebook, its parent company (Who 2017). The ability to post a photo gives users on Instagram the opportunity to express themselves. The small amount of sociological research on Instagram and the complete lack of sociological studies of political Instagram comments is most likely because it is challenging to collect Instagram data. Given how popular Instagram is, however, and how frequently both Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Beto O'Rourke used it during their campaigns, it is essential to study it as a space in which gender affects discourse.

IV. Hypotheses

To answer my research question, I compare the Instagram comments on Beto O'Rourke's Instagram posts to comments on Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Instagram. Based on my survey of the current body of literature on gender, women in politics and discourse on social media, it is clear that there is a relationship between gender and discourse, and especially within American

politics. Instagram presents a gendered sphere of communication and comments provide a way for users to react to politicians “doing” gender. Therefore, I hypothesize:

H₁: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez will receive a higher percentage of negative comments than Beto O’Rourke.

H₂: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez will receive more comments about her physical appearance and competence than Beto O’Rourke.

H₃: Beto O’Rourke will receive more comments calling for him to run for president than Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

V. Methods

Research Design

To analyze discourse about political candidates for election, I employ the method of content analysis. Recently, studies of discourse about political candidates and policy have been conducted through content analysis because it is a fast way to collect data from a large sample size (Meeks 2012, Bystrom and Dimitrova 2014, Flores 2017, Ince et al. 2017, Yaqub et al. 2017). Content analysis is an appropriate method for studying discourse because it can “determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data (i.e. text)” (Content). In conducting content analysis, I can analyze the presence and valence of words, phrases and the meanings of specific concepts. The method of content analysis allows me to conduct a qualitative or quantitative analysis once my dataset is complete. Additionally, I began my research during my sampling period and completed my research so soon after the sample has been collected that it is impossible to collect any other sort of data on discourse within the time constraints of this study.

To conduct my content analysis, I gather content from Instagram. I analyze Instagram comments because both candidates used Instagram constantly during their campaigns. Users can engage in discourse with and about candidates for free on Instagram. Instagram can be an especially gendered sphere because it gives users the opportunity to post photos to express themselves. As aforementioned, there is scant research on political content on Instagram compared to the body of research on Twitter data. It is important to analyze political data on Instagram as 35 percent of the US adult population uses Instagram and 64 percent of adults ages 18 to 29 use Instagram (Who).

Data

To test for gender's effect on discourse, I began a selection process for two white Democrats with robust social media presences. I picked Democrats because I wanted to analyze a party with equal gender difference; 56 percent of Democrats are women, but 37 percent of Republicans are women (Bradley 2018). I surveyed all primaries for the 2018 midterm elections, initially intending to find a race where a white, female Democrat was running against a white, male Democrat and posted about it on Instagram. However, that proved impossible as there were no two candidates that were white, Democrats, and extremely active on Instagram. I then searched for two candidates who were as similar as possible, prioritizing Democratic party-affiliation and active Instagram presence. I found two candidates with large Instagram presences who were both running against "establishment" incumbents, a common type of race in the 2018 Midterm elections (Salam 2018). For the female candidate, I selected Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a Latina Democrat who at the time was running against Joe Crowley for the Democratic candidacy for New York District 14's seat in the House of Representatives. For the male candidate, I selected Beto O'Rourke, a white Democrat who at the time was running against Ted

Cruz, an “establishment” incumbent for one of Texas’s Senate seats. At the time of candidate selection, on October 12, 2018, in a search of the four most-trafficked online news sources, *The New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, *the Guardian*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, there were 661 results on O’Rourke and 903 results on Ocasio-Cortez. O’Rourke had 257,000 Instagram followers and Ocasio-Cortez had 362,000 followers.

The Candidates



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was born in 1989 in Queens, New York to a working-class family of a Puerto Rican mother and a Bronx-born father (Wang 2018). During her childhood, her parents sent her to a school in nearby Westchester County because of the lack of advanced schools in the Bronx (Wang 2018). After she graduated from Boston University, she worked as an educational director, waitress, and bartender to support her mother who cleaned houses and drove school buses (Gambino 2018). Ocasio-Cortez’s work during college for various Boston politicians landed her a spot as a political organizer for Bernie Sanders’s 2016 presidential

campaign (Goldmacher and Martin 2018). After her work on the Sanders campaign, and after visibly protesting at Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in 2016 against the Dakota Access Pipeline, she was contacted by Brand New Congress, a progressive political organization, to run for the United States House of Representatives (Wang 2018).

Ocasio-Cortez's district, NY-14, had been represented by Joe Crowley, a Democrat who had not faced a primary challenger in 14 years (Wang 2018). Crowley was the fourth most senior Democrat in the United States House of Representatives and was considered a possible successor to Nancy Pelosi as Speaker of the House (Goldmacher and Martin 2018). Ocasio-Cortez, a working-class Latina, announced her bid for election and was immediately welcomed (Goldmacher and Martin 2018). Her district is majority-minority and had been represented by a white male (Goldmacher and Martin 2018). She was 28 at the time; Crowley was 56 (Wang 2018). Her campaign, featured mostly on her social media presence, emphasized her policies on abolishing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (The Editorial Board 2018), offering tuition-free public college (Wang 2018), providing Medicare for all and guaranteeing federal jobs (Wang 2018). She rejected all corporate donations (Wang 2018). Ocasio-Cortez used Crowley's experience against him, capitalizing on demands within her constituency for fresh faces in Congress (Goldmacher and Martin 2018).

On June 25, 2018, Ocasio-Cortez defeated Crowley in what was widely labeled an "upset," and was "the most significant loss for a Democratic incumbent in more than a decade" (Goldmacher and Martin 2018). At the time of the election, she had never held public office and was still paying off her student loans (Wang 2018). She earned more than 57 percent of the vote, securing her role as the Democratic Candidate for United States House of Representatives New York District 14 (Goldmacher and Martin 2018). On November 6, 2018, Ocasio-Cortez defeated

Anthony Pappas, a Republican, with 78 percent of the vote (New York). When she took office in January of 2019, at 29 years old Ocasio-Cortez became the youngest woman ever inaugurated into Congress (Watkins 2018).



Photo 2: 11/5/18 (@betoorourke)



Photo 4: 6/13/18 (@betoorourke)

In contrast to Ocasio-Cortez’s working-class background, Robert “Beto” Francis O’Rourke, a fourth-generation Irish-American was born in El Paso in 1972 to his father, a county judge, and his mother, the owner of a high-end furniture store (Benson 2018). After attending boarding school in Virginia, O’Rourke attended Columbia University, where he was the captain of the crew team (Tackett 2018), played in a punk band called Foss and earned a bachelor of arts in English literature (Benson 2018). After graduating from Columbia University, O’Rourke moved back to El Paso, where he started a software company and ran for city council (Benson 2018). As a councilman, he focused on fixing a narcotics epidemic at the United States border with Mexico and advocating for the legalization of marijuana (Benson 2018). In 2012, he ran

against incumbent Silvestre Reyes to represent Texas's District 17 in the United States House of Representatives and won narrowly with 50.5 percent of the vote (Benson 2018)

After securing re-election in 2014 and 2016, O'Rourke announced his campaign for the United States Senate in March 2017 (Benson 2018). During his race against incumbent Ted Cruz in a largely conservative state, in which no Democrat had won a statewide seat since 1994, O'Rourke adopted an "emotive" approach in which he focused on virtue rather than fear (Tackett 2018). As he traveled to all of Texas's 254 counties (Tackett 2018), many of which had not received a visit from a senatorial candidate in decades, he emphasized his policies of protecting dreamers, revitalizing healthcare and making college more affordable (Benson 2018). Throughout his campaign, most of which was live-streamed and Instagrammed about daily, O'Rourke only accepted contributions from individuals (Benson 2018). O'Rourke's campaign was written about incessantly in the news; writers focused on his "charisma," his "Kennedyesque" nature and his "compassion" (Benson 2018).

Even though O'Rourke had been in Congress for years, the media coverage during his congressional campaign portrayed him as a "fresh-faced outsider" (Benson 2018). This persona and the high profile of the race helped gain him endorsements from people like Travis Scott and Beyoncé (Pitts 2018). However, on November 6, 2018, in one of the most closely-watched races in the midterm elections, O'Rourke lost to Cruz with 48.3 percent of the vote compared to Cruz's 50.9 percent (Texas). On March 13, 2019, O'Rourke announced his bid for the 2020 presidential election (Bradner 2019)

Operationalization and Measures

To answer my research question in the context of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Beto O'Rourke, I conceptualize gender as the process of managing one's actions regarding normative

ideas of attitudes and conduct appropriate to one’s membership in each sex category (Zimmerman and West 1987). It is the *created* categories that are the differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential or biological (Zimmerman and West 1987). I operationalize gender as “male” or “female.” Ocasio-Cortez identifies as female (About 2018) and O’Rourke as male (About Beto 2018). I conceptualize discourse as communication ranging from symbols and ideas to accepted words that construct meaning about an issue (Misra 2015). Discourse is operationalized as comments on Instagram posts by O’Rourke and Ocasio-Cortez and will be analyzed qualitatively.

I conduct a content analysis of Instagram posts posted by Ocasio-Cortez and O’Rourke. In particular, I analyze all comments on their Instagram posts posted by Instagram users. This is a simple way to access data on discourse about the candidates as comments are publically available on Instagram. Since I want to understand discourse, which I define as communication, I focus on how users communicate with the candidates and how this may vary across gender. Content analysis allows me to understand the discourse surrounding candidates in a cost-effective, timely and efficient manner.

Figure 1: Dataset Information

	Beto O’Rourke	Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Candidate Time Period	March 31, 2017 – November 5, 2018	April 3, 2017 – November 5, 2018
# Instagram Posts	1,068	194
# Comments Total	112,244	53,905
# Comments Coded	72,215	34,991

All Instagram posts by O'Rourke (@betoourourke) and Ocasio-Cortez (@ocasio2018) from the day they formally announced their candidacies until November 5, 2018, the number of likes they garnered, the captions of the posts and all comments on those posts are included in my analysis. I chose to end collection the day before election day as to control for election outcomes. This gave me a population of 112,244 comments on O'Rourke's posts and 53,905 comments on Ocasio-Cortez's posts that I collected manually from Instagram across 1,068 of O'Rourke's posts and 194 of Ocasio-Cortez's posts. One hundred percent of these comments were analyzed; 72,215 comments on O'Rourke's posts were coded and 34,991 comments on Ocasio-Cortez's posts were coded. I excluded conversations between commenters as these do not reflect sentiment towards the candidates and most often consist of personal arguments between the commenters.

There are limitations to this population. The candidates are not of the same ethnicity, are not competing for the same office, and I am not able to access any demographic information about users. Most users on Instagram do not report where they are from, and even if they do, it is difficult to find out if it is accurate information. Additionally, O'Rourke was an incumbent congressman when he ran for office and Ocasio-Cortez had never run for public office before. Given that this is a natural experiment, I found no closer comparisons available at the time of data collection. Additionally, users with public accounts can moderate or delete comments, so this may have affected the sample.

Data Collection

To collect my data, I first took screenshots of the photo or a slide of video in a post and labeled it according to date and person (ex: OCASIO 4_17_17) and saved that file to my Google Drive for reference. Then, in Excel I marked the name of the person, the date of the post, the

caption of the post, all the comments and the number of likes. Initially, to input the comments, I copied them from the posts and pasted them into TextEdit, a word-processing software, and reformatted each comment which included taking out usernames. However, while collecting data, Instagram disabled the copy and paste functions on their website. To complete my sample, I typed each caption and comment individually. Once my dataset was complete, I converted each emoji to its meaning provided by Emojipedia, the emoji dictionary written by the creators of emojis (“Emojipedia”).

Data Analysis

To analyze the effect of gender on political discourse, I conduct a qualitative analysis using MAXQDA, which is a software program. While I was collecting data from Instagram, I took note of several common themes across the dataset and turned them into codes that I used to categorize sentiment. During the coding process, I expanded on these themes and turn them into a helpful, relevant coding system that tracks gender patterns as well as other important behaviors within the data.

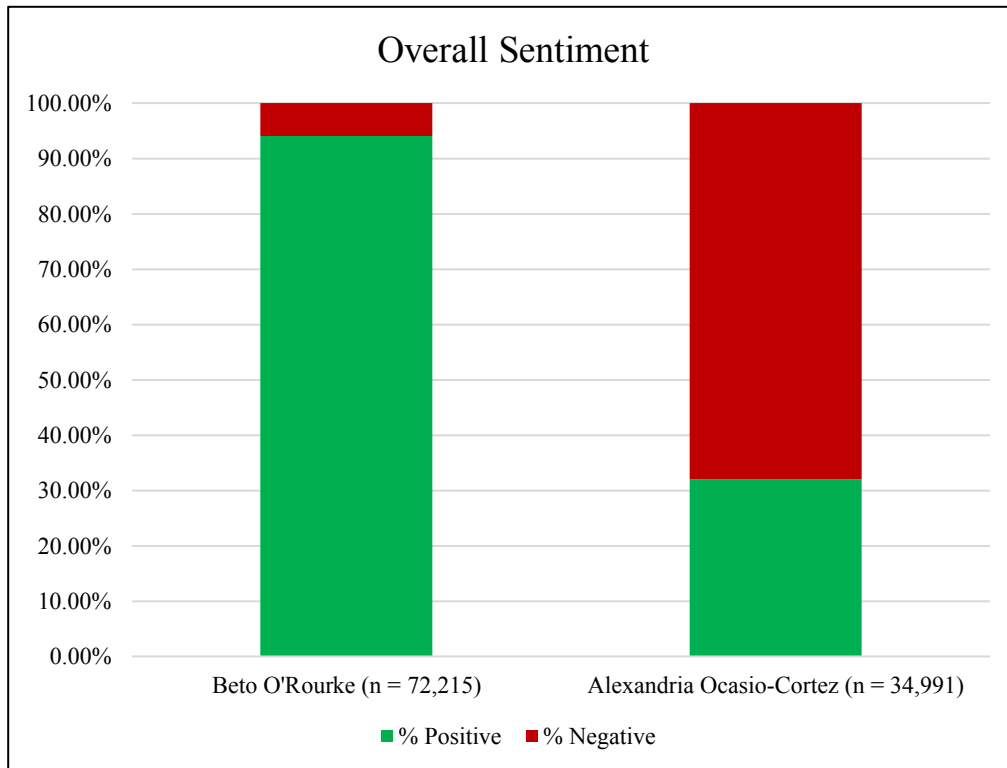
Based on my main hypothesis that Ocasio-Cortez will receive more negative comments than O’Rourke, I created two coding categories of positive and negative. Within the positive coding group, the sub-codes I found most relevant both in terms of the data and previous research are positive physical appearance, encouragement to run for president, and general support. Within the negative coding group, I used sub-codes of incompetence, negative physical appearance, policy, threats, personal history and general opposition. I added more sub-codes to the negative coding group because commenters seemed to “do gender” more frequently through negative sanctions. Therefore, each comment fell into one of two codes, positive or negative, and then one or more of nine sub-codes. In MAXQDA, I assigned a code to each comment.

VI. Results

Overall Sentiment and Themes

After conducting content analysis in MAXQDA, I find support for my hypothesis that the comments on Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's posts will be proportionally more negative than those on Beto O'Rourke's. Thirty-two percent of Ocasio-Cortez's comments are negative whereas only six percent of O'Rourke's are negative. Ocasio-Cortez has less than half the amount of comments O'Rourke received but almost three times as many negative comments as O'Rourke. O'Rourke averaged 3.85 negative comments per post and Ocasio-Cortez averaged 58. O'Rourke averaged 8,035 likes per post and Ocasio-Cortez 6,543. A majority of comments on Ocasio-Cortez and O'Rourke's posts are positive.

Figure 2: Overall Sentiment



Beyond analyzing comments for positive and negative sentiment, further analysis of the comments revealed a few major themes. Within my coding scheme, the most significant themes I came across in positive comments were positive appearance, encouragement to run for president and generally positive comments (Figure 3). In negative comments, the most significant themes were negative physical appearance, incompetence, policy issue challenges, threats, personal history, and generally negative comments (Figure 4). I found that comments varied more when they were negative. Therefore, I created more sub-codes for negative comments.

Notably, 44 percent of negative comments on Ocasio-Cortez's posts target her competence whereas only 4.2 percent target O'Rourke's. Ocasio-Cortez proportionally received twice as many positive comments about her appearance, and 20 times as many negative comments about her appearance as O'Rourke received. Both candidates have nearly equal percentages of commenters calling for them to run for president and negative comments about their policy platforms. O'Rourke received seven percent more negative comments about his personal history than Ocasio-Cortez. While O'Rourke only received one extremely violent or threatening comment, Ocasio-Cortez received 111, which is 50 times as many comments as he received.

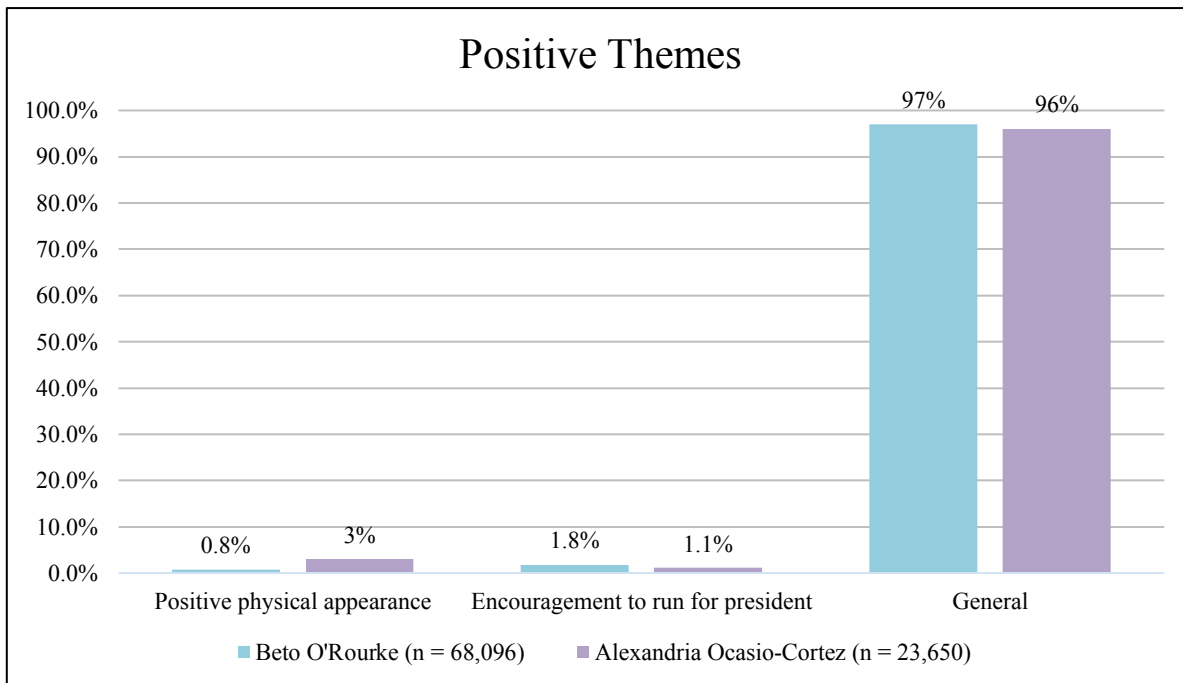
Figure 3: Sub-codes of the Positive Themes Code

Sub-code	Definition
Positive physical appearance	Positive comments about physical features, clothing, flirtatious advances
Encouragement to run for president	Comments asking candidates to run for President, referring to candidates as President, and positive references to 2020
General	Positive comments with no specific theme; general support, relatability, wishes of good luck, pledges of votes or donations, support for the Democratic party

Figure 4: Sub-codes of the Negative Themes Code

Sub-code	Definition
Negative physical appearance	Negative comments about physical body appearance, clothing, linking candidates appearance to a negative personality trait and comparisons to animals
Incompetence	Negative comments targeting intelligence, mental stability, capability and qualifications, and challenges to debate
Policy issue challenges	Negative comments about policy issues
Threats	Negative comments threatening physical force against a candidate or extreme insults
Personal history	Negative comments about a candidate's past or background
General	Negative comments with no specific theme; general dislike, sexist language, support for Donald Trump's re-election and disdain for the Democratic party

Positive Themes

Figure 5: Positive Themes

Positive Physical Appearance

Positive comments about appearance include any comments that have a complimentary sentiment about physical features, including clothing, and flirtatious advances extending from them (Figure 3). Given the fact that Instagram is a photo-sharing application, I expected to receive many comments about physical appearance as it provides a way for candidates to “do gender.”

O’Rourke’s positive comments are .8 percent about his appearance. Commenters frequently call him an attractive father, calling him “daddy” or “zaddy,” compliment him on his overall appearance, and propose marriage.

3/9/18: You are literally such a zaddy. MAKE AMERICA CUTE AGAIN!!!!!!
 9/24/18: Senator Hunk
 10/9/18: Can you either marry me or adopt me?
 11/3/18: He is Kennedyesque

In many of O’Rourke’s posts, he is sweating profusely and comments on those posts generally reflect positive sentiment towards that, to the extent that commenters have nicknamed him “Sweato.”

8/16/18: Love a sweaty man
 10/19/18: Sweatooo! Love it
 10/19/18: Those are the sweat stains of a future senator!

One point five percent of Ocasio-Cortez’s positive comments are about her appearance, almost twice the percentage O’Rourke received. These comments most frequently call her “beautiful,” “hot” and “sexy,” and mention surprise at how attractive she is. Many commenters talk about wanting to have sex with her or wanting to take her on a date.

6/8/17: You are tougher than you look!
 8/11/17: So, on top of being an inspiration, I have to say you are actually really hot too! I promise I mean that with all due respect lol ;)
 6/11/18: Alex looks like JLO here! Sexy lady!!
 6/26/18: This girl is hot!!
 10/9/18: Let me take u on a date please

Many commenters compliment her for her clothing, make up, footwear, and hair. When Ocasio-Cortez posted in a pant suit for the first time, there were many comments about her “power suit” and how great she looked in it.

2/3/18: Love the boots!
 6/20/18: You stunned with the red lip
 6/26/18: Obama in a dress!
 9/6/18: Oh man I love you and this suit.

Encouragement to Run for President

Positive comments that were coded as “encouragement to run for President” include comments asking candidates to run for President, referring to candidates as President as well positive references to the year 2020 (Figure 3). There are 1,552 comments in total asking O’Rourke and Ocasio-Cortez to run for presidential election during their bids for congressional election, the first having been posted as early as January 1, 2018. O’Rourke received .7 percent more of these comments. O’Rourke frequently spoke about running for election during his congressional campaign, which explains the excitement with which those comments are made.

O’Rourke Presidential Election Comments:
 10/1/18: And they’ll say “President O’Rourke once spoke here”
 10/10/18: Run for President already
 10/11/18: I want to see him elected as #POTUS #Beto2020

Ocasio-Cortez Presidential Election Comments:
 1/12/18: Girl after you win this election we need you in the White House!
 5/30/18: Run for President #weneedyou
 10/5/18: My PRESIDENT

Many of these comments suggest specific tickets, like “O’Rourke and Ocasio-Cortez 2020” or “Beto and Kamala Harris 2020.” Other comments already address O’Rourke and Cortez as “Mr.” or “Ms. President” or “Future President.”

General

A majority of positive comments do not reflect specific themes. Many of O’Rourke’s generally supportive comments are about his road trip across Texas, with many commenters

either asking him to come to their home town, telling him they enjoyed speaking with him or thanking him for travelling across Texas.

8/4/17: Great to hear you speak today!

6/8/18: 254 counties visited. 254 counties represented. That's what Texas deserves!

8/30/18: Thanks for stopping into Sweetwater!

Other comments include support for the Democratic party, pledges to vote or statements that they had voted for him, compliments to his family members and wishes of good luck. For O'Rourke, 539 comments say "Go Beto Go."

1/26/18: Go Beto go!! You have my vote!!!

4/28/18: You have my vote!

11/5/18: No matter what happens tomorrow, I haven't been this inspired by a democratic candidate since Obama. Best of luck!

Ocasio-Cortez's generally supportive comments are often about her relatability as a Latina, a woman from the Bronx or a woman in general. Many commenters address her casually as "sista," "girl," "mama" or "mami" in rooting for her.

10/25/17: You go girl! Wishing you all the best of luck

1/12/18: Yes mami! Yes!!!

5/30/18: I am Mexican from Chicago and still I am SOOO Proud of this Latina!

Other positive comments include support for Democratic Socialism, the Democratic Party and refer to her as a role model, inspiration and "breath of fresh air."

5/17/17: You are my hero!

1/1/18: You are truly an inspiration and a woman I look up to! Thank you for everything you taught me in a short period of time it means the world.

6/28/18: You're a breath of fresh air and I know you're going to do amazing things!

Commenters frequently post that they voted for her or are planning on voting for her or that they believe she will win. When Ocasio-Cortez won the Democratic primary for her district, she received many comments congratulating her.

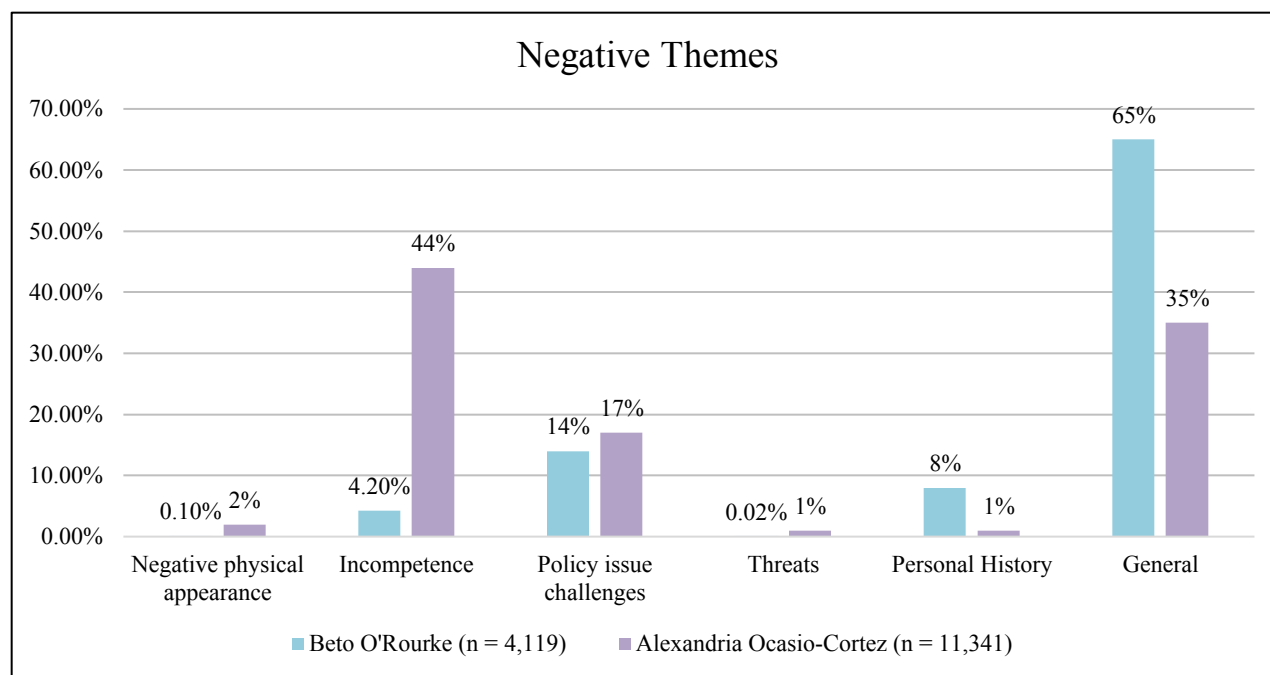
1/12/18: Just tell me when & where I can vote for you.

3/6/18: I am so excited to vote for you!

6/28/18: Congratulations on your victory!

Negative Themes

Figure 6: Negative Themes



Negative Physical Appearance

Comments coded as “negative physical appearance” include negative comments about physical body appearance, about clothing, linking candidates’s appearance to a negative personality trait, and comparing candidates to animals (Figure 4). O’Rourke received four negative comments about his appearance, making up .1 percent of all negative comments on his Instagram posts. Two of the four comments are:

9/23/18: Skeleton looking fool
 9/23/18: You look like a disgusting beaver... I don’t want you for this country

Ocasio-Cortez received 261 negative comments about her appearance. Many comments are about her physical body appearance, often comparing her to an animal.

5/21/18: Your smile hasn’t brought any cheer to your parents. You are disgusting.
 6/5/18: Christ almighty you look like a xenomorph
 6/5/18: Horrible person with a horse face

6/5/18: Of course you want equality, no man will ever treat you any kind of special with that smile

6/26/18: What kind of insect is this

6/27/18: You are a DONKEY

Many comments link a negative physical trait to a negative personality trait in referencing Ocasio-Cortez's "crazy eyes," and "crazy smile."

10/25/17: Look at those whack job eyes

6/5/18: EVIL EYES.

6/13/18: You're as stupid as you look.

6/26/18: Oh look it's crazy eyes socialist!

6/26/18: You are one scary looking chick. I'm gonna have nightmares of those eyes

7/2/18: She's got those crazy eyes like when someones in a cult and brainwashed

Comments frequently target her clothing. At one point, Ocasio-Cortez posed in a borrowed \$3,000 pantsuit in a magazine shoot and many users posted comments criticizing her for both how she looks in the suit and how they feel the price of it does not align with her working-class background (Bellafante 2018).

6/26/18: Jesus have you ever heard of earrings and a necklace? And a suit that fits? Oh, and get your hair done for Pete's sake!

9/6/18: What a wolf in sheeps pant suits

9/16/18: Is that a \$2,500 pants suit? That wardrobe choice didn't work very well for the last far left liar to use it.

10/3/18: Stop wearing \$20k suits if you preach socialism

10/3/18: Is that a suit that the other 98% of people could afford ?

Incompetence

Comments about incompetence target intelligence, mental stability, capability and qualifications, and challenge candidates to debate (Figure 4). Comments about O'Rourke's competence center on name-calling. Commenters call him a "moron," "snowflake," which is a derogatory term for liberals used by conservatives, or an "idiot." There are no comments in which users challenge his ability to lead in Congress nor were there challenges from anyone to debate anyone beyond Ted Cruz.

10/10/18: Dumbass go live in Cali

10/17/18: Moron

10/29/18: This dumb snowflake

A majority of the negative comments made about Ocasio-Cortez are about her competence, making up 44 percent of all negative comments. These comments attack her intelligence, which often includes her knowledge of economics and politics. Ocasio-Cortez is often called an “idiot” and “dumb,”

5/17/17: It’s official that she will embarrass herself and waste a lot of money because she knows nothing about the real world and how it works

5/21/18: She’s taking no corporate money because they’re all smart enough to not support an idiot like herself.

4/6/18: Someone abolish this idiot

6/13/18: Educate yourself with a basic economics book

6/26/18: You’re cute but dumb af lolz

6/30/18: Brain dead idiot....read some history books

Other comments that were coded for “incompetence,” includes those about mental stability. In these comments, Ocasio-Cortez is labeled as “psychotic,” a “lunatic,” “autistic,” and “mentally ill.”

6/13/18: ur so autistic

6/20/18: You are a psychopath. You slap your hands on the table like a child.

6/26/18: You know your mentally ill right?

7/11/18: You are a fking lunatic lady

8/28/18: Crazy psycho lady!!

Ocasio-Cortez is also challenged for her capability and qualifications. Many comments call her a “joke,” and others tell her to “go back to bartending,” because she “can’t handle” being in Congress.

1/23/18: At what point will it hit you that most people view you as a giant joke? Your life, goals and aspirations got you nowhere except on the news as a spectacle of how far you can go simply by saying words you don’t really know. I am sorry no one will likely take you seriously again, but no one is ever going to be on board with your “vision.”

6/20/18: The fact that this woman is the face of the modern left is laughable, she is a joke and a complete moron

6/26/18: She should go back to bartending and not paying taxes like all the illegals. She’s not gonna make it in politics

6/28/18: What is your greatest accomplishment in life and business and what makes you qualified to hold an office since 3% of the vote is not really qualifying

7/11/18: This woman is a lunatic. Send her back to bartending.

Three thousand comments ask Ocasio-Cortez to “debate Ben Shapiro.” During Ocasio-Cortez’s campaign, Ben Shapiro, a conservative political columnist, challenged Ocasio-Cortez to debate, offering her \$10,000 to a charity of her choice (Foderaro 2018). When Ocasio-Cortez turned down the offer, it began an online debate given that Shapiro has over one million followers (Foderaro 2018).

10/12/17: Why won’t you debate Shapiro? Are you concerned you can’t keep up?

6/5/18: No way you’re real... you need to debate Ben Shapiro... this guy would chew you up and spit you out.

6/13/18: Debate Shapiro you Marxist twat

6/13/18: Debate someone...ANYONE... on policy, you coward

8/25/18: You lack the fortitude to debate your opponents or others

Policy Issue Challenges

Comments about policy issue challenges include those that express negative sentiment about policy (Figure 4). O’Rourke and Ocasio-Cortez received a similar amount of negative comments about their policy opinions, though Ocasio-Cortez received three percent more. O’Rourke’s negative policy comments are often about his economic policies, but are most often about his opinions about immigration.

1/13/18: Why do you support illegals over vets?

2/25/18: Rourke has his busses of illegals ready to vote for him, blow up those busses, if I need a ID to exercise my 2nd amendment constitutional right, then so should people who want to vote, keep elections honest!

9/29/18: I like my border like I like my sweet tea, WITH ICE

11/2/18: Yes vote for a criminal who just broke campaign laws to help illegals!

11/2/18: Yeah go give Americans money away to illegals.

The negative comments on Ocasio-Cortez’s posts about policy are often about immigration but are overwhelmingly about socialism, as Ocasio-Cortez identifies as a Democratic Socialist (The Editorial Board 2018).

1/31/18: Your only 28. You were 10 or 11 yo when 9/11 attack's were carried out. Your beliefs in open borders being a possible safe solution is absurd. Socialism has put multiple countries in the toilet. Capitalism is literally what makes this country the "American dream." The possibility of working your way to the top and living a life of luxury. Your trying to take that away from hard workers like me, and for that you're an un-American POS.

10/9/18: Go move to Venezuela, you fking commie!

6/30/18: It's hilarious how you think that socialism works.

6/30/18: Take your socialist bs somewhere else you America hating garbage pile

Threats

Comments coded as "threats" are comments that threaten physical force against a candidate or comments that include extreme insults (Figure 4). O'Rourke received one threatening comment, which was "siege heil," a Nazi salute. Though Ocasio-Cortez also received one "siege heil," in addition she received 110 more violent or threatening comments. There are no comments on O'Rourke's posts that approximate the level of violence of these comments.

Users often call Ocasio-Cortez "cancer" or "a cancer to America."

6/5/18: Cancer yikes!

6/21/18: You are a cancer

6/26/18: I hope u get cancer soon

7/11/18: I hope and pray you and your entire family get cancer soon

7/11/18: You are a living cancer cell

Other users reference her vagina and threaten rape or physical assault.

6/5/18: @ocasio2018, if you ever need a night of unbridled passion, please let me know. I won't vote for you but would stick my tongue so far up you that you'd feel like a president

6/30/18: You're one of the few women who deserve a physical beating

7/2/18: Right where you belong, on your knees

7/11/18: I'd like to take this chick to poundtown whilst wearing a MAGA hat and eating a giant ribeye. She's a QT and needs a man to bang the progressive right outta that tight little bod

9/16/18: She's cute enough to bang but commie enough to hang

10/5/18: This lady is out of place. She'll get the mindless feminist vote because she has that thing between her legs, but that's it.

Several comments are death threats or comments asking her to die.

4/23/18: Better dead than red.

5/31/18: Living joke, needs to die.

6/13/18: You and Sanders can drop dead now!

7/2/18: Please die!

7/11/18: Can't wait to hang this class traitor

Personal History

Comments about personal history are negative comments about an event in a candidate's past or a candidate's background (Figure 4). O'Rourke received seven percent more comments about his personal history than Ocasio-Cortez. Several comments focus on O'Rourke's arrest for driving under intoxication, his father's connection to the arrests and O'Rourke's arrest for burglarizing a college campus (Benson 2018). These comments not only reflect on the arrest but also accuse O'Rourke of hitting a female and fleeing from the scene. Comments frequently call him a "criminal" and a "drunk."

9/16/18: Remember that time when you drove drunk, crashed your car almost killing someone, fled the scene and had your daddy who was a judge make sure you didn't do time? Good times!

9/19/18: Will you make drunk driving and burglary legal, too?

9/24/18: How is someone who tried to flee the scene of a drunk driving car accident able to run for office?

10/4/18: Drunk driving criminal!

10/21/18: Fuck you Beto the criminal!

The other negative comments about O'Rourke's personal history criticize him for having what is interpreted as a Spanish nickname "Beto," while his full name, Robert Francis O'Rourke, is Irish (Benson 2018). Many commenters call him a "fake Mexican" for adopting the nickname.

10/13/18: His real name is Robert O'Rourke... complete fake!

10/21/18: Hey drunk, wannabee Mexican!

10/21/18: Fake Mexican, real moron

10/23/18: Dude quit pandering to the Hispanic population you beta cuck

11/3/18: Francis O'Fraud

Comments that target Ocasio-Cortez's personal history, making up one percent of all negative comments, are most often about where she is from. Many commenters either believe that since she moved to Westchester to go to high school (Wang 2018) that she is no longer from the Bronx, or that she never actually lived in the Bronx and does not live there now. For this, they label her a "liar," as well as a "rich girl."

4/19/18: She's not even from the Bronx!

6/28/18: Is your rick daddy going to pay for all the free stuff?

6/30/18: Aren't you from the second most wealthy suburb but you tell everyone you're from the Bronx?

6/30/18: You grew up in Rich Westchester... Not the Bronx

General

Negative comments coded as “general” are those that have no specific theme (Figure 4). These comments consist of general dislike, sexist language, support for Donald Trump and disdain for the Democratic Party (Figure 4). For O’Rourke, a majority of negative comments are generally oppositional comments about his candidacy, the Democratic Party, liberals or supportive comments about his opponents.

8/13/18: Liberal politicians lie to our Black Americans to get their vote. Then they completely forget about them after they're elected. It's sickening. America first!

9/24/18: Vote Ted Cruz or let all of Texas lose!

10/5/18: Don't California my Texas

10/19/18: #votecruz

One-third of Ocasio-Cortez’s negative comments are general; they are most often about how she would guarantee a Republican victory, the Democratic Party, liberals, or expressions of general dislike.

4/6/18: Democrats going crazy these days – so now I'm an independent

6/30/18: You will never win

10/3/18: Guaranteeing a red victory in November

10/5/18: Liberals make me want to drive off a cliff

Several negative comments on Ocasio-Cortez’s posts are negative generalizations about her gender.

6/30/18: The only way you beat a woman is with a closed fist

2/14/18: Get back in the kitchen and make me a sandwich

7/11/18: This is why women shouldn't be in politics, they think more with their emotions than actual logic

7/11/18: I would ask you why you're so stupid, but then I realize you're just a woman in politics so that answers that

For both O’Rourke and Ocasio-Cortez, hundreds of comments are pro-Trump, ranging from saying “make America great again” to wishing for Trump’s re-election in 2020.

VII. Conclusion

In analyzing comments on Beto O'Rourke and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's posts during their congressional campaigns, I find that discourse varies significantly by gender, but most significantly in negative comments as it seems that commenters are "doing gender" through negative sanctions. Concurrently, I can support all three of my hypotheses. First, I find that Ocasio-Cortez received a higher percentage of negative comments than O'Rourke. Second, I find that Ocasio-Cortez received more comments about her physical appearance and competence than O'Rourke. Third, I find that O'Rourke received more comments calling him to run for President than Ocasio-Cortez.

Each candidate's gender was reified and challenged based on how their performance of gender lined up with gender norms, as predicted by previous research (Yaqub et al. 2017). In pursuing a role dominated by male politicians, Ocasio-Cortez is perceived as deviant, and in reaction, the discourse about her is more negative than the discourse about O'Rourke. Social Role Theory, the idea that people expect women and men to fulfill specific gender-role goals and reward those who do (Meeks 2012), holds within my dataset as does the perception that females with a perceived lack of feminine traits are deemed "unlikeable" (Mendoza and DiMaria 2019). Ocasio-Cortez received 26 percent more negative comments than O'Rourke. O'Rourke is rewarded for "doing [his] gender" correctly through the large number of positive comments he received. Within negative commentary as well as positive commentary, my data shows that there are significant differences based on gender.

Prevailing literature holds that women are evaluated for their appearance more than men (Heflick and Goldberg 2010), and my results confirm this pattern. Appearance coverage makes up 1.4 percent of all of O'Rourke's comments while it made up 2.7 percent of Ocasio-Cortez's

comments. Positive appearance coverage of O'Rourke frequently compares him to President John F. Kennedy, linking attractiveness to leadership. When O'Rourke poses in photos drenched in sweat, commenters laud him for working hard enough to get elected that he was sweating. When O'Rourke posts a photo of himself with a child, commenters call him "Daddy." O'Rourke has been able to tie together his family-orientation and compassion with his political goals to appeal to voters as the "new man" described in Meeks' research on gender management in politics (Meeks 2012). In contrast, positive appearance comments of Ocasio-Cortez are generally unrelated to politics. Many commenters express that she is attractive *despite* her role as a politician, one expressing that she is "tougher than [she] looks."

While Ocasio-Cortez received 261 negative comments about her appearance, O'Rourke only received four. Ocasio-Cortez's negative comments about her appearance are more negative than O'Rourke's, often likening her to a horse or a donkey. In sanctioning her for "doing gender" incorrectly, perhaps users insult Ocasio-Cortez in this way to express that not only is she venturing outside of the confines of her gender, but she is also failing at achieving her own gender. Such negative comments about Ocasio-Cortez undermine her political capability.

Ocasio-Cortez received 39.8 percent more negative comments about her competence than Beto O'Rourke, proving the second part of my second hypothesis. This directly supports West and Zimmerman's Theory that when one ventures out of the performance criteria of their gender, they receive negative sanctions (Zimmerman and West 1987). Commenters target Ocasio-Cortez's intelligence and ability to lead because they do not associate those traits with her gender, and because they do not associate her gender with her political goal. Comments about Ocasio-Cortez's competence included words like "joke" and "crazy," which are words that have been cited in previous research as being used to describe female candidates for election (Bystrom

and Dimitrova 2014). It is possible that a large number of negative appearance comments on Ocasio-Cortez's profile negatively affected her perceived competence, as predicted in the literature (Hayes et al. 2014). The existence of comments targeting Ocasio-Cortez's competence is important because if voters doubt a female politician's competence in leadership, it can decrease support for them (Hayes et al. 2014).

The most extreme example of negative sanctions for doing gender incorrectly in my data is the violent and sexist comments Ocasio-Cortez received. Commenters frequently ask Ocasio-Cortez to die and threaten to rape her. It is possible that these commenters are upset with Ocasio-Cortez's "norm breaking" and her policies and that they feel more comfortable posting comments on a candidate they take less seriously since she is pursuing a role they may believe is not meant for her. O'Rourke did not receive any comments threatening sexual assault and did not receive comments that are death threats. Comments like these not only affect Ocasio-Cortez and her security, but also if seen by other females may dissuade them from running for office. In posting comments asking Ocasio-Cortez to "go back into the kitchen," or to "go back to bartending," commenters overtly ask Ocasio-Cortez to conform to gender norms instead of breaking them. O'Rourke did not receive any comments asking him to change his profession because his profession aligns with his gender norms.

Ocasio-Cortez and O'Rourke received similar amounts of negative comments about their policy platforms. Previous research explains that politicians receive more positive coverage when they are presented with gender-congruent issues (Meeks 2012). If this theory held in my dataset, O'Rourke would receive more positive coverage for national security and the economy, and Ocasio-Cortez would receive more positive coverage for healthcare and family issues. Almost all of O'Rourke's negative policy comments are about border issues, which is a national

security issue, and socialism or communism, which are economic policies. A majority of negative comments about policy on Ocasio-Cortez's posts are about socialism and communism. Therefore, my dataset shows mixed support for Meeks' gender-congruence theory (Meeks 2012).

O'Rourke received seven percent more negative comments about his personal history than Ocasio-Cortez. A majority of these comments on O'Rourke's posts are about his criminal activity, and a smaller amount is about his nickname "Beto" and about how it is not his "real name." In such comments, O'Rourke is labeled a "criminal" and a "fake Mexican," which directly targets O'Rourke's policies about immigration. Ocasio-Cortez's comments are more often about where she grew up. It is possible that O'Rourke received a larger proportion of negative comments about his personal history because of his arrest. Additionally, since O'Rourke is displaying the correct gender norms for the position he is aiming to get, voters may be more likely to look into his past to see if he ever violated such norms.

O'Rourke received .7 percent more comments asking for him to run for President than Ocasio-Cortez received, providing some support for my third hypothesis that he will receive more comments than she will receive. This difference in comments supports previous research that shows that masculinity is associated with leadership, especially in politics and the presidency (Mendoza and DiMaria 2019). However, Ocasio-Cortez received 283 calls for her to run for president, bolstering Dolan and Lynch's claim that voters are no longer leaning on gender stereotypes in deciding whom to support (Dolan and Lynch 2016).

This study is not without its limitations. A more thorough study of discourse in elections may include more similar candidate pairs, perhaps a pair within the same ethnicity and the same type of congressional election, or state, or candidate pair that has a closer amount of Instagram posts. My study aimed to find Democratic candidates as similar as possible who also had large

presences on Instagram. Given that this was a natural experiment that was occurring while I collected my dataset, I was not able to find a pair more similar than Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Beto O'Rourke. This limitation may impact the findings in that it is difficult to assess the confounding effect Ocasio-Cortez's ethnicity has on top of the effect of her gender.

The dataset is limited in that it is impossible to figure out the identity of the users who posted many of the comments and if some of those users potentially are not real people and instead are bots. As with any qualitative study, it is also difficult to assess what some of the comments mean or imply. It is also impossible to figure out how many comments were deleted from the Instagram posts as comments reported for hate speech on Instagram can be deleted and users with public profiles can also choose to delete comments. Since there were no wide-ranging studies of political discourse before mine, I did my best to control for such limitations and to apply the methodology used in similar research as often as possible.

My study opens many doors for further research. Future studies may analyze more candidate pairs and candidate pairs in other countries to see if the effect of gender on discourse is consistent throughout elections and countries. Additionally, it may be fruitful to compare a pair of male and female Democratic candidates with a pair of male and female Republican candidates to see whether gender has an equivalent effect on discourse in both political parties. Instead of analyzing the effect of gender on political candidates, my methodology could be used to analyze the effect of race on discourse by controlling for the gender of political candidates. There is a considerable lack of research on both if similar gender stereotypes exist for female candidates across races, most significantly for Latinx women candidates. Lastly, once the 2020 presidential election is complete, further research may compare the effect of gender on discourse in congressional and presidential campaigns.

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