THE IMPACT OF GENDER-NEUTRAL PRONOUNS ON PERCEPTIONS OF CANDIDATES

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Abstract

This study examines the role of candidate pronouns in the process of candidate evaluations. The experiment investigates what assumptions voters will make about gender neutral candidates and how voters will react to candidates who use gender neutral pronouns. Specifically, it explores candidates with gender neutral pronouns and voter perceptions of these candidates. Findings suggest that, overall, candidates who use gender neutral pronouns are not at a disadvantage when it comes to candidate evaluations. Candidates who use *they/them* pronouns are more likely to be favoured in comparison to candidates who use *he/him* pronouns but less likely to be favoured in comparison to candidates who use *she/her* pronouns. The results contradict the widely accepted notion that men are likely to be perceived more positively by voters than women. Finally, the author considers the ramifications of these results on future scholarship and what it means for women and gender diverse political candidates.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The 2018 midterm elections in the United States resulted in a record number of women heading to Congress, along with first-time elected officials from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and increased numbers from the LGBTQ+ community (Bulgarella, 2018). This wave continued into 2020, where there was a 21% increase in LGBTQ+ individuals elected to offices across the country (Out for America, 2020; Fitzsimons, 2020). Meanwhile, in Canada, the 2019 federal election saw fewer than 5% of LGBTQ+ candidates elected to the House of Commons (Hoye, 2019). Scholars have explored the role of candidate sex and race in influencing the perceptions of voters and the likelihood they will employ stereotypical thinking when evaluating candidates (e.g., Schneider & Bos, 2014), and the role of media coverage in priming and framing sex and race (e.g., Tolley, 2016; Goodyear-Grant, 2014), as well as assessing the success of LBGTQ+ candidates (e.g., Tremblay, 2019; Everitt & Camp, 2014). As the candidate pool becomes increasingly gender diverse, it is important to gather information on how voters perceive a candidate whose gender expression or gender identity fall outside of the traditional gender binary.

Many stereotypes and judgements are based on what we think we know about gender (e.g., girls should play with dolls and boys should play with trucks). This also applies to how voters evaluate political candidates (e.g., women are too emotional for politics). The literature suggests that voters associate politics, particularly winning elections, with masculinity (Carlson & Boring, 1981), and masculine traits are often viewed as more beneficial than feminine traits in the eyes of voters (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). Previous research also indicates that women politicians are at a disadvantage compared to men candidates regarding stereotypical masculine qualities while also not having an advantage when it comes to stereotypical feminine qualities

(Schneider & Bos, 2014). This means that women can neither be seen as too masculine nor too feminine without suffering consequences. Across all leadership roles, men and women with more masculine voice pitches are preferred by voters (Anderson & Klofstad 2012), further perpetuating the idea that masculine is best. However, regardless of gender expression, women candidates face an increased amount of gendered media coverage in comparison to their male counterparts (Meeks, 2012). Women political leaders can become marginalized by the media when they do not conform to traditional masculine political values and norms, but, when they deviate too far from traditional feminine stereotypes, the media over-emphasizes this behaviour leading to a disproportionate amount of negative and combative soundbites (Gidengil & Everitt, 2000). Women candidates are expected to find the perfect balance between masculine and feminine attributes, an issue which their men counterparts do not have to face.

While there is a plethora of existing literature surrounding gendered differences among political candidates, it typically only focuses on men and women. Even though the candidate pool has become increasingly diverse (Bulgarella, 2018), current political science research often does not reflect this. Research has indicated that how we measure gender matters, and it should not be measured the same way that we measure sex (Bittner & Goodyear-Grant, 2017), and it should not be measured as a binary. We now know that classifying gender into two categories is not entirely accurate, so we need to explore the dynamics of candidate evaluation with more diversity in mind. This would promote research covering the differences among openly transgender and gender fluid/queer candidates.

In recent years, there has been an emergence of more inclusive gender research within political science. For example, research has indicated that while gay and lesbian candidates have recently seen electoral success, despite a multitude of barriers, transgender candidates have not

seen the same degree of success, largely due to voters' discomfort surrounding gender nonconformity (Haider-Markel et al., 2017). Studies indicate that there is a significant relationship between television viewership and attitudes towards transgender candidates, highlighting the fact that media consumption may shape perceptions pertaining to nonbinary gender identities (Jones et al., 2018). Gender identity can also be used as a shortcut among voters when determining their feelings towards a specific candidate. For example, transgender candidates are often seen as more liberal and less likely to represent voters. Even when provided with additional information regarding the candidates (e.g., party identification), inferences made pertaining to the candidate's gender remained relatively consistent (Jones & Brewer, 2019), highlighting the critical role gender identity plays when voters head to the ballot box. We do not know whether these same patterns exist for gender fluid candidates and/or those who utilize gender neutral pronouns.

The concept of gender-neutral pronouns has been pushed to the forefront of recent gender and linguistic discourse. Gender neutral pronouns, as defined by the LGBTQIA Resource Centre, are described as "a pronoun which does not associate a gender with the individual who is being discussed" (2020). Using *he/him*[1] pronouns assumes that the individual presents as masculine and is also physically male (Wayne, 2005). Additionally, due to the gender binary, there is an added implication that the counterpart to *he/him* is inherently *she/her* (Hyde et al., 2019). It is clear that pronouns are not only linked to gender, but to sex and sexuality as well (Wayne, 2005). Due to the lack of a neutral singular pronoun in the English language, there are often difficulties with the implementation and use of gender-neutral pronouns (LaScotte, 2016). The most commonly used gender-neutral pronoun is *they/them*, even with the emergence of neopronouns

[1] Pronouns will be stylized in italics mirroring research by Gustafsson Sendén et al. (2015).

such as *ze/zir* and *xe/xem* (Bradley et al., 2019[1]). Typically, we see a bias towards the masculine when interpreting gender neutrality, therefore resulting in the default use of *he/him* pronouns (e.g., DeLoache, et al., 1987; Cheryan & Markus, 2020). We do not really know how voters react to or interpret gender neutral pronouns.

My research will ask two key question: Firstly, what assumptions will voters make about candidates with gender-neutral pronouns? And secondly, how do voters react to candidates who use gender-neutral pronouns? I hypothesize that voters will make the assumption that political candidates described with gender neutral-pronouns are men/masculine. This is supported by the fact that *they/them* pronouns are typically defaulted to *he/him* (Deloache et al., 1987; Cheryan & Markus, 2020) along with the fact that voters associate politics with masculinity (Carlson & Boring, 1981).

H_1: *Voters will assume candidates using "they/them" pronouns are men/masculine.*

I also hypothesize that voters will evaluate candidates with gender-neutral pronouns more negatively then their cis-gender counterparts. This includes speaking about them in a negative tone, feeling more negatively towards them, perceiving them as less qualified, and being less likely to vote for them. These hypotheses are rooted in social role theory and the gender-incongruency hypothesis. If a person does not "fit" a specific role, they are likely to face discrimination (Eagly & Diekman, 2005). Because voters cannot infer binary gender from *they/them* pronouns, they will not be able to employ gender-based assumptions during candidate evaluation and therefore, may have a negative reaction towards said candidate.

H_2: *Voters will evaluate candidates using "they/them" pronouns with a more negative tone, in comparison to candidates using "she/her" and "he/him" pronouns.*

H_3: *Voters will feel more negatively about candidates using "they/them pronouns, in comparison to candidates using "she/her" and "he/him" pronouns.*

> ***H_4:*** *Voters will view candidates using "they/them" pronouns as less qualified, in comparison to candidates using "she/her" and "he/him" pronouns.*
>
> ***H_5:*** *Voters will be less likely to vote for candidates using "they/them" pronouns, in comparison to candidates using "she/her" and "he/him" pronouns.*

To test my hypotheses I will be analyzing data collected from a survey experiment created specifically for this project which introduces voters to a fictitious candidate who uses either *he/him*, *she/her*, or *they/them* pronouns. This thesis proceeds in the following steps: I will first unpack the relevant literature surrounding candidate evaluations, gender, stereotypes, and pronouns. I will then outline the methods of the project in detail, which entailed an experimental treatment embedded in a survey, followed by an analysis of data collected. Finally, I will discuss the findings and themes that emerged from my research and point to some conclusions and implications for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

To better understand how voters perceive gender diverse candidates, it is necessary to look at women's representation research, along with scholarship closely related to candidate evaluations, gender, and pronouns, as this field has made important inroads into our understanding of the gendered dynamics of candidate evaluations. First, I will focus on the broader literature regarding voter perceptions and candidate evaluations by highlighting themes such as partisanship, candidate appearance/image, political sophistication and candidate character traits. Second, I will dive into social role theory and gender stereotypes and biases. Here we see themes pertaining to gender norms and roles, gender stereotypes, the role of the media, and the gender gap emerge. Finally, I will focus on existing research on LGBTQ+ candidates and voters, as well as perceptions surrounding gender neutral pronouns. What becomes clear is that we know very little about non-binary and gender nonconforming candidates, and even less about gender neutral pronouns in the context of voter perceptions and candidate evaluations.

Voter Perceptions and Candidate Evaluation

Voters evaluate political candidates on a regular basis through the campaign information they encounter and engage with (Lodge et al., 1995). The lens through which they evaluate these candidates can be determined by a variety of factors, such as partisanship and gender (e.g., Weisberg and Rusk, 1970; Hart et al., 2011). Consequently, voter perceptions, and how voters choose to evaluate candidates, are likely to impact political outcomes. The existing political behaviour literature heavily discusses voter's abilities to retain information on parties, candidates, and issues, particularly when asked to make a political decision (Lodge et al., 1995).

Voters encounter varying levels of political information over long periods of time, and therefore, when evaluating candidates from memory, voters rely on minimal information-processing models (Lodge et al., 1989). When encountering and interacting with campaign information, voters are responsive to the information they are faced with. Despite this, their level of responsiveness does not directly translate into a voter's ability to recall information about a campaign or a candidate (Lodge et al., 1995). Instead, it is those who actively participate in political discussions, accompanied by consuming political media, who are likely to be the most receptive to the political information (Kwak et al., 2005). This means that voters use a wide range of information and cues when evaluating political candidates. The way in which a voter evaluates a candidate is completely reliant upon context. The following section will cover some of the factors that influence voters including partisanship, candidate appearance and image, political sophistication, and character traits.

Partisanship

Possibly one of the biggest factors that influences voter perceptions is partisanship. Political parties have high salience in determining voting behaviour and political attitudes, so it is only logical to assume that partisanship influences voter perceptions of a candidate (Sigel, 1964). Party identification can be described as an individual's affective orientation to a political party (Campbell et al., 1960). Voters have a psychological attachment to political parties. Thus, partisanship, and its influence on voter perceptions and candidate evaluation, cannot be ignored (Weisberg & Rusk, 1970). The literature highlights the role of partisanship in a variety of ways. For example, previous research indicates that voters rely on both stereotypes, in the form of partisanship, and their own stances on political issues when evaluating candidates. These factors intersect when it comes time for voters to make judgments about candidates (Crawford et al.,

2011). If voters have weaker ideological opinions, partisanship will often be the deciding factor when making judgments of candidates. However, there is also space for issue dimensions, meaning that how a voter perceives a specific political issue can impact the candidate evaluation process as well (Weisberg & Rusk, 1970). An example of this is reflected in research conducted by Chung and Fink (2016) that analyzes negative incongruent messages amongst political candidates. They found that repeated exposure to negative incongruent information on a candidate over time decreases voter's traditional belief trajectories. This particularly affects voters with weak party identification, causing a decline in candidate evaluation over time.

The influence of partisanship does not stop there. Caruso et al. (2009) found that partisanship influences how voters perceive candidate race. When a participant viewed a candidate of colour favourably, they actually perceived them to be "lighter" in skin tone. Those who were viewed unfavourably were perceived to be "darker" in skin tone. Partisanship also shapes how voters feel about crime and gun reform (Pearson-Merkowitz & Dyck, 2017), voter fraud and voter identification laws (Kane, 2017), abortion and LGBTQ+ issues (Jelen, 2017) and government corruption (Blais et al., 2015), among other things. Tilley and Hobolt (2011) found that voters tend to assign blame/fault according to their partisanship, despite who is actually responsible for said incident. With all of this evidence, it is clear that voters heavily rely upon their party identification to make judgements about political candidates.

There is also a notable relationship between partisanship and gender. Partisan gender differences exist in elections, as well as what issues are on the political agenda, policy debates, and the nomination process (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2004). When women are running for office, the relationship between candidate gender and partisanship even influences fundraising and candidate donor networks (Thomsen & Swers, 2017). Gender interacts with how voter's

perceive parties as a whole. For example, Democrats are stereotypically thought of as feminine whereas Republicans are thought of as masculine (Winters, 2010). There is also evidence to suggest that women are more likely to vote for other women. This is called the "gender affinity effect" (e.g., Dolan, 2008; Brians, 2005). However, in the Canadian context, there is a greater focus on party rather than individual candidate differences. This means that unlike in the U.S. context, women voting for women candidates occurs at a similar rate to men voting for women candidates (Goodyear-Grant & Croskill, 2011).

Candidate Appearance & Image

While partisanship does play an important role in candidate evaluation, it is not the only factor that matters. Aspects of a candidate that may seem insignificant can actually be important and aspects that appear to be detrimental may not have any effect on voters. An example of this is candidate image, both in the sense of physical appearance and the cultivated persona/image they portray to their constituents and through the media. Research indicates that the physical appearance of political candidates matters. Voters are more likely to vote for a candidate that is conventionally attractive (Efrain & Patterson, 1974). This especially applies to low-information voters and non-partisans (Johns & Sheppard, 2007). Voters are also more likely to perceive the face of male politicians as more competent and dominant, whereas women are perceived as more attractive and approachable (Chiao et al., 2008). Going a step further, obese women politicians are evaluated more negatively than their nonobese counterparts (Miller & Lundgren, 2010).

Candidate race and ethnicity is also tied to candidate appearance and image. Firstly, we know that racism has a significant impact on candidate evaluations (Dwyer et al., 2009). Black candidates are often penalized by white voters based on race and individual levels of racial prejudice. Furthermore, dark-skinned Black candidates are evaluated more harshly than light-

skinned Black candidates (Terkildsen, 1993). Additionally, conservative candidates who are Black and/or Hispanic are more likely to be viewed as less competent than their white counterparts (Sigelman et al., 1995). Voters make assumptions about Black candidates using racial stereotypes (e.g., McDermott, 1998), which are heavily rooted in racism. How a candidate looks, including size, race, and sex, affects voters' evaluations of them. Candidate appearance is closely tied to the image a candidate portrays to the public.

When a candidate and their actions diverge from their public image, voter's evaluations often fluctuate. Voters are less likely to vote for a candidate that is involved in a scandal than a non-scandalized candidate. However, for candidates involved in multiple scandals, there does not seem to be any major consequences over time (Nawara & Bailey, 2021; Vonnahme, 2014). Even the type of scandal (e.g., financial scandal versus sex scandal) has varying impacts among voters (Carlson et al., 2000). Voters are not a monolithic group. Therefore, it is necessary to consider differences among voters and how they act individually. Voter's opinions on candidates are often updated as they interact with new information. They are also capable of correcting biases (e.g., Hart et al., 2011).

Political Sophistication

When evaluating candidates, each voter weighs the importance of information they have encountered differently. For example, moderate voters are less responsive to candidate ideology than their more partisan counterparts (Adams et al., 2017). The efficiency in how voters process and weigh information is often dependent upon political sophistication levels (McGraw et al., 1990). Because candidate evaluation depends on voters as individuals, it is important to consider how different people interpret information in a way that is unique to them. The political sophistication of a voter directly influences the amount they engage with issues and ideology.

Research conducted by McGraw et al. (2003) addresses ambivalence and how it interacts with candidate evaluations. They found that less sophisticated voters were more likely to be affected by ambivalence. When ambivalence seeps into recalling information about candidates, it affects the less sophisticated voter's ability to make snap judgements. Additionally, evidence suggests that more sophisticated voters are less likely to entertain gender-based stereotypes, while less sophisticated voters are more susceptible to said stereotypes, largely due to the over-saturation of gender stereotypes in media coverage of political candidates (Coronel & Federmeier, 2016). Regardless of political-sophistication or ideological levels, it is important to highlight that partisanship remains stable in its influence on candidate evaluations. Furthermore, non-ideological voters are more likely to rely upon party identification and other easily accessible information. Scholars argue that those with less resolute ideologies use easy-to-process information when evaluating candidates (Lavine & Gschwend, 2007).

Character Traits

Even so, the level of political sophistication of a voter does not tell us how that individual will interpret candidate character traits (Pierce, 1993). Context matters when looking at how voters evaluate candidates. Context also matters when we look at individual differences among candidates, just as we do with voters. Unsurprisingly, the character traits of a candidate influences the process of candidate evaluation (e.g., Funk, 1999; Glasgow & Alvarez, 2000; Goren, 2002). With that being said, what character traits are considered to be important varies across candidates. For example, empathy traits may have played a larger role in the candidate evaluation of a one candidate, whereas integrity traits matter more for the evaluation of another candidate (Funk, 1999). Voters who feel uncertain about the personality traits of political candidates will actually reduce a voter's overall evaluation of said candidate (Glasgow &

Alvarez, 2000). However, as news coverage on a candidate increases, voters become more comfortable with evaluating candidate traits (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011). This is unsurprising as the media heavily focuses on the personality traits of political leaders, in turn making the voters focus on these traits as well (Bittner, 2011). Previous research suggests that candidate personality traits are an important factor considered by both early and late deciders, even when considering other aspects such as ideology (Catellani & Alberici, 2012).

Social Role Theory and Gender-Incongruency

Another important aspect of the candidate evaluation literature is gender. Because gender is an essential part of this study in particular, we need to look deeper into the existing research in this area. We know that voters employ stereotypical thinking when evaluating candidates (e.g., Schneider & Bos, 2014), and that many of these stereotypes are gender related (e.g., Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Winter, 2010). It is likely that many of these stereotypes stem from gender norms. The concept of gender norms arose from feminist sociologists arguing that gender is best conceptualized when the perception of a person's gender is used to allocate resources, roles, power and entitlements (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Cislaghi and Heise (2020) define gender norms as follows:

> "Gender norms are social norms defining acceptable and appropriate actions for women and men in a given group or society. They are embedded in formal and informal institutions, nested in the mind, and produced and reproduced through social interaction. They play a role in shaping women and men's (often unequal) access to resources and freedoms, thus affecting their voice, power and sense of self" (p. 415-416).

Gender diverse and fluid individuals disrupt many of the gender norms that exist in today's society. In order to understand this disruption, and why voters might perceive gender diverse candidates differently, we need to look towards what the literature says about the gender binary, gender norms, and gender roles. Social role theory does a good job of explaining some of these

phenomena. According to Eagly and Wood (2016, p.1): “Social role theory argues that sex differences in behavior are a function of gender roles and other proximal causes, which in turn arise from the distal causes that define the positions of women and men in the social structure.” However, discourse surrounding social role theory often does not adequately address the various contexts that shape gendered behaviour. In this kind of research, gender is often used as an explanation for specific behaviour, when in reality, closer attention needs to be paid to social conditions (Yoder & Khan, 2003).

Schneider and Bos (2019) use social role theory to study gender in politics. They find that men, or those who identify with traditionally masculine traits, support policies that fit the agentic gender role (e.g., self-assertion, independence) and women, or those who identify with traditionally feminine traits, support policies that fit the communal gender role (e.g., concern for others, interpersonal sensitivity). Furthermore, their study highlights many of the ways in which these ingrained gender roles can influence political participation and vote prejudice. Diekman and Schneider (2010) address the role of gender-stereotypic expectations, internalized traits and goals, and variations in status and resources, and find that the social roles of men and women influence the general shape of gender differences in political attitudes.

Rooted in social role theory, the gender-incongruency hypothesis could explain why gender diverse candidates may face potential backlash from the electorate, resulting in candidates losing in elections. The gender-incongruency hypothesis suggests that if a person does not “fit” a specific role, they are likely to face discrimination (Eagly & Diekman, 2005). Because political roles are male dominated, voters often believe that men are more suitable for political office (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000), and voters associate agency and high-status with men (Diekman & Schneider, 2010). It is evident that politics is a male-dominated field, making it

difficult for gender diverse political candidates. They already diverge from the gender binary and they are unlikely to fit with voter's preconceived notions of what a political candidate should be. Voters are unable to place them, according to what they have previously internalized about men and women (e.g., gender norms), and therefore might cast them aside.

Gender Stereotyping and Biases

Voters already have preconceived attitudes and ideas surrounding gender. These attitudes shape how voters perceive candidates. However, since we know very little about gender nonconforming candidates, and how voters evaluate them, we must use existing literature on stereotypes and biases to better understand how they may be perceived. For example, since it is known that women candidates are typically evaluated more harshly than their male counterparts (e.g., Wasburn & Wasburn, 2011), it is not unreasonable to assume that gender fluid candidates will also be evaluated more harshly, particularly due to the levels of discomfort some voters have displayed to such candidates (Haider-Markel et al., 2017).

Gender Stereotypes

The presence of women candidates alone does not mobilize voters (Dolan, 2006). Gender stereotypes are often singled out as having an important influence on both perceptions of women's political leadership and actual voting behaviour (Bligh et al., 2012). Previous research has found that voters often utilize gender stereotypes to assume the ideological orientation of some candidates. This results in voters perceiving female candidates to be more liberal than they actually are, which may also be the case for gender nonconforming candidates, as research indicates that transgender candidates are often seen as more liberal and less likely to represent voters (Jones & Brewer, 2019). Interestingly, this is not limited to ideological orientation as research also indicates gender may be used by voters to assume a candidate's issue-specific

positions, personality traits, and even competency levels (Koch, 2000). Other research conducted by Koch (1999) shows that citizens perceive female candidates as better equipped to handle "compassion issues'' such as welfare and education while they are also perceived as less competent and less experienced leaders than male candidates. This research highlights the innate gender stereotypes that individuals already maintain before media biases become involved and brings into question how these stereotypes would be applied to gender fluid candidates.

There is also research that contradicts traditional assumptions surrounding gender stereotypes and political candidates. For example, research conducted by Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) found that traditionally stereotypically feminine candidates are at a disadvantage compared to female candidates that were associated with more masculine traits. Another study analyzing gender stereotypes found that these stereotypes go both ways. Evaluations and support of both male and female candidates are heavily influenced by stereotypes (Sanbonmatsu, 2002). However, other research claims that while gender stereotypes influence voter's abstract evaluations of candidates, there is little evidence suggesting that gender stereotypes are as influential on vote choice when evaluating actual candidates (Dolan & Lynch, 2014). Recent research suggests that female candidates are able to overcome gender stereotypes without losing their favourability when it comes to traditionally perceived women's strengths (e.g., warmth). Embracing counter stereotypic gender strategies can improve evaluations of women running for office along both masculine and feminine leadership dimensions (Bauer, 2016).

The Role of the Media

Contemporary sexism continues to operate through mainstream media coverage of politics (Romaniuk, 2015). It is no secret that women frequently encounter sexism in the media, but yet it continues to happen, regardless of improvements made during the new wave of

feminist movements. Maybe the open misogyny of the past has faded, but more subtle gender biases and omissions continue to berate the media presence of women politicians (Ross & Comrie, 2011). Research suggests that women and men attract different types of media attention, not just in tone and content as previously mentioned, but in volume and therefore visibility as well (Ross & Comrie, 2012). Women candidates are often portrayed in-terms of long-standing gender stereotypes, even in Canada with more unified party messages, where they are also more frequently linked to "women's issues" (Kittilson & Fridkin, 2008).

Furthermore, the media tends to focus on the physical appearance of political candidates, where the prevalence of gender biases is quite apparent. Some research indicates that regardless of overall candidate favourability, assessment of traits, or perceptions of issue-handling ability, women candidates are similarly affected by negative appearance-based news coverage as men candidates are (Hayes et al., 2014). While this may be true, negative coverage of men candidates and negative coverage of women candidates is inherently different. In comparison to their male counterparts, stories covering women in politics focus on trivial subjects such as physical appearance, rather than their positions on prominent campaign issues (Wasburn & Wasburn, 2011). Therefore, while men and women candidates may be similarly affected by negative appearance-based coverage, women candidates encounter this negative coverage at significantly higher rates, which, in turn, increases the impact that the negative coverage has. There is research that notes that the relationship between sexualized media coverage and the conception of women as sex objects is quite strong (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007), which is another example of the gendered nature of media coverage. Because voters make different inferences about candidates based on gender, it is crucial to explore these gendered understandings of politics and how the media presents them.

Historically, women have been labeled as “other”, while men have been considered the default or norm (de Beauvoir, 1949). In politics, the prefix “woman” is used to point out that they are different from other male politicians. In most cases, gender nonconforming candidates are not even seen as a viable option, let alone as the “other”. The media deems it necessary to highlight that women candidates go against previous political traditions of allowing the field of politics to be dominated by men. The same can be assumed for gender fluid candidates as they also oppose traditional gender roles present in politics. Gendered news is commonplace. It influences voters, thereby effecting women’s electoral success, it effects women’s willingness to run for office, and it impacts women officeholders who have to navigate gendered news coverage throughout their careers (Goodyear-Grant, 2013). Women politicians are continuously undermined by the media’s fascination with their personal appearance and relationship status, while their views on policy remain ignored (Ross & Comrie, 2011). This bias in the media is caused by a variety of reasons. For example, research indicates that gender biases are most common in men. Due to the tendency for males to hold sexist notions, they more frequently view female political candidates as less legitimate and competent than their male counterparts (Uscinski & Goren, 2011). These gender biases are also reflected in the Canadian context. Research conducted by Gidengil and Everitt (2003) found that metaphors used in the media coverage of Canadian leaders during debates followed a masculine narrative, with continued use of stereotypical masculine imagery (e.g., sports references and imagery). Additionally, Tolley (2016) highlights that visible minority women face negatively toned media coverage. While the stereotypes employed in the media may not be overtly racist, systematic and institutionalized racism is a major problem that affects racialized candidates.

Gender Biases & The Gender Gap

It is important to pay attention to the gender biases that exist among voters. Many of these biases contribute to the voting gap between men and women voters. The gender gap in voting refers to "the difference in percentage of women and the percentage of men voting for a given candidate" (Gothreau, 2021). At present, there are many explanations for this gap. For example, research has shown that gender gaps in voting in countries such as Australia and Britain can be attributed to socioeconomic disparity and additional household responsibilities among women, whereas in the United States, partisanship and political attitudes play a much larger role (Studlar et al., 1998). In line with the behaviour prominent in the US, women voters have been found to be progressing to the political left, over time, globally (Inglehart & Norris, 2000; Erickson & O'Neill, 2002). Regardless of political orientation, countries with compulsory voting laws display a much smaller gender gap among voters (Córdova & Rangel, 2017). Despite this, research has also found that men have a stronger sense of civic duty when it comes to voting (Galais & Blais, 2019). With all of these explanations, one thing is clear: individuals have different motivations and obstacles when it comes to the act of voting.

Using data from six Canadian elections for the basis of their study, findings from Bittner and Goodyear-Grant (2017) indicate that we need to pay attention to individual differences among voters, particularly when looking at gendered political attitudes. For example, certain women focus more on gender identity in comparison to others. Women who are concerned with gender identity are also more liberal across a variety of policy dimensions. Candidates who target women voters will be the most successful among women who feel strongly connected to their gender group (Winfrey et al., 2014). In general, voters who are more traditional in their

views on gender roles have a less positive view of women candidates and their attributes (Alexander & Anderson, 1993). Additionally, utilizing the gender affinity effect, the idea that female voters are more likely to vote for women candidates than their male counterparts, Goodyear-Grant and Croskill (2011) analyzed voting trends during the 2000 and 2004 Canadian federal elections. Their findings indicate that because women are gender conscious, they are motivated to vote for female candidates. However, due to Canadian political institutions discouraging candidate-based voting, they do not have the proper incentives to vote for women. Despite this, research by Wagner et al. (2017), looking at media coverage of eleven Canadian national leadership campaigns between 1975-2012, found that candidate gender does not influence the media visibility of candidates when seeking party leadership. Instead, candidate competitiveness and novelty impact coverage amount. Thus, it is important to avoid over-amplifying the effects of gender, while still considering it as an important factor when studying voters and candidates.

LGBTQ+ Candidates

Previous research indicates that sexuality actually does not seem to impact electoral outcomes (e.g., Magni & Reynolds, 2018; Haider-Markel, 2010). Typically, gay and lesbian candidates run strategically in order to avoid electoral barriers. For example, they are usually highly qualified and run in districts that are likely to support LGBTQ+ candidates (Haider-Markel, 2010). Furthermore, in the US context, most LGBTQ+ candidates run as Democrats, avoiding outspoken opposition as those who are opposed are unlikely to vote for any Democrat (Loepp & Redman, 2020). However, as LGBTQ+ candidates grow in prominence, there seems to be a wave of anti-LGBTQ+ hate and backlash rising as well (Haider-Markel et al., 2020).

Studying this backlash, and how voters are influenced by it, can provide insight on how to ensure that we can diversify those who hold political office (Magni & Reynolds, 2020).

Gender identity is separate from sexuality, so insights on gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc. candidates does not necessarily tell us much about gender diverse candidates. Previous research suggests that voters can, and do, infer substantial information from a candidate's gender identity (Jones & Brewer, 2019). While the research on non-binary candidates is limited, we can look towards research conducted surrounding transgender candidates. Haider-Markel et al. (2017) found that voters who support women, Black, or lesbian and gay candidates, are likely to support transgender candidates. On the other hand, voters who oppose women, Black, or gay and lesbian candidates, are even more opposed to transgender candidates. So, what fuels these kinds of opinions? Jones et al. (2017) suggest that public opinion in this area is shaped by voter's fundamental values and personal characteristics. For example, party ideology and religiosity play a role. There also seems to be a relationship between television use and attitudes about gender diverse candidates (Jones et al., 2017) insinuating that the media plays a role in shaping the public's opinions.

In Canada, LGBTQ+ members of Parliament have steadily grown in numbers since 1988, when MP Svend Robinson openly declared his sexuality (Everitt & Camp, 2014). We have also seen public support for same-sex marriage rapidly increase over time (Matthews, 2005). Research conducted in the Canadian context highlights that despite the fact that gender and sexuality, along with other identities, are deeply ingrained in the structure of political ideologies, they are also excluded from the conversation and mainstream understandings of Canadian politics (Tremblay & Everitt, 2020). However, Wagner (2019) found that though most LGBTQ+ candidates anticipated some form of backlash for their sexuality, it never came. Though, it is

important to note that there were still voters who were adamant in not voting for an LGBTQ+ candidate. If there is relatively little backlash, how do we explain the results of the 2019 Canadian federal election?

Despite a high number of LGBTQ+ candidates running in recent years, the lack of research on LGBTQ+ political candidates can be linked to the fact that openly LGBTQ+ candidates have only been present in politics for a short period of time. As Tremblay (2019) aptly points out: "...it might be worth reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of how LGBTQ people's representation has been studied up to now – mainly as a copy-paste of research on women's political representation" (p. 10). While there are certain similarities between women and LGBTQ+ individuals (e.g., both are gendered minorities deprived of socio-political influence/power), the LGBTQ+ community carries "a legacy of criminalization and social stigma that was not experienced by women, who instead were infantilized by laws, cultural customs, and social institutions" (Tremblay, 2019, p. 11). We cannot continue to assume that the issues underpinning lack of representation among women and LGBTQ+ individuals are the same.

The Two-Spirit movement in Canada is a grassroots movement, operating at a distance of other LGBTQ+ groups (Depelteau & Giroux, 2015). As Greensmith & Giwa (2013) articulate, contemporary queer politics are entrenched in settler-colonialism and that non-Indigenous queer individuals must confront this settler-colonialism, as well as white supremacy. The Indian Act has played a large role in erasing traditional Indigenous gender traditions, along with the residential schooling system (Depelteau & Giroux, 2015). In 2019, Lori Campbell was the first Two-Spirit person to seek election to the House of Commons (Rubinoff, 2020). Confronted with this information, it is not surprising that 1) there have not been many Two-Spirit political candidates and 2) there is no existing research on how voters perceive Two-Spirit political

candidates. Like many other gender diverse people, Two-Spirit individuals use a wide array of pronouns. By analyzing how voters perceive gender neutral pronouns, we may be able to gain more insight on how voters might perceive Two-Spirit candidates.

Pronouns

Though gender diverse individuals do indeed fall under the LGBTQ+ umbrella, once again, there must be a distinction made between sexuality and gender. As we know, gender cannot be defined as binary (Bittner & Goodyear-Grant, 2017), and gender can be presented and performed in a multitude of ways. One of the biggest indicators of gender is a person's pronouns.

In the past, male pronouns (e.g., he/him/man) were considered to be "neutral" pronouns. They were often used in the absence of a specified gender (Moulton et al., 1978). As gender-neutral pronouns, such as *they/them*, have been popularized, there continues to be a male bias. Rather, gender-neutral terms are automatically assumed to be male or masculine (Stahlberg et. al, 2007; Hellinger, 2002). This is likely to stem from *androcentrism*, quite literally meaning male-centred, which is the conflation of male with humanity. Males are the norm and/or the default. Men become the standard for gender-neutral, whereas women become gender-specific (Bem, 1993). This means that individuals who fall outside of the gender binary become further otherized and this bias is continuously passed on through societal norms. Unsurprisingly, one of the main assumptions research makes about political life is that it is rooted in the male experience (Caroll & Zerilli, 1993; Kenny & Mackay, 2018). The male experience is relayed as the "normal" experience, even within the context of politics. This is not unlike how he/him pronouns were considered "neutral".

Research indicates that androcentrism is more likely to present in men respondents than women respondents (Bailey et al., 2020). This is even reflected in young boys (Hsiao et al.,

2021). However, it is not exclusive to men. For example, research conducted by DeLoache et al. (1987) showed mothers labeling gender-neutral picture book characters as male. While these instances may seem harmless, the societal harm caused by androcentrism is actually quite substantial. Examples include military exclusion policies (Abrams, 1993), gaps in medical knowledge (Bueter et al., 2017), and even influencing rape culture (Pimentel, 2017). Therefore, in order to create a non-discriminatory language, there must be a shift from gendered-pronouns to neutral-pronouns in the English language. This will also help expand the definition of sexism to include the inflexible gender binary and the gender bias that stems from it (Wayne, 2005). As Moser and Devereux (2019) have said: "Everyday language can be both a product and a driver of societal changes" (p. 331).

LaScotte (2016) directly asks the question: "Which pronoun should one use when referring to a singular, genderless antecedent?" (p. 62). In the absence of a clearly specified singular gender-neutral pronoun within the English language, there has been much debate over which direction to turn to. In 2012, Sweden added a gender-neutral pronoun *hen*. No other language has done this (so far) that actually reached the broader population of language users (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015). Meanwhile, in English speaking countries, a wave of neopronouns is also emerging as a popular pronoun option for gender diverse individuals. Common examples of neopronouns would be *ze/zir/zirs* and *xe/xim/xyr* (McGaughey, 2020). However, *they/them/I* also popular gender-neutral pronouns, forcing English speakers to accept *they* as a generic singular pronoun (Bradley et al., 2019[2]).

Research conducted on the topic of gender-neutral pronouns has varied. A recent study by Arnold et al. (2021) analyzed how listeners differentiate between singular and plural versions of *they/them*. Singular responses were the strongest when participants were directly told about an

individual's pronouns. If people are told someone uses *they/them* pronouns, they will use them. Their results highlight that the social trend of talking about pronouns has a direct impact on how language is understood. Furthering this, Speyer and Schleef (2019) found that non-native English speakers were able to understand/process the singular use of *they* as a pronoun as long as it was taught to them. The more they encounter it, the more it becomes normalized for the learner. In fact, those who have been shown to be more resistant to *they/them* pronouns seem to be individuals who are highly influenced by traditional gender roles (e.g., Bradley et al., 2019[2]) or feel very strongly about their own gender identity and the gender binary (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015).

Some research has been done comparing the use of a singular *they* pronoun to the use of neopronouns (typically *ze/zir* or *xe/xem*). Lindqvist et al. (2019) found that the use of actively created gender-neutral pronouns reduced male bias, whereas the use of traditional neutral words still contained a male bias. Furthermore, they argued that an actively created neutral pronoun (a neopronoun) is of the highest value as it is the most inclusive. However, other research has found that neopronouns are less accepted by many individuals. Bradley et al. (2019[1]) showcased that, grammatically, English speakers rated the use of a singular *they* gender-neutral pronoun as more acceptable than other gender-neutral alternatives (e.g., *ze/zir*), even among individuals with more transcendent attitudes about gender.

Despite whatever grammatical implications there may be, the naming of pronouns can disrupt the articulation between sex, gender, and sexuality while also reinforcing stable gender identities and binaries (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2018). As society progresses to a place where gender-neutral pronouns are becoming commonplace, it is not unprecedented that more gender diverse individuals, who use they/them pronouns (or other neopronouns), are running for

political office. There is evidence that grammar can influence voter's perceptions of political candidates (Fausey & Matlock, 2011), so it is possible that the grammatical nuances of using *they/them* as a singular, gender-neutral pronoun may also influence voters

Gaps in the Literature

As the candidate pool diversifies, there are some gaps in our knowledge. What we know about gender diverse political candidates and how voters perceive them is very limited. This current study aims to fill some of these holes.

Firstly, studies that discuss gender diverse elections typically refer to elections where only men and women candidates are running. In this case, diversity is signaled by the presence of a woman. This means that the research excludes transgender, Two-Spirit, non-binary, and gender queer individuals. Gender nonconforming candidates do exist and they are running for office. Ignoring these individuals keeps us from better understanding their experiences as candidates. Secondly, the intersection of pronouns and politics is mainly studied in the context of political speeches. For example, the use of 1st person versus 3rd person pronouns on speech reception and effectiveness (e.g., Alavidze, 2016; Kranert, 2017; Bello, 2013). There is virtually no political research regarding gender-neutral pronouns and the candidates who use them. Finally, while all of the aforementioned literature is important for studying gender, we must remember that the majority of this research was conducted under the context of the gender binary (e.g., men candidates versus women candidates). Although we can make assumptions surrounding gender fluid candidates, a very small portion of current research actually addresses them specifically. Much like Tremblay (2019) has stated, what we know about LGBTQ+ candidates is limited and often directly mirrors political science research on women, with little nuance.

In an attempt to fill these gaps, my research is focusing on voter's reactions and assumptions surrounding gender neutral pronouns. This research will help to gain insight on some of the unique experiences of gender nonconforming candidates. Specifically, we will learn more about how candidate gender identity, expressed through pronouns, can influence voters.

Chapter 3: Methods

This study follows an experimental single candidate design in order to test my research questions: What assumptions will voters make about candidates with gender-neutral pronouns? How do voters react to candidates with gender-neutral pronouns? In particular, I am looking for a causal relationship between pronouns and voter perceptions of candidates. This methodological chapter discusses survey design, candidate description, question design, general procedures, and participants. I outline what the survey included, how the survey was conducted, and who took the survey, as well as a detailed description of the experimental design.

Survey and Experiment Design

In order to investigate my research question, I employed a cross-sectional study using survey research. The survey, as will be detailed below, asks 3 sets of questions. The experiment itself has a three-group experimental design in which only the pronoun in the description of the candidate changes (*they/them* vs. *she/her* vs. *he/him*). The independent variable is the candidate pronoun, and the dependent variable is how the voters perceive the candidate. In order to test my hypotheses, survey participants were presented with a description of a fictional political candidate. This description is where candidate pronouns were altered between treatment groups. Participants saw either they/them pronouns, she/her pronouns, or he/him pronouns. The fictious description is as follows:

> Taylor Smith is currently running for city council in an upcoming election. It is his/her/their first time running for political office. He/She/They have always been passionate about his/her/their community and politics. He/She/They even majored in political science during their undergrad before continuing on to become a lawyer. His/Her/Their platform includes improving infrastructure, ensuring affordable housing, and enforcing transparency among fellow council members. He/She/They promise to put the community first and work towards a better council that can best serve its constituents.

Following the description of the political candidate, the participants were presented with four questions. These questions asked how participants felt about Taylor Smith, if they thought Taylor Smith was qualified, and would they vote for Taylor Smith, followed up with asking them to explain why or why not (see Appendix A for full description of question wording)[2].

The survey asks 11 questions in total (see Appendix A). Outside of the questions previously described, participants were first asked to answer 4 short demographic questions. These questions inquire about participants' age, gender, language background, and education. Following the demographic questions, the survey asked 3 pre-script/scenario questions that were slightly more targeted. These questions consisted of an ideology question, a partisanship question, and a trait preference question. It is important to note that all of the demographic questions and the pre-script/scenario questions, excluding the one addressing trait preferences, reflected the standard implemented in the Canadian Election Study (2019). Slight changes were made to the gender question in order to make it more inclusive (e.g., including options for non-binary, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender queer individuals).

Fictitious Candidate Description

The current literature on candidate evaluation and voter perceptions reveals a lot of integral information when it comes to understanding the perceptions of voters, and scholars have employed a number of different techniques and approaches to better understand how voters evaluate candidates. Many studies are based on standard surveys, administered as national elections studies (e.g., CES, ANES), while others employ experimental methods. Experimental methods are most promising for understanding how voters react to gender diverse candidates because there have been so few in past elections. This study aims to build on previous work by

[2] While the study consisted of 217 participants, only 161 of those participants answered the final question in the study.

assessing voter's evaluation of candidates when gender-neutral language is deployed in a campaign context. As briefly mentioned above, the survey constructed for this research involved the creation of a brief paragraph including a fictitious candidate description. Fictitious descriptions make it easier to manipulate experimental conditions (e.g., Ditonto et al., 2014; Rossenwasser & Dean, 1989; Laustsen & Peterson, 2020; Fausey & Matlock, 2011; Kiousis et al., 1999).

Ditonto et al. (2014) presented participants with mock presidential campaigns. They used these fictitious candidates to test the influence of gender on vote choice and information searching. Fausey and Matlock (2011) employed a fictitious description of a senator who was up for re-election. They included four different descriptions depicting good and bad actions (e.g., he was taking hush money, or took hush money versus he was collecting donations, or he collected donations). The goal of their research was to analyze how language and grammar can influence voters which is similar to the goal of this present study. Laustsen and Peterson (2020) used fictious personality descriptions in order to test how online tallies make dominant candidates appear competent in contexts of conflict in the eyes of voters. Kiouss et al. (1999) asked participants to read new articles containing fictitious political candidates. They manipulated two specific attributes: candidate qualifications and personality traits. Once again, their research focused on candidate evaluations and voter perceptions. Their goal was to look at the relationship between media emphasis on specific political candidate attributes and public perceptions. Another prominent example of fictitious descriptions used to evaluate voter perceptions includes research conducted by Rossenwasser and Dean (1989) where, in a portion of their study, participants were given 1 of 4 descriptions of hypothetical Presidential candidates.

These descriptions were altered to diversify candidate sex and gender roles. This reflects the pronoun alteration that will be used in this research.

Naming

Van Fleet and Atwater (1997) tackle gender in the context of naming. Names that they found to be the most gender neutral/androgynous included Pat, Terry, Chris, and Lee. However, these names do not reflect current naming trends. It was also important to ensure that the spelling used conveyed androgyny, as variance in spelling can convey entirely different gender connotations (e.g., Tony versus Toni, as discussed in Seguin et al., 2021). Seguin et al. (2021) analyzed the instability of androgynous names over time, using baby names data from the US Social Security Administration (SSA). Of the various names included in their study, I selected Taylor for this study as it was shown to be a stable androgynous name. This means that the name Taylor, when tested, remained stable overtime without turning into a name solely related to one gender[3].

Additionally, when selecting a name, there needed to be awareness of other potential assumptions that could be drawn outside of candidate gender. Lieberson and Bell (1992) highlight that naming is a social process. They cite that naming patterns emerge from a variety of influences: imagery associated with said name, notions parents have towards the future characteristics of their children, estimating how others may respond to said name, knowledge and opinions of names perpetuated through the media, parent's beliefs towards what they deem is appropriate, and institutionalized norms and pressures. Therefore, it is not surprising that

[3] Though Taylor can be considered a gender-neutral name, it is also important to keep in mind that participants can have different reactions to names depending on individual experiences (e.g., Kasof, 1993). It is possible that a participant knows someone with the name Taylor, and consequently, they will automatically link the Taylor from the study to the Taylor that they already know. This could cause participants to make assumption about candidate gender under the gender-neutral experimental condition.

certain names are often associated with different ethnicities, races, religions, and other cultural backgrounds. Research indicates that negative perceptions, both explicitly and implicitly, can be drawn solely from the appearance of a traditionally racialized or ethnic name (e.g., Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Daniel & Daniel, 1998, Arai et al., 2018). For my study, it was important to try to ensure minimal racial, ethnic, and/or religious indicators through naming. However, with every name, there are still potential racial and class connotations. It is important to realize that no name is inherently "neutral".

Partisanship, Platform & Experience

Firstly, when creating the description, it was important to eliminate partisanship from the equation as much as possible. There is a plethora of research that highlights the importance of partisanship when it comes to candidate evaluation and voting (e.g., Campbell et al., 1960; Bartels, 2000). We know that there are gendered perceptions and stereotypes associated with certain political parties (Winter, 2010). However, nonpartisan elections, such as municipal elections, are not completely absent of partisanship. Bonneau and Cann (2015) highlight that, despite conventional wisdom stating otherwise, voters are able to determine the party identification of nonpartisan candidates through ideological and issue-based clues. At higher level politics, research shows that more conservative candidates are associated with defense, terrorism, and controlling crime, whereas more liberal candidates are associated with education, healthcare, poverty, and environmental issues (Bonneau & Cann, 2015). These issues have gendered implications, letting voters assume conservative candidates are more masculine and liberal candidates are more feminine (Winter, 2010; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). Knowing this, when creating Taylor Smith's platform, it was necessary to choose somewhat neutral issues that would not flag partisanship. Additionally, as mentioned previously, it is important to avoid the

inclusion of any information that could be particularly gendered. This meant steering away from compassion issues and traditionally "masculine" issues such as military and defense (e.g., Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989), while also staying within the scope of what city councillors actually have power over.

Secondly, the fictional platform that was created had to ascribe to the normal parameters of typical municipal electoral platforms. Research from Goodman and Lucas (2016) sorts the policy priorities of municipal candidates into 2 main categories: fiscal issues and economic development and/or good governance and administration. Therefore, this meant sorting the 3 main issues included in the candidate description into these categories with "improving infrastructure" and "ensuring affordable housing" falling under fiscal issues and economic development while "enforcing transparency among fellow council members" can be categorized as good governance and administration.

Additionally, when providing background information on Taylor Smith, their political background/experience needed to be mentioned. Incumbency has been shown to be the strongest predictor of candidate success at the local level (Krebs, 1998). In order to minimize the incumbency effect, it was determined that Taylor Smith should be running for office for the first time. However, this presents a separate set of challenges. Kirkland and Coppock (2017) highlight that in non-partisan elections, voters place more emphasis on other candidate dimensions in the absence of partisanship. Lack of political experience could result in increased dissatisfaction with a candidate. In an attempt to offset this, job selection and community involvement needed to be specially curated as well. In the United States, elected officials are likely to come from backgrounds such as law, business, higher education, and politics (Lawless & Fox, 2005). Voters frequently use the occupational backgrounds as information cues when evaluating candidates

(McDermott, 2005). In the context of this experiment, Taylor Smith is a lawyer. Participants may infer that they are more qualified for office due to their occupational background, especially since a lawyer fits the mould of existing politicians. Smith's previous education with a background in political science would also fit that existing mould.

Survey Questions

Outside of the candidate description, the survey included 4 standard demographic questions regarding age, gender, language, and education. The purpose of these questions was to test the correlation between each demographic and the experimental condition, in this case pronouns. I wanted to see if age, gender, language, or education had a significant relationship with how candidates with gender neutral pronouns were perceived and if those pronouns were respected. Following these demographic questions, specific ideology, partisanship, and traits questions were asked (totalling 3). The ideology and partisanship questions were also borrowed from the Canadian Election Study in order to follow standard practice. Similarly, to the other demographic questions, these were asked to highlight the potential relationship between ideology and/or partisanship with pronouns and candidate perceptions.

The trait question pulls data from research conducted by Conroy and Green (2020)[4]. Adopted from previous research, they created agentic and communal trait dictionaries using traits that are typically associated with political candidates. For the purpose of this research, some of the traits present in the dictionaries were adopted while also including some more relatively neutral traits. These "neutral" traits consist of traits that are frequently used to describe

[4] Originally, I thought I might like to look at the relationship between voters' description of an ideal candidate and gendered/gender-neutral pronouns, but in the end, I decided not to include this question in the analysis because this project became too large. I hope to address this in the future.

politicians (e.g., Bittner, 2011; Kinder et al., 1980) but were not present in the trait dictionaries created by Conroy and Green (2020).

Table 3.1: Agentic, Communal, and Neutral Traits Employed in the Survey

Agentic Traits		Communal Traits		Neutral Traits
Influential	Wise	Forgiving	Patient	Honest
Competent	Clever	Humble	Kind	Trustworthy
Ambitious	Adventurous	Polite	Understanding	Intelligent
Leadership	Outgoing	Compassionate	Loyal	
Rational	Dominant	Caring	Sensitive	

Communal traits are often perceived as stereotypically "feminine" traits whereas as agentic traits are perceived as stereotypically "masculine" traits (REF). Therefore, using vocabulary from the trait dictionaries created by Conroy and Green (2020), I created a question that inquired about the personality traits of participants' ideal political candidate. The purpose of this question is to highlight a connection between participants preferred candidate traits and how they perceive Taylor Smith.

The last 4 questions included in the survey are questions that target feelings and vote choice. These are meant to gauge how the participants perceive Taylor Smith after they are presented with the candidate description. Do the pronouns presented in the description have any influence over how the participants evaluate Taylor Smith? As hypothesized, I anticipate there will be differences across the 3 pronoun groupings.

> ***H_2:*** *Voters will evaluate candidates using "they/them" pronouns with a more negative tone, in comparison to candidates using "she/her" and "he/him" pronouns.*
>
> ***H_3:*** *Voters will feel more negatively about candidates using "they/them pronouns, in comparison to candidates using "she/her" and "he/him" pronouns.*
>
> ***H_4:*** *Voters will view candidates using "they/them" pronouns as less qualified, in comparison to candidates using "she/her" and "he/him" pronouns.*
>
> ***H_5:*** *Voters will be less likely to vote for candidates using "they/them" pronouns, in comparison to candidates using "she/her" and "he/him" pronouns.*

Additionally, the last question is the only open-ended question included in the survey. It simply asks participants to explain why they would or would not vote for Taylor Smith. This question exists to test my primary hypothesis:

H_1: *Voters will assume candidates using "they/them" pronouns are men/masculine.*

This question was left open-ended in order to see if participants would use pronouns, and if so, whether they will respect the given pronouns or misgender Taylor Smith, and would this vary by experimental treatment.

Procedure

Following ethics approval, using Qualtrics research software, the survey was constructed and administered. A document circulated social media for participant recruitment (see Appendix B)[5]. Since the desired sample size is relatively small, social media recruitment is an adequate method to meet the allotted requirement. However, this means that the survey has accessibility limitations. Individuals who do not have access to the internet or social media are excluded from the experiment. Plus, the nature of the recruitment means that only those who are extremely motivated will choose to participate in the survey. This may also affect representability. But, as per standard psychology experiments and research, the treatment effect is what is most important, regardless of demographics (e.g., Reichardt, 2009). When the allotted period of time to complete the survey closed, the data was downloaded and copied onto spreadsheets in preparation for analysis using STATA software. All of the responses were coded/translated into numbers that reflect the answers given by participants. For example, with the question "Would you vote for Taylor Smith?", there are three potential responses: yes, no, or maybe. If participants answer yes, their response will be coded as 0. No will be coded as 1 and maybe will

[5] Individuals were incentivized to participate in the study with the chance of winning 1 of 3 $50 Amazon gift cards.

be coded as 2 (see Appendix C). The open-ended response was coded in a similar fashion. If participants used the correct pronouns, their response was coded as 0. If the participants used the wrong pronouns, their response was coded as 1. Finally, if the participants avoided the use of pronouns completely, their response was coded as 2. Most importantly, I was looking for whether they misgendered the political candidate in the experimental group. Additionally, I analysed whether the responses were negative or positive in tone in order to see if, on average, the candidate described with they/them pronouns were viewed more negatively or positively than the candidates described in the control groups.

Participant Demographics

All participants (N = 217; 145 women, 58 men, 4 transgender, 7 non-binary, 2 Two-Spirit, 1 gender queer[6]) were born between the years 2003 and 1935. This means all participants were of legal voting age. The sample was primarily composed of native English speakers with 69.12% citing English as the only language they spoke, while 29.03% were native English speakers along with 1 or more other languages. Only 1.84% of participants were not native English speakers. 97.7% of all participants stated that they had completed, at least some university/technical college. Additionally, Participants' political party affiliation was split across Conservative (9.85%), Liberal (29.06%), NDP (45.32%), Green (3.94%) and "Other" (11.82%). As for ideology, 81.41% of participants rated themselves as "left-leaning", whereas only 4.52% rated themselves in the center and 14.07% rated themselves as "right-leaning".

While the overall sample is diverse, there are a couple of limitations due to skewed demographic data (see Appendix D). Women compromise around two-thirds of the gender

[6] Given the sample size, there seems to be a high number of gender diverse participants. According to the 2019 CES, 0.77% of participants identified as "other". In comparison, 6.45% of participants in this study identified as gender diverse individuals.

demographic and participants born between 1996-1987 account for almost half of all respondents. Participants were also highly educated and almost all were native English speakers. Additionally, the majority of respondents rated themselves as "left-leaning" when asked about ideology and that is reflected in the responses recorded from the partisanship question. These skewed demographics made it difficult to interpret certain trends among the different groups[7]. For example, approximately two-thirds of the participants were women. Are women more likely to respect candidate pronouns than men? With such an unequal distribution, we cannot accurately gauge what the relationship between gender and pronouns looks like. Having said this, the goal of this study is to assess the impact of the experimental treatment on participants' attitudes. The sample size is adequate for this purpose, as seen in other experimental studies (e.g., Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989; Fausey & Matlock, 2011).

[7] The data shows some potentially interesting trends that require further investigation; however, future research would require a more evenly distributed sample. I hypothesize that voters from sociodemographic groups who are considered to be more liberal, such as women and other gender diverse individuals, those who are more educated, younger individuals, and those with left leaning ideologies and party affiliation (Erickson & O'Neill, 2002; Igielnik, 2020; Kiley & Maniam, 2016), will be more likely to correctly interpret gender-neutral pronouns. This is further supported by the fact that liberal voters are typically more supportive of LGBTQ+ issues (Jelen, 2017), and therefore, they are more likely to be conscious of correctly interpreting gender-neutral pronouns.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

This chapter will discuss the significant relationships and patterns that emerged from the data. I conducted a series of bivariate analyses between the variables of interest in relation to my five hypotheses about the impact of candidate pronouns on perceptions of voters. Several trends can be seen including incorrect pronoun usage under the *they/them* experimental treatment (H_1) and highly positive evaluations of the candidate under the *she/her* experimental treatment (H_2, H_3, H_4, H_5). The following pages walk through findings related to all five hypotheses.

Do Voters Get Pronouns Right?

Hypothesis 1 predicted that voters would assume the political candidates described with gender neutral pronouns are men/masculine, because of the dominance of masculinity in society (e.g., Deloache et al., 1987; Cheryan & Markus, 2020), and that they would misgender them in their open-ended responses outlining why they would/would not vote for them.

H_1: *Voters will assume candidates using "they/them" pronouns are men/masculine.*

Table 4.1 presents the results. From the data, we can see that only voters in the gender-neutral condition used incorrect pronouns. Respondents who received the *she/her* and *he/him* treatments did not misgender the candidate. Only three participants misgendered Taylor Smith and of those three, two did so with *she/her* pronouns. This conflicts with prior research (Deloache et al., 1987; Cheryan & Markus, 2020) that suggests *they/them* pronouns are typically defaulted to *he/him*. Thus we have a partial confirmation of H_1, as voters were likelier to misgender gender-neutral candidates compared to cis-gender candidates, but not by labeling them as men, as anticipated.

Table 4.1: Treatment Condition and Participant Use of Pronouns

	Correct pronouns were used	Incorrect pronouns were used	No pronouns were used
they/them	41.67%	6.25%	52.08%
she/her	50.85%	n/a	49.15%
he/him	59.26%	n/a	40.74%

Note: $N = 161$; Chi-squared = 9.37; p-value = 0.052.

The relationship between the candidate pronoun condition (e.g., *they/them*, *she/her*, *he/him*) and what pronouns were used, if any, nearly meets the traditional threshold of statistical significance ($p<0.05$).

Additionally, the data indicates that voters were more likely to avoid using pronouns altogether during the *they/them* condition. While there were cases in each pronoun condition where respondents did not use pronouns at all, the percentage was higher among the *they/them* condition. This makes sense as there are no clues to infer gender, therefore, participants avoid using pronouns altogether. From responses pertaining to the *she/her* and *he/him* conditions, it seems that voters are most likely to use pronouns (in general) when referring to men candidates. Nearly 60% of participants in the gender-neutral treatment condition either used no pronouns or the wrong pronouns, compared to 50% in the *she/her* treatment condition and 40% in the *he/him* treatment condition, further strengthening the idea that masculine politicians are the default/norm.

Using a different name besides "Taylor" may have a different effect. Individuals often associate names and gender with people they know, causing them to make gender inferences (Seguin et al., 2021). A name that is supposedly androgynous, like Taylor, can easily become gendered depending on each individual's circumstance. For example, Taylor Swift is a very popular celebrity. An individual could see the name Taylor and automatically link it back to her. Or the participant could have a close family member with the name Taylor. While there is no

way to completely eliminate this possibility, perhaps using multiple androgynous names could combat this.

How Do Voters React to Gender Neutral Pronouns?

Participant Tone

To further understand the impact of candidate pronouns on voter evaluations, the tone of participant responses was also evaluated, again based on the final open-ended question in which participants were asked to describe why they did/did not believe they would vote for the candidate. Here, we are testing Hypothesis 2:

> ***H_2:*** *Voters will evaluate candidates using "they/them" pronouns with a more negative tone, in comparison to candidates using "she/her" and "he/him" pronouns.*

Table 4.2 presents the results from this analysis. The patterns shown do not support the hypothesis, and the results are not statistically significant.

Table 4.2: Treatment Condition and Participant Tone

	Participant Tone		
	Positive	Negative	Neutral
they/them	47.92%	16.67%	35.42%
she/her	59.32%	8.47%	32.20%
he/him	40.74%	22.22%	37.04%

Note: *N*=161; Chi-squared = 5.69; p-value = 0.224

While the quantitative analysis does not show a relationship in the expected directions, the open-ended nature of this survey question allows us to dive into voter perceptions a little more deeply. Examples of positive evaluations include:

> *"Professional degree speaks to ability to make educated and rational decisions. Affordable housing and political transparency align with my own values"*

> *"They have a passion for change and is willing, on basic information, to work for my community. Affordable housing is crucial and I would love to see it installed".*

Examples of negative evaluations include:

> *"I'm not convinced Taylor has a deep enough understanding about what the community needs to be able to advocate for them. I believe that having more 'grassroots' experience at the community level is more important than a shiny law degree"*
>
> *"I am skeptical of politicians whose experience is studying politics, and law is a typically privileged field. 'Community' is easy to say but doesn't mean much. I would want to know his track record, volunteer experience, etc., as well as what is meant by 'infrastructure'".*

Negativity directed towards the fields of law and political science was also present (examples above), but only in the *he/him* condition. In the she/her condition, Smith's background was instead seen as a positive:

> "*Her background is very relevant, she's a woman, and I share her values"*
>
> *"Checks off the boxes for me. Competent and intelligence proven by ability to accel in their own learning"*

This pattern contradicts findings in existing research about both gender and occupational background (e.g., Lawless & Fox, 2005; Carlson & Boring, 1981; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). I believe this area requires further attention and research.

Participant Feelings

To get a fulsome understanding of the effects of candidate pronouns on voter perceptions, participants were also asked to rate their feelings toward Taylor Smith (e.g., very positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative, very negative). The goal of this question gauged participant's feelings in order to address Hypothesis 3.

> ***H_3:*** *Voters will feel more negatively about candidates using "they/them pronouns, in comparison to candidates using "she/her" and "he/him" pronouns.*

Table 4.3 presents the relationship between the treatment condition and feelings toward the candidate. As expected, from the results we can see that participants are somewhat more likely to feel negatively towards the candidate under the *they/them* treatment. However, they were also more likely to feel "very positively" about the candidate under the *they/them* treatment in

comparison to the candidate under the *he/him* treatment. Feelings appear to be more polarizing in the *they/them* treatment condition compared to the other two conditions. Overall, participant feelings appear to be the most positive under the *she/her* condition. This mirrors what was found when analyzing participant tone. There appears to be an emerging trend in which the candidate under the *he/him* treatment is being evaluated somewhat more harshly.

Table 4.3: Treatment Condition and Participant Feelings Towards Candidate

	How do you feel about candidate?				
	Very Positive	Somewhat Positive	Neutral	Somewhat Negative	Very Negative
they/them	36.11%	47.22%	11.11%	4.17%	1.39%
she/her	49.32%	38.36%	12.33%	n/a	n/a
he/him	27.78%	59.72%	11.11%	1.39%	n/a

Note: *N*=217; Chi-squared = 13.59; p-value = 0.093

The relationship between the treatment condition and participant's feelings towards the candidate does not reach the traditional standard for statistical significance ($p>0.05$), however, it may be the case that such a small sample size is limiting the strength of these relationships. Given that the p-value is <0.1, we can have some confidence in the relationship, which is not likely to have occurred by chance. Participants were more likely to express negative feelings about the candidate in the *they/them* treatment.

Perceived Qualifications

Participants were asked a question about their perceptions of the candidate's qualifications. Hypothesis 4 predicted a relationship between the experimental treatment and perceptions of the candidate's qualifications:

> ***H_4:*** *Voters will evaluate candidates using "they/them" pronouns as less qualified, in comparison to candidates using "she/her" and "he/him" pronouns.*

Table 4.4 presents the results of the bivariate analysis for these two variables. As the table indicates, the relationship between the treatment condition and perceived candidate qualifications is not statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.257. As such, H_4 is not supported by these data.

Table 4.4: Treatment Condition and Perceived Candidate Qualifications

	Is candidate qualified?		
	Yes	No	Maybe
they/them	70.83%	4.17%	25.00%
she/her	80.82%	2.74%	16.44%
he/him	63.89%	4.17%	31.94%

Note: *N*=217; Chi-squared = 5.31; p-value = 0.257

Vote Choice

The next hypothesis is about the relationship between pronoun usage and vote intention. I asked participants to indicate whether or not they would vote for the candidate. I expected there to be a negative relationship in the gender-neutral condition.

> ***H_5:*** *Voters will be less likely to vote for candidates using "they/them" pronouns, in comparison to candidates using "she/her" and "he/him" pronouns.*

Table 4.5 presents the results of the bivariate analysis. Note that the results do not achieve traditional levels of statistical significance ($p<0.05$) but do nearly approach a p-level of 0.1, with a p-value of 0.117. Therefore, we ought to interpret the results in Table 4.5 with caution.

Table 4.5: Treatment Condition and Vote Choice

	Would you vote for candidate?		
	Yes	No	Maybe
they/them	33.33%	5.56%	61.11%
she/her	47.95%	4.11%	47.95%
he/him	26.76%	5.63%	67.61%

Note: *N*=216; Chi-squared = 7.38; p-value = 0.117

The findings indicate that participants felt more inclined to vote for Taylor Smith when *she/her* pronouns were used. Under the *he/him* treatment, participants were less likely to vote for Taylor Smith. Again, this partially disproves my hypothesis. The candidate under the they/them

treatment was more likely to receive a participant's vote then the candidate under the he/him condition, but less likely to receive a participant's vote then the candidate under the she/her condition. The trend of the candidate using she/her pronouns receiving the most positive responses continues across all of my dependent variables.

Notably, "maybe" was the most common response to the vote intention question across all three treatment categories. This may have something to do with Taylor Smith's platform, and lack of opposition for voters to compare to, rather than pronouns. More research is needed.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study explored the relationship between candidate pronouns and voter perceptions by examining what assumptions voters make about gender neutral candidates and how they react to candidates who use gender neutral pronouns. The findings of this study are mixed. I originally hypothesized that voters would assume that political candidates described with gender neutral pronouns are men/masculine. My hypothesis was only partially confirmed: merely three respondents misgendered Taylor Smith, although they did not all assume Smith was a man. What is substantively significant here is that Taylor Smith was **only** misgendered in the *they/them* condition. This highlights that gender diverse individuals have to worry about aspects of gender that cis-gendered individuals do not, since cis-gendered candidates are much less likely to be misgendered by voters. Gender nonconforming candidates will likely have to be more concerned about gender presentation and the image they portray to the public.

There also appears to be a relationship between the pronouns a candidate uses and how voters react to them. I hypothesized that voters would evaluate gender neutral candidates more negatively then their cis-gender counterparts. This includes speaking about them in a negative tone, feeling more negatively towards them, thinking of them as less qualified, and being less likely to vote for them. The findings were mixed, and many of the hypotheses were not supported as the results of some bivariate analyses were not statistically significant. The data indicate that there is a significant relationship between the pronouns used by a candidate and feelings towards the candidate, as well as willingness to vote for the candidate. However, the results were not as I originally anticipated. Instead of being evaluated more negatively than candidates who use *he/him* and *she/her* pronouns, candidates who use *they/them* pronouns face

more positive evaluations then those who use *he/him* pronouns. This contradicts existing research that might suggest otherwise (e.g., Eagly & Dickman, 2005).

There are two very important implications here. Firstly, what we know about gender diverse political candidates is limited. Reflecting the thoughts of Tremblay (2019), while there is value in using political science research that focuses on women, it does not capture the unique experiences of LGBTQ+ candidates and voters – something we can see happening in this research. Because traditional research on candidates solely utilises men and women candidates, assumptions were made about gender diverse candidates based on how women candidates are typically perceived. These results indicate that, at least in the case of gender-neutral pronouns, more research is needed.

Secondly, these findings contradict the existing literature on candidate evaluations and voter perceptions. While not statistically significant, one of the themes that emerged from the data was a trend in which the candidate who used *she/her* pronouns was evaluated more positively than the candidate who uses *he/him* pronouns. Voters were more likely to discuss her in a positive tone, feel positively about her, feel that she was more qualified, and vote for her. While I am hesitant to make any bold claims, given the sample size and statistical significance, it is notable that women candidates were evaluated more favourably, and it requires further attention.

This project's findings are limited, partially due to sample size. There was a total of 217 participants, and the sample distribution was demographically skewed. Because respondents were generally more left leaning, both in ideology and in partisanship, it is not surprising that almost all participants were receptive to the pronouns that Taylor Smith used. The liberal demographic groups who have been found to be more supportive of LGBTQ+ issues (Jelen,

2017) are primarily the ones who participated in this study. Therefore, the results may reflect underlying attitudinal orientations rather than treatment effects, including more positive perceptions of the candidate in the *she/her* treatment condition. Because a large majority of participants were progressive, it is likely that they also interpreted the candidate platform as progressive. A replication of this study with a larger, representative sample could potentially strengthen our understanding of the relationship between pronoun use and candidate evaluations.

In addition to issues with sample size and distribution, it is important to note that not every participant answered every question. This became noticeable with the open-ended question at the end of the survey ("Explain why you would or would not vote for Taylor Smith"). Out of a total of 217 participants, only 161 answered the final question, which meant that we are missing data for 25% of participants. The decision not to answer a survey question is not usually distributed randomly (Berinsky, 2008), and so this is an important consideration for future research. Going forward, it would be a good idea to re-evaluate how voter's reactions to candidate pronouns should be measured and reconsider questionnaire design.

The fictious candidate description may also need to be re-evaluated. Because participants were only presented with one candidate, many responses stated that they would need to know the opposition's platform before making a decision. By creating a second fictitious candidate, we could potentially give participants an opportunity to compare and contrast the candidates. New androgynous names could be added, and different pronouns could be used, to evaluate how the same participant would react when presented with gender neutral pronouns versus cis-gender pronouns. Although using a fictitious candidate description decreases external validity (Mitchell, 2012), it can help us to control for experimental/confounding variables (e.g., partisanship). Furthermore, it may be worthwhile to include a mix of liberal and conservative positions within

the candidate description. This would reduce the impact of partisan stereotypes that may appear in voter's evaluations.

Outside of adding new names and multiple candidates/pronouns, future research could consider incorporating the use of pictures. We know that candidate appearance and image matters (e.g., Efrain & Patterson, 1974; Johns & Sheppard, 2007; Miller & Lundgren, 2010), but we know less about the impact of gender presentation on voters' evaluations of candidates. Gender nonconforming adults struggle with navigating their own identity and gender presentation (Fiani & Han, 2019), and the combination of this with the pressures of being a political candidate and the scrutiny that comes with it, creates an additional obstacle for gender nonconforming candidates. It is likely that these candidates will frequently be misgendered. It is also likely that they will face increased appearance-based criticism, much like women, racialized, LGBTQ+, and members of other equity deserving groups (e.g., Hart et al., 2011; Dwyer et al., 2009). Are non-binary candidates too masculine or not masculine enough? By evaluating voter's reactions to candidate pronouns with the addition of photos, we might be able to find a stronger relationship between candidate pronouns and voter reactions. However, because the integration of adding pictures to this experiment may be quite complex, adding a simple manipulation check could also provide interesting findings. By asking participants what they thought the gender identity of the candidate was, after reading the candidate description, we would be able to see how many people notice and make gender-identity inferences on the basis of pronouns.

This study found evidence of a relationship between gender-neutral pronouns and evaluations of candidates. The experiment I conducted showed that participants who were presented with candidate using gender-neutral pronouns were more likely to mis-gender the

candidate, more likely to express negative feelings about the candidate and less likely to indicate that they would vote for the candidate. More research is needed to better understand these patterns, but it is clear that voters' perceptions of gender-neutral pronouns are not neutral.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

Demographic Questions

Age: In what year were you born? Please type the four-digit year.

Gender: Are you…
- A man
- A woman
- Transgender
- Non-binary
- Two-Spirit
- Gender queer
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

Language: Which language(s) did you learn as a child and still understand today? Select all that apply.
- English
- French
- Aboriginal Language (Please Specify)
- Arabic
- Chine, Cantonese, Mandarin
- Filipino/Tagalog
- German
- Indian, Hindi, Gujarati
- Italian
- Korean
- Pakistani, Punjabi, Urdu
- Persian
- Farsi
- Russian
- Spanish
- Tamil
- Vietnamese
- Other (Please Specify)
- Do not know/Prefer not to answer

Education: What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- No Schooling
- Some Elementary School
- Completed Elementary School
- Some Secondary/High School
- Some Technical, Community College, CEGEP, College Classique
- Completed Technical, Community College, CEGEP, College Classique
- Some University

- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Professional Degree or Doctorate
- Do not know/Prefer not to answer

Pre-Treatment Questions

In politics, some people talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on this scale?
- Participants were presented with a scale/thermometer to rate themselves accordingly.

Do you usually think of yourself as:
- Conservative
- Liberal
- NDP
- Green
- Other (Please Specify)
- Do not know/Prefer not to answer

From the list below, select 3 of the following qualities that you most value in a political candidate?
- Participants were presented with the same list of traits outlined in Table 3.1.

Post-Treatment Questions

What are your feelings towards Taylor Smith?
- Very Positive
- Somewhat Positive
- Neutral
- Somewhat Negative
- Very negative

Do you think Taylor Smith is qualified to run for political office?
- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Would you vote for Taylor Smith?
- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Explain why you would or would not vote for Taylor Smith.

Appendix B: Recruitment Document

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study on Political Candidates and Biases.

You are invited to participate in a research study that examines voter perceptions of political candidates. This study is led by Brooke Steinhauer (Master's student, Principal Investigator, Memorial University) and supervised by Dr. Amanda Bittner (Memorial University). This research was designed to investigate potential biases that may arise amongst voters when evaluating candidates running for political office. The data collected from this study will be published in the form of a master's thesis.

We are looking for volunteers to complete a singular (1) online survey. Individuals must be of legal voting age (18+) to participate. The survey should only take around 15 minutes to complete, including a few demographic and background questions, a short candidate description, 4 follow-up questions. The survey will be open from May 26th-31st, 2021.

Please note that this survey is not a requirement of the university or any programs/courses. Professors will not know if a student has participated or not.

As a thank you for contributing to the study, participants will be entered to win one of three $50 Amazon gift cards. Please note that you must submit your email address when prompted during the survey in order to be eligible.

If you are interested in participating, the survey can be accessed at the following link: https://mun.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_7Vz5gjgQIOdh1wW

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Appendix C: Coding Scheme

Condition:
they/them -1
she/her- 2
he/him -3

Age:
No age given - Blank
2003-1997 - 0 → 18-24
1996-1987 - 1 → 25-34
1986-1977 - 2 → 35-44
1976- 1967 - 3 → 45-54
1966-1957 - 4 → 55-64
1956+ - 5 → 65+

Gender:
No gender specified/prefer not to answer - Blank
Man - 0
Woman - 1
Trans - 2
Non-binary - 3
Two-spirit - 4
Gender queer - 5
Other - 6

Language:
No language specified/prefer not to answer - Blank
Just English - 0
English + 1 Language - 1
English + 2 or more Languages - 2
Language(s) excluding English - 3

Education:
Completed High School education or less - 0
Some Technical, Community College, CEGEP, College Classique - 1
Completed Technical, Community College, CEGEP, College Classique - 2
Some University - 3
Bachelor's Degree - 4
Master's Degree - 5
Doctorate/Professional Degree - 6
Other - 7

Ideology:
0-49 (Left) - 0
50 (Center) - 1
51-100 (Right) - 2

Partisanship:
No party specified/Don't know/Prefer not to answer - Blank
Conservative - 0
Liberal - 1
NDP - 2
Green - 3
Other - 4 (this includes those who specified that they do not identify with any party or they frequently change party affiliation).

Finished coding before starting traits
Traits → Break into 3 columns
1st Trait:
No trait selected - Blank
Agentic - 0
Communal - 1
Neutral - 2

2nd Trait:
No trait selected - Blank
Agentic - 0
Communal - 1
Neutral - 2

3rd Trait:
No trait selected - Blank
Agentic - 0
Communal - 1
Neutral - 2

Feelings towards Taylor Smith:
No answer/Prefer not to answer - Blank
Very positive - 0
Somewhat positive - 1
Neutral - 2
Somewhat negative - 3
Very negative - 4

Qualified:
No answer/Prefer not to say - Blank
Yes - 0
No - 1
Maybe - 2

Vote:
No answer/Prefer not to say - Blank
Yes - 0
No - 1
Maybe - 2

Explain (Open-Ended):
No answer given - Blank
Proper pronouns used - 0
Wrong pronouns used - 1
No pronouns used - 2

Tone of Response:
No answer given - Blank
Positive - 0
Negative - 1
Neutral - 2

Appendix D: Demographic Data

Table 5.1: Age Distribution of Participants

	Age	
	# of Participants	% of Participants
2003-1997	41	20.81
1996-1987	97	49.24
1986-1977	19	9.64
1976-1967	16	8.12
1966-1957	21	10.66
1956+	3	1.52

Note: *N*=197.

Table 5.2: Gender Distribution of Participants

	Gender	
	# of Participants	% of Participants
Men	58	26.73
Women	145	66.82
Transgender	4	1.84
Non-binary	7	3.23
Two-Spirit	2	0.92
Gender Queer	1	0.46
Other	0	0

Note: *N*=217.

Table 5.3: Language Distribution of Participants

	Language	
	# of Participant	% of Participants
Just English	150	69.12
English + 1 Other Language	58	26.73
English + 2 Other Languages	5	2.30
Language(s) Excluding English	4	1.84

Note: *N*=217.

Table 5.4: Education Distribution of Participants

	Education	
	# of Participants	% of Participants
Completed High School education or less	5	2.30
Some Technical, Community College, CEGEP, College Classique	3	1.38
Completed Technical, Community College, CEGEP, College Classique	21	9.68
Some University	29	13.36
Bachelor's Degree	96	44.24
Master's Degree	43	19.82
Doctorate/Professional Degree	20	9.22
Other	0	0

Note: *N*=217.

Table 5.5: Ideology Distribution of Participants

	Ideology	
	# of Participants	% of Participants
Left of Center	162	81.41
Center	9	4.52
Right of Center	28	14.07

Note: *N*=199.

Table 5.6: Party Identification Distribution of Participants

	Party Identification	
	# of Participants	% of Participants
Conservative	20	9.85
Liberal	59	29.06
NDP	92	45.32
Green	8	3.94
Other	24	11.82

Note: *N*=203.

Table 5.7: Breakdown of Respondents Based on Treatment Condition

	Pronoun Treatment	
	# of Participants	% of Participants
they/them	72	33.18
she/her	73	33.64
he/him	72	33.18

Note: *N*=217.