Running to Lose: Gender Stereotypes in Memoirs by Geraldine Ferraro Pat Schroeder and Nancy Pelosi

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Running to Lose:

Gender Stereotypes in Memoirs by Geraldine Ferraro, Pat Schroeder, and Nancy Pelosi

By

Meredith G. Fierro

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ABSTRACT

FIERRO, MEREDITH. Running to Lose: Gender Stereotypes in Memoirs by Geraldine Ferraro, Pat Schroeder and Nancy Pelosi, June 2013.

ADVISOR: Kara Doyle; Katherine Lynes

Over the last three decades, scholars have studied the impact of gender stereotypes on voter choice. Significant scholarship has found that gender stereotypes impact how voters evaluate candidates, with preference given to candidates who possess "masculine" qualities. I examine the memoirs of female politicians to evaluate how candidates themselves contribute to their image as “feminine” or “masculine.” After examining the memoirs of Geraldine Ferraro, Pat Schroeder and Nancy Pelosi, I argue that these politician-authors intentionally present a feminine image of themselves. In order to understand why they emphasize their femininity, I turn to the theories of Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan. Friedan's work is especially relevant, being published when these women were getting married and starting a family. As voter preference for masculine qualities has been determined, female politicians' choice to emphasize their femininity is ultimately detrimental to their own chances at election, contributing to the underrepresentation of women in political office. Female politicians must be mindful of their self-representation with regards to gender stereotypes in order to aid their chances of election. Additionally, deconstructing the rhetoric of female politicians in their memoirs encourages further scholarship to address the role politicians play in representing themselves according to gender stereotypes.
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Introduction

Politicians are not known for their humility. It generally takes a healthy ego and driving ambition (the oft-described “fire in the belly”) to run for elective office. So I was surprised to read the following demure statements from some of America’s most noted female politicians regarding their political intentions: “I had no intention of running for office” (Pelosi 56); “It was absurd” (Clinton 483); “Was he nuts?” (Schroeder 6); “The first time I ran for office, it was by mistake” (Kunin 35); “I became involved in politics by accident” (Bachmann 5).

The hesitancy of these women to embrace their own ambition vividly contrasts with the attitudes of male politicians in their memoirs. Bill Clinton boasted, “I knew I could be great in public service” (Clinton 63). Joe Biden didn’t hesitate to characterize his profession as a politician as “a noble calling.” George W. Bush felt the country was headed in the wrong direction and he “wanted to do something about it” (Bush 172). Calvin Coolidge ran for office to advance himself: “My main thought in those days was to improve myself in my profession…Because I thought the experience would contribute to this end, I became a candidate for the Massachusetts House of Representatives (Coolidge 96). Edward Kennedy had his eye on politics from high school: “Elective office had been on my mind as early as my days at Milton” (Kennedy 65).

Unlike Nancy Pelosi, Hillary Clinton, and Pat Schroeder, all who initially dismissed entreaties to run for office, Theodore Roosevelt and Richard Nixon reacted quite positively to their recruitment. Roosevelt immediately agreed to the suggestion that he run for governor: “To this I replied that I should like to be nominated, and if
nominated would promise to throw myself into the campaign with all possible energy” (Roosevelt 526). Richard Nixon responded similarly to the suggestion that he run for Congress: “Two days later I called Perry and said I was honored by his letter and excited by the prospect of running for Congress (Nixon 34).

The stark difference between male and female politicians in how they present themselves in their memoirs is not limited to the matter of political ambition. Male and female politicians also treat the subject of family life quite differently. While female authors tend to emphasize their role as mothers, male authors rarely mention their family at all. Pelosi and Kunin both devoted large potions of their memoirs to their family. Bachmann and Schroeder dedicated specific chapters to a discussion of their family. On the other hand, of the seven male autobiographies studied, only two politicians—Bill Clinton and George W. Bush—bother to mention their children. And even then, these former presidents consign their daughters to a single page.

The choice of female politicians to downplay their ambition and emphasize their roles as mothers suggests their intent to conform to gender stereotypes about women. I chose to focus my research on the memoirs of Geraldine Ferraro, Pat Schroeder, and Nancy Pelosi. These women were all trailblazers: the first female vice presidential nominee of a major political party; the first congresswoman from Colorado; and the first female Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Furthermore, these women do not possess meek or timid personalities that could otherwise explain their adherence to the status quo. The media often described Ferraro as “feisty” during the 1988 campaign. Schroeder was known for her
outspokenness, labeling Ronald Reagan as the “Teflon President,” and presenting former House Speaker Newt Gingrich with the “best performance by a child actor” award on C-SPAN, after he complained about his seating on Air Force One. Nancy Pelosi has been aggressively partisan, once refusing to rent a house when she discovered that its owner was moving in order to work for President Nixon, and later welcoming George W. Bush to California by telling him that she was doing everything possible to ensure his defeat in that year’s presidential election.

These politicians—Ferraro, Schroder and Pelosi—were and are strong, opinionated, and gutsy women. That’s what makes them unlikely and surprising conformists to gender stereotypes. However, a deconstruction of their autobiographical texts reveals these stereotypes to be undoubtedly present in their self-representation. In order to understand the implication of female politicians’ adherence to gender stereotypes, previous research on gender stereotypes in politics must be considered.

**Previous research**

Previous research on gender stereotypes in politics focused on two questions that have important consequences for my thesis. Scholarship addressed whether gender stereotypes impact voter choice, and if such stereotypes disadvantage female candidates. As the impact of gender stereotypes on voter choice must be determined before scholars can comment on its consequences for women, I will discuss the body of research on these two questions separately.
In 1981, Virginia Sapiro pioneered the research on gender stereotypes and political candidates by distributing two identical speeches to two political science classes. Sapiro identified the political candidate differently to the groups by using the name “John Leeds” with one class and “Joan Leeds” with the other. Sapiro found evidence that voters use gender stereotypes to evaluate candidates on issues. Subsequent research has supported this theory: Rosenwasser and Dean (1989); Tuddy and Terkildsen (1993); Alexander and Anderson (1993); Kohn (2000); Sanbonmatsu (2002). The research highlighted reflects a scholarly consensus that voters use gender stereotypes in evaluating candidates for office.

Another important question being considered by scholars is whether the impact of gender stereotypes on voters places female candidates at a disadvantage. A few scholars found that gender stereotypes actually place female candidates at an advantage. Sapiro’s 1981 study found that voters evaluate female candidates as more honest and better equipped to handle health issues. Kahn’s 1984 study of gender stereotypes in voters’ evaluation of candidates for senate and governor found similar results, leading Kahn to suggest that stereotypes can actually produce an advantage for women.

Other scholarship found that gender stereotypes disadvantage female candidates. In 1988, Rosenwasser and Seale expanded on Sapiro’s original findings and discovered female candidates are rated higher at “feminine tasks” and male candidates at “masculine tasks.” However, “feminine tasks” were rated less important by study participants. Similarly, in 1991, Leeper suggested that female candidates who emphasize masculine qualities have an improved chance of election.
Most recently, Jennifer Lawless’ 2004 article “Women, War, and Winning Elections” found voters prefer male candidates’ leadership and generally find men more competent at national security and military issues in the aftermath of 9/11. Therefore, although gender stereotypes produce positive evaluations for women, the higher level of importance placed on “masculine” qualities and issues generally leaves female candidates disadvantaged.

Although a large body of research has focused on the role of voters in gender stereotyping of candidates, very little research has explored whether the candidates themselves contribute to such stereotyping. In 2005, Katherine Dolan sought an answer to the question of whether candidates play into gender stereotypes within the context of campaign issues. Her study found little support that female candidates emphasize “feminine” issues (e.g., healthcare, education) and male candidates emphasize “masculine issues” (e.g., defense, national security).

My thesis uses qualitative research to evaluate the prevalence of gender stereotypes in the memoirs of female politicians. Unlike Dolan, I do not address the campaign issues discussed, but rather focus on the politicians’ characterization of themselves as protagonists. I examine memoirs published by Geraldine Ferraro, Pat Schroeder, and Nancy Pelosi in the past fifteen years (1998, 2004, 2008). I demonstrate that these female politicians reinforce gender stereotypes by purposely crafting a feminine image of themselves in their respective memoirs. The fact that these politicians published their memoirs either after retirement (i.e. Ferraro; Schroeder) or towards the end of their career (i.e. Pelosi) indicates that they were not intentionally emphasizing their femininity in order to gain support for an upcoming
election. Instead of using femininity to gain support from potential voters, I argue that the female politicians’ choice to emphasize their femininity reflects their conditioning to imitate a feminine ideal. I use the theories of Simone de Beauvoir and the ideas of Betty Friedan in order to understand and explain why these politicians feel the need to emphasize their femininity. These theories are outlined in the following section.

The overall implication of female politicians’ emphasis on femininity is no small matter. As previous scholarship has demonstrated that voters prefer candidates with “masculine” qualities, I argue that female politicians may be harming their own chances at election by emphasizing their femininity, thus contributing to the underrepresentation of women in political office.

**Theoretical Framework**

February 2013 marked the 50th anniversary of the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*. In 1963, Betty Friedan used *The Feminine Mystique* to address “the problem with no name,” referencing the dissatisfaction and feeling of emptiness among housewives across America. Friedan attributes said problem to “the feminine mystique,” or the belief that the sole purpose of women is to fulfill their femininity by identifying themselves solely as a wife and mother. *The Feminine Mystique* was published at a time when Geraldine Ferraro, Pat Schroeder, and Nancy Pelosi were in their twenties, either getting married or starting a family. Geraldine Ferraro was twenty-eight, and had given birth to her first child the year before its publication. Pat Schroeder and Nancy Pelosi were twenty-three—
Schroeder had married the year before, and Pelosi got married the same year Friedan published her book. Friedan eventually contributed to the success of both Geraldine Ferraro and Pat Schroeder, urging Schroeder to run for President and helping to get Ferraro nominated for the vice presidency. Although there is no indication that Friedan played a direct role in Pelosi’s political ventures, her contributions to the advancement of women were recognized by Pelosi in a statement she released at the time of Friedan’s death:

Betty Friedan has played a central and unique role in many of the advancements toward gender equality in the last 40 years. It is rare that a book so exposes quiet truths and changes the national debate as did Betty's Friedan's The Feminine Mystique. (Pelosi 1)

Friedan’s influence on these women lends itself to a helpful analysis regarding why and how they not only accept, but also promote stereotypes of femininity in their memoirs. However, Friedan’s journalistic writing does not delve into the feminist theory necessary to answer these questions. In order to cover the analysis missing in Friedan’s work, I turned to well-known French feminist Simone de Beauvoir’s 1949 publication of The Second Sex. Friedan cited Beauvoir as a major influence in the acknowledgements section of The Feminine Mystique. More importantly, Friedan defended Beauvoir’s observations and contributions as applicable to the situation in America:

When a Frenchwoman named Simone de Beauvoir wrote a book called The Second Sex, an American critic commented that she obviously ‘didn’t know what life was all about,’ and besides, she was talking
about French women. The ‘women problem’ in America no longer existed. (Friedan 62)

A detailed summary of both publications is provided below in order to define for the reader ideas and theories that will be referenced later on.

_The Feminine Mystique and The Second Sex_

Born in 1921, Friedan was a major figure in American feminism. In 1963, Friedan published _The Feminist Mystique_, which is credited by some as inspiring the second-wave of feminism. In 1966, Friedan founded The National Organization for Women (NOW) in an effort to promote equality for women.

Friedan wrote _The Feminine Mystique_ based on observations from a survey she conducted of her former Smith College classmates. Friedan discovered “the problem that has no name,” referencing a trend of discontent and unhappiness among her female former classmates. Friedan attributes this problem to society’s acceptance and promotion of the belief that the sole purpose of women is the fulfillment of their femininity, or “the feminine mystique.” Friedan aims to identify the dissatisfaction experienced by housewives everywhere, and to help these housewives understand that they are not alone. Friedan also identifies many forces driving “the feminine mystique” in society, such as psychology, the advertising industry, and women’s magazines. According to Friedan, the “feminine mystique” causes two important issues for women: denial of ambition and motherhood as the ultimate fulfillment. Friedan explains that careers were taught as being in opposition to femininity: “they
were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents” (Friedan 15). Instead of finding fulfillment through careers, women were taught to only desire marriage and motherhood. Friedan explains that this assumption led women in college to deny their interest in academia, aware that they would not be able to use their education after graduation. “Over and over again, stories in women’s magazines insist that women can know fulfillment only at the moment of giving birth to a child” (Friedan 62). Friedan discusses the emptiness women experience as a result of constant identification through others—first through their husbands, and then through their children. However, Friedan observes that once their children are grown, women lose their sense of purpose in the world.

Missing from Friedan’s writing is a theoretical analysis of how the feminine mystique was developed and conditioned into women. Fortunately, the work of an earlier feminist aids in filling the gap in Friedan’s analysis. In The Feminine Mystique, Friedan acknowledges French feminist Simone de Beauvoir as an influence to her own thinking. Born in 1908, Simone de Beauvoir was a writer, philosopher and theorist. Beauvoir published her most influential work, The Second Sex, in 1949. While Friedan’s work is more journalistic, Beauvoir uses theory in order to explain how gender was created, and how feminine conditioning renders women inferior to men.

Beauvoir asserts that gender is a social construct, thus denying the existence of women as an objective/absolute category. Beauvoir argues that the construction of gender renders women “the Other,” defined in accordance with the Subject, or Man.
The myth of woman is created and used by men to benefit them. For instance, Beauvoir provides altruism as an example of a constructed feminine trait that “guarantees absolute rights in her devotion.” Beauvoir explains the similar traits observed in women as reflecting not objective reality, but lies and play-acting they are taught to engage in from adolescence (Beauvoir 259). Such lies are a direct result of feminine conditioning, making women believe their main duty is to please others.

Beauvoir provides a detailed analysis of the conditioning process for women, showing how women are conditioned to deny their ambition and view motherhood as the ultimate fulfillment. Beauvoir asserts that men and women are born without differences in attitudes, which remains the case for the first three to four years. It is after these years that treatment from their elders separates the genders. While little boys are expected to be tough and independent, little girls are coddled, pampered and dressed in fancy, restricting clothing. This difference in treatment causes girls to believe their main task is to please others, renouncing their ambition and dedicating their life to the servitude of others. Beauvoir illustrates the signs of conditioning at age thirteen—while boys are at the peak of their aggressiveness, girls renounce “tough games,” unfamiliar with the experience of competition. As young adults, girls fear ambition; being taught passivity will gain them the ultimate status of married women. “Women’s independent successes are in contradiction with her femininity,” Beauvoir recognizes (Beauvoir 336).

At the time The Second Sex was published in 1949, Beauvoir did admit there had been gains for women in terms of their ability to have a career. In France, women had achieved the right to vote, and the 1946 Constitution established the right to
equality between men and women. Yet, the female destiny of marriage and motherhood persisted:

It is often astounding to see how readily a woman can give up music, study, her profession, once she has found a husband. She has clearly involved too little of herself in her plans to find much profit in accomplishing them. Everything combines to restrain her personal ambition, and enormous social pressure still urges her on to find social position and justification in marriage (Beauvoir 369).

Beauvoir shows that even women pursuing careers were not immune to the expectations of society to fulfill their femininity.

Of course, the myth of motherhood dictates that bearing children is woman’s “natural calling” or “physiological destiny.” Beauvoir unpacks the woman’s stages in attitudes towards maternity. First is the little girl who, taking enjoyment in her doll as a plaything, sees maternity as “a miracle and game.” As the little girl moves into adolescence, she experiences mixed feelings and “at once fears and longs for it.” Once a woman is with child, a new set of stages occurs. The pregnant woman experiences mixed feelings regarding her fetus: “she feels it as at once an enrichment and an injury”(Beauvoir 495). Since the fetus is kept inside her body, the woman has some possession over it—yet, the fetus also controls her in terms of her comfort, needs, and desires. In addition, Beauvoir views the fetus as providing a justification for the woman’s life and a sense of value. However, Beauvoir understands this feeling of value and self-worth as an illusion: “for she does not really make the baby, it makes itself within her; her flesh engenders flesh only, and she is quite incapable of
establishing an existence that will have to establish itself”(Beauvoir 496). While these early stages of pregnancy result in a feeling of fulfillment, pride and justification, the later stages can be a source of confusion. The woman feels excitement at the prospect of fulfilling her feminine destiny, but is also aware of the responsibilities stemming from its birth.

Beauvoir also considers it significant that women are unable to fulfill their feminine destiny independently, requiring assistance with the birth from midwives or nurses. The woman is forced to play a passive role in what is seen as the most important event of her life. Once the baby is born, disappointment is inevitable. According to Beauvoir, the woman both experiences anxiety about her new responsibilities and disappointment that the baby cannot justify her life. Beauvoir refutes the concept of a universal “maternal instinct,” claiming that women’s attitude towards her child depends entirely on her situation and reaction to it (Beauvoir 500).

Both *The Feminine Mystique* and *The Second Sex* are integral to the reader’s understanding of why the female politicians studied in this paper emphasize their femininity in their portrayal of political ambition and family life. Friedan, having published her work at the same time these female politicians were fulfilling their femininity (i.e. getting married or having children), is useful in identifying the problematic “feminine mystique,” which dictates how these women portray their lives. Beauvoir provides a more extensive analysis on how women are made to behave in this manner (e.g. passive, nurturing) by deconstructing their conditioning process.
When examining the memoirs of Geraldine Ferraro, Pat Schroeder, and Nancy Pelosi, it is important to understand that the genre of memoir does not necessarily demand truth. Memoirs by their nature require self-representation in the reconstruction of the author’s life. G. Thomas Couser asserts that the genre of memoir “does not promise, much less guarantee, factual truth on every level; rather, it affirms the author’s identity with the work’s narrator and protagonist” (Couser 24). In order to more clearly demonstrate how each politician-author constructs herself as the protagonist in her respective story, I will use the politician’s last name when referring to her as the author, and the politician’s first name when referring to her as the character.

In addition, the role of ghostwriters must be considered. Both Geraldine Ferraro and Nancy Pelosi acknowledge their ghostwriters on their memoir’s cover. The cover of Ferraro’s memoir states “with Linda Bird Franke,” and Pelosi’s cover states “with Amy Hill Hearth.” Pat Schroeder does not acknowledge a ghostwriter in her memoir. Although it is difficult to determine each ghostwriter’s level of involvement in these memoirs, ghostwriters typically interview the subject of the memoir at length. It is rare that a ghostwriter operates without any input from the author. At the very least, each politician had to consent to the memoir’s content before being published. Therefore, regardless of the extent of the ghostwriter’s involvement, it is fair to conclude that these three politicians purposely crafted an image of themselves as protagonists when analyzing these works.
The Memoirs

I ordered my analysis of the memoirs according to complexity, from least complex to most complex.

In her 2004 memoir *My Life*, Ferraro projects a feminine image of her protagonist Geraldine by characterizing Geraldine as lacking political ambition. Ferraro uses numerous episodes to portray Geraldine as uninvolved in her candidacy by asserting that Geraldine never believed she would be chosen as the nominee. Additionally, Ferraro denies Geraldine’s ambition to be the vice presidential nominee, by depicting her as disinterested in the position.

In regards to family life, Ferraro takes the approach of most male politicians and does not use Geraldine’s children as a main feature of the story. The few times Ferraro does mention Geraldine’s children, Ferraro mainly focuses on Geraldine’s loneliness due to being away from her family. Importantly, Ferraro concludes by characterizing Geraldine as understanding the sacrifice as “worth it.” Geraldine’s ability to compromise her family life in order to succeed professionally is decidedly not feminine, and is contrary to Ferraro’s overall emphasis of Geraldine’s femininity. Although Ferraro is not consistent in depicting Geraldine’s femininity, her reoccurring characterization of Geraldine as passive lends itself to an overall impression of Geraldine as feminine.

Four years after Geraldine Ferraro lost the vice presidency, Pat Schroeder ran for President of the United States. However, Schroeder penned her memoir six years
before Ferraro, publishing *24 Years of House Work and the Place is Still a Mess* in 1998. Schroeder’s memoir has some similarities to as well as major differences from Ferraro’s. In her treatment of political ambition, Schroeder also portrays Pat as passive. However, Schroeder differs from Ferraro by depicting Pat as minimizing her ambition, rather than simply not possessing any. Schroeder’s description of Pat’s tearful press conference announcing her withdrawal from the race reveals Pat’s ambition for the presidency. However, Schroeder still manages to frame Pat as feminine by highlighting Pat as unwilling to fight for the position. Schroeder also discusses family life quite differently than Ferraro. While Ferraro chooses to include very little about Geraldine’s family, Schroeder dedicates two chapters to Pat’s children in order to lead readers to view Pat as “successful” at raising her children. Schroeder’s choice to highlight Pat’s aptitude as a mother reveals a conscious decision to create an impression of Pat as nurturing and caring, which are feminine traits.

Nancy Pelosi became the first female Speaker of the House in 2007. A year later, Pelosi published her memoir: *Know Your Power: A Message to America’s Daughters*. Like Ferraro and Schroeder, Pelosi also portrays Nancy as passive, but purposely crafts her memoir to show Nancy’s ability to overcome her passivity and embrace her ambition. However, the strides Pelosi makes in her treatment of ambition are arguably undermined by her characterization of Nancy in regards to motherhood. Like Schroeder, Pelosi also uses motherhood to present a feminine image of Nancy. Pelosi characterizes Nancy as entirely fulfilled through motherhood (thus possessing no further ambition), and defends Nancy as dedicated to her
children. As a whole, Pelosi’s characterization of Nancy is contradictory, as Pelosi portrays Nancy as a woman who triumphed over her conditioning yet promotes the idealized mother women are taught to imitate.

*External Forces*

While my thesis focuses on the inner struggle female politicians face in overcoming their feminine conditioning, it is important to note that all three politicians describe instances of external sexism and gender stereotyping in society.

In *My Story*, Ferraro depicts Geraldine as experiencing sexism from the staff of Walter Mondale, her running mate:

> Johnson brought out two charts with our schedules blocked in, one chart marked in red ink, the other in green. ‘How come the chart isn’t in pencil?’ I asked. It looked as if there was to be no discussion at all about my part in the campaign. There were the next three months of my life, finalized in ink. The inference seemed clear. I was supposed to do what I was told. (Ferraro 149)

Here, Mondale’s staff behaved according to gender stereotypes of women as eager to please, meek, and agreeable. Staff members assumed Geraldine would not raise issue with anything they told her to do, because women are supposed to be submissive.

Similarly, Schroeder describes an instance in which Pat’s opponent in the Colorado congressional race, James McKevitt, was condescending to her based on her gender, in order to improve his own chances at election: “After my primary
victory, he started referring to me as ‘Little Patsy’ (although I was several inches taller)”(Schroeder 15). McKevitt played into gender stereotypes about women as delicate and inconsequential, to make Pat appear less professional and serious as a candidate.

Pelosi also provides an example of the implication of gender stereotypes that relates to Nancy’s role as a mother. Nancy describes her frustration with being asked about her children on the campaign trail: “I was asked over and over again, ‘Who is taking care of your children?’ My answer was, ‘My children are grown and are taking care of me.’” In 1987, even among the progressives who wanted to see more women in public office, some were uneasy with the idea of a mother running for Congress who still had little children in the home”(Pelosi 79). This comment sheds light on why Pelosi might feel it necessary to defend Nancy as a good mother who did not neglect her children.

The examples provided by Ferraro, Schroeder, and Pelosi demonstrate that gender stereotypes are still prevalent in society. While it is important to acknowledge that all the female politicians describe some external stereotyping, this is not the main focus of my thesis. Instead, I focus on the inner struggle female politicians face in battling against their feminine conditioning, to what extent these politicians absorb their conditioning, and how this conditioning contributes to their representation of themselves as protagonists.

Conclusion
Previous scholarship has demonstrated that gender stereotypes impact voter choice, and voters prefer candidates who possess masculine qualities and issue strengths. Contrary to expectations, the political memoirs of the female politicians studied do not emphasize their masculine traits in order to gain support or likeability from readers. Rather, Geraldine Ferraro, Pat Schroeder, and Nancy Pelosi use their memoirs to present a feminine image of themselves to readers. In order to understand why these women are emphasizing their femininity, I turn to the ideas of Betty Friedan and theories of Simone de Beauvoir to provide a feminist framework for my analysis. These three women serve as case studies that demonstrate how female politicians reinforce gender stereotypes. As voters’ preference for masculine qualities has already been determined, the choice of female politicians to emphasize their femininity is ultimately hurtful to their own chances at election. Thus, female politicians, in presenting themselves according to gender stereotypes, may be counterproductive, contributing to the underrepresentation of women in political office.
Chapter I

Geraldine Ferraro’s Memoir:

A Story of Docility

Introduction to Geraldine Ferraro

In 1984, Geraldine Ferraro became the first female nominee for Vice President of the United States. Some might argue Ferraro’s nomination demonstrates that women have finally succeeded in breaking the glass ceiling, overcoming the major inequalities exposed in the writing of past feminists, such as Betty Friedan. Indeed, in her memoir, Ferraro lists Betty Friedan as one of the major feminist activists present at the Democratic Convention, where Ferraro officially accepted the nomination for vice president. Friedan served as a delegate at the Convention. In addition, Friedan was part of the delegation of women who met with presidential candidate Walter Mondale to assure him that he would receive their support regardless of the gender of his running mate. Ferraro also includes a quotation from Friedan, who summarized for Ferraro what Friedan had said during the meeting.

Ferraro also relates to Friedan on a deeper level, as Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* was published around the same time Ferraro was “fulfilling her femininity,” having given birth to her first child the year before its publication. Unfortunately, the issues brought up in Friedan’s work did not disappear after Ferraro became the first female vice presidential nominee. Rather, many of the problems Friedan identifies as inhibitors to women are revealed in Ferraro’s 2004 memoir.
As noted earlier in this paper, to distinguish between Geraldine Ferraro’s dual roles as the author and the protagonist of the memoir, I will use “Ferraro” to refer to the author and “Geraldine” to refer to the character. I examine Ferraro’s characterization of Geraldine in regards to two specific topics—political ambition and family life.

In her memoir, Ferraro depicts Geraldine as lacking political ambition, but she does not use Geraldine’s family as a main topic of discussion. Therefore, Ferraro’s depiction of family life does not contribute to her overall characterization of Geraldine as feminine. However, Ferraro’s representation of Geraldine as passive in terms of her political ambition does create a feminine image.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir demonstrates that gender is a social construction, created by behavioral conditioning. According to Beauvoir, women are treated differently than men from the age of three or four, which ultimately leads to their identification as inferior beings. In fact, young girls are taught that their primary goal is to marry, causing them to develop traits and characteristics that will facilitate this endeavor. Beauvoir’s theory of gender construction helps to explain why Ferraro has chosen to present a feminine image of Geraldine. Ferraro’s emphasis on Geraldine’s femininity reflects the author’s acceptance of conditioned traits and behaviors. As we will see, this promotion of gender stereotypes occurs in the memoirs of Pat Schroeder and Nancy Pelosi as well, although their characterizations of themselves as protagonists vary.

*Motherhood*
Ferraro noticeably does not use the topic of motherhood to emphasize Geraldine’s femininity. Unlike the other female politicians in this thesis, Ferraro first mentions the subject of motherhood fifty pages into her memoir: “I missed my family. For all the challenge of my congressional work and the energy I put into it, I was lonely in Washington and looked forward to returning to Queens on weekends”(Ferraro 53). Here, Ferraro portrays Geraldine as struggling when she was away from her family, not because of a duty to her children, but for personal reasons. In addition, Ferraro depicts Geraldine as comfortable with her decision to pursue her career: “Did I feel my presence in Congress made a difference? Definitely. Did I feel it was worth the sacrifice I had chosen to make in my family life? Yes again”(Ferraro 58). By admitting Geraldine had to sacrifice her family life, Ferraro represents this sacrifice as an acceptable choice for women.

Although the premise of the feminine mystique is that motherhood is the ultimate destiny for women, Ferraro contradicts this assumption in her representation of Geraldine. Ferraro does illustrate the consequences of having a role outside the home, but these consequences are viewed as an issue for Geraldine, not her children. In fact, Geraldine directly states this later on: “The children weren’t an issue. They were well on their way to focusing on their lives outside the family”(Ferraro 92). While the fact that Geraldine’s children were grown during her time in Congress certainly contributes to Ferraro’s depiction of being away from home as an issue that primarily affects Geraldine, Nancy Pelosi was in the same situation but her reaction was quite different, as explained later in this thesis. Ferraro’s choice to represent
motherhood as only an issue only contributing to Geraldine’s “loneliness,” indicates that Ferraro was not trying to create a feminine image through the use of this topic. Ferraro only mentions motherhood a few times throughout the memoir, choosing not to make the subject a main focus of her story. Ferraro uses the subject of motherhood to emphasize the struggle Geraldine faced in balancing her roles as politician and mother, but characterizes Geraldine as having no regrets or apologies about the sacrifices she made as a mother.

*Political Ambition*

In her discussion of political ambition, Ferraro uses two characterizations of Geraldine to construct a feminine image. First, Ferraro characterizes Geraldine as extremely skeptical about the possibility of being selected as the vice presidential nominee in order to minimize Geraldine’s seriousness as a candidate. Secondly, Ferraro characterizes Geraldine as passive by continuously denying Geraldine’s ambition for the vice presidency.

Geraldine’s disbelief in her own candidacy is a major theme of Ferraro’s memoir. Surprisingly, Ferraro’s dismissiveness was not commented on in the reviews of the book. Maureen Dowd of *The New York Times* did briefly comment on Ferraro’s reaction to the gender issue: “[Ferraro’s] social commentary runs more along the lines of ‘What a pain this gender thing was going to be’” (Dowd 1). However, Dowd did not delve into Ferraro’s dismissiveness of her own chances at
gaining the nomination or its significance—namely, Ferraro’s decision to portray Geraldine as lacking an active role in her candidacy, thus reinforcing Geraldine’s characterization as passive.

Geraldine’s dismissiveness about her potential candidacy appears at the very beginning of the memoir: “I never really thought I would be the vice-presidential nominee. Even as I left New York on July 10, 1984, go to the Democratic Convention in San Francisco, I didn’t think the slot would end up going to a woman. No way”(Ferraro 24). Ferraro purposely crafts Geraldine as a disbeliever in her own candidacy in order to show that Geraldine’s candidacy was solely the doing of other people. Ferraro’s portrayal of Geraldine reflects what Friedan deems “the feminine mystique”, which dictates that women are not supposed to have ambition—“‘ambition,’ like ‘career,’ has been made a dirty word by the feminine mystique”(Friedan 22). Ferraro’s characterization is also consistent with Beauvoir’s theory that while men are conditioned to be proactive and take initiative, women are conditioned to be passive and docile. Geraldine’s continual claims that she had very little role in her candidacy represent Ferraro’s intention to undermine any assumptions about Geraldine possessing masculine traits. Ferraro uses strong language to emphasize Geraldine’s doubt: “If the women honestly believed they could get a woman on the ticket, great. Go for it. But it seemed like pie in the political sky to me”(Ferraro 26). Ferraro uses “great” and “go for it” to indicate that Geraldine was not opposed to the idea of a female vice presidential candidate. However, Ferraro labels the chance of a female candidate as “pie in the political sky”
in order to emphasize Geraldine’s confidence that she would never become the candidate, and was not invested in the efforts driving her candidacy.

Ferraro re-emphasizes this point later on when she receives a letter encouraging her to consider the position of vice presidential nominee: “My first clue came on July 19, 1983—exactly a year before I accepted the nomination in San Francisco—when I received an unexpected letter from Tom Foglietta, member of Congress from Philadelphia… I was flattered by Tom’s consideration, but I dismissed the idea”(Ferraro 70). Ferraro highlights this event to display Geraldine as unwavering in her belief that she would never be the candidate, despite receiving serious support. Even as Geraldine is chosen as Platform Chair, a stepping-stone to becoming the vice presidential candidate, Ferraro depicts Geraldine as unable to take her candidacy seriously: “I still held the concept at arm’s length”(Ferraro 86). Ferraro’s choice of “arms length” to convey her point reflects the distance Ferraro places between Geraldine and her candidacy. Ferraro is consistent in portraying Geraldine as dismissive about her candidacy, not once providing the reader any indication that Geraldine ever viewed the vice presidency as a possibility or something she actively pursued. Geraldine’s doubt in her candidacy is a product of the behavioral conditioning that Beauvoir deconstructs in The Second Sex. Since women are conditioned as inferior, or “the Other,” it is unsurprising that Ferraro would characterize Geraldine as underestimating her chances. However, Geraldine’s lack of confidence can be viewed as another instance of Ferraro perpetuating gender stereotypes.
Ferraro not only portrays Geraldine as dismissive about her candidacy, but also describes an instance where Geraldine undermines her own candidacy. While Geraldine dismissed her chances at being chosen quite often, she also publically implied that she was not interested in the position, thereby undermining her chances:

I almost blew away my candidacy good with two responses. When a reporter asked me: ‘If Mondale were to win the nomination, who would be his best running mate?’ I responded: ‘Hart.’ The next day the press reported it as a straight news comment, saying that I had called for a Mondale-Hart ticket (Ferraro 86).

Geraldine’s choice to answer the reporter’s question and provide a specific name other than her own reinforces the characterization of Geraldine as refusing to take her candidacy seriously. Furthermore, Geraldine’s answer indicates not only her doubt that Mondale would choose her, but also her doubt about being the most qualified and politically useful running mate for Mondale. Although Ferraro implies that the press misinterpreted Geraldine’s comment, because in reality it was a response to a specific question, Geraldine had the option of declining to comment or providing a vague answer.

Ferraro provides another example of Geraldine’s skeptical view about her candidacy a few pages later: “Looking back it seems amazing to me that even after being on the cover of Time and speculating about the subject on national television, I still didn’t believe my candidacy would ever really happen. The press was full of it”(Ferraro 91). Geraldine’s self-reflection reveals an understanding about the irrationality of her previous disbelief in her candidacy. However, Ferraro purposely
includes this revelation to provide further evidence that nothing could convince
Geraldine to view her candidacy seriously. Ferraro also uses specific examples of the
growing momentum for Geraldine (i.e. “being on the cover of *Time*;”
“speculating…on national television”) to represent the rest of the world as
responsible for Geraldine’s candidacy. Additionally, Ferraro uses “full of it” to
suggest that Geraldine viewed encouragement about her potential of becoming the
vice presidential candidate as completely false and misguided.

Ferraro describes Geraldine’s skepticism as unwavering until she actually
gained the nomination:

> There were just two weeks to go until the Democratic National
> Convention convened in San Francisco. As we landed in Minnesota, I
> was convinced Mondale would go with Hart. (Ferraro 99)

Once again, Ferraro highlights Geraldine’s inability to take her candidacy seriously,
even while Ferraro remains in the running for the position a mere two weeks before it
was announced.

Ferraro also reveals that Geraldine was even more skeptical about her chances
than she let on to other people: “Publically I said I thought I had a fifty-fifty chance
of getting the nomination. But I didn’t believe it. And after my three-hour interview
with Mondale, I thought the odds [of not getting it] had increased even more”(Ferraro
101). Ferraro corrected her public statement in order to demonstrate to more
informed readers that Geraldine truly did not believe she would be nominated, despite
what readers may remember about real-life statements from Ferraro. Moreover,
Ferraro uses “the odds had increased even more” to indicate that Geraldine believed
her interview performance to be poor. Geraldine’s critical view of her performance further reflects her self-doubt and lack of confidence, which ultimately represent feminine traits conditioned within Ferraro. By portraying Geraldine as a disbeliever in her own candidacy, Ferraro seeks to characterize Geraldine as not only unassuming, but also aware and accepting of her inferior place in society. Thus, Ferraro portrays Geraldine as not actively rebelling against the patriarchal system, instead consenting to an inferior position.

Ferraro not only portrays Geraldine as dismissive about her candidacy, but also characterizes Geraldine as purely the subject of recruitment, lacking ambition for the position. The reviews of Ferraro’s memoir also do not fully address this characterization. Kathleen Hoeth of the *Library Journal* writes: “Ferraro effectively conveys…the sense of pride with which she carried the high honor bestowed upon her” (Hoeth 1). Hoeth’s observation does not entirely reflect reality. A close inspection of Ferraro’s memoir reveals her characterization of Geraldine as disinterested in the position of vice presidential candidate. In fact, Ferraro includes the statement “I never did want it” in regards to Geraldine’s interest, or lack thereof, in the position. Therefore, a sense of pride is not a trait that Ferraro highlights, but rather disputes in her memoir. However, Maureen Dowd of the *New York Times* does identify Geraldine as somewhat passive: “she retreats into the role of the docile wife who seems at ease about being kept in the dark on crucial financial transactions” (Dowd 1). Still, Dowd limits her critique of Geraldine to the controversy surrounding her husband’s business, and does not address Geraldine’s denial of ambition.
In her chapter “Why Me?”, Ferraro describes Geraldine’s consideration as a candidate as stemming purely from recruitment:

While I had been going about my own business, this group of five politically active women had meticulously been going through the records and backgrounds of every possible woman vice-presidential candidate—and decided I was the surest shot. (Ferraro 71)

Dowd’s review of My Life completely misrepresents Geraldine’s attitude toward these politically active women, who Ferraro calls “Team A,” saying “She gratefully describes the group of feminists called ‘Team A,’ who spent more than a year laying the groundwork for her selection” (Dowd 2). Ferraro does not characterize Geraldine as “grateful,” but rather constructs episodes of recruitment to portray Geraldine as ambitionless. Ferraro uses the phrase “going about my own business” to depict Geraldine as possessing no intentions of becoming involved in the race for Vice President. In addition, Ferraro describes Geraldine as “the surest shot” to show that the women needed Geraldine to run in order to achieve feminist goals. Therefore, if Geraldine were to reject her potential candidacy, she would be inhibiting the progression of women in society. Ferraro uses this information to depict Geraldine as passive, because she did not intend to become a candidate, and was forced into acceptance of the idea. Geraldine’s reaction to recruitment further demonstrates her passivity and modesty: “Would I stay open to the idea of becoming the actual nominee if the concept caught fire? I was both flabbergasted and flattered” (Ferraro 73). Ferraro’s use of “stay open” indicates that Geraldine did not make a decision on her own accord about becoming a candidate, but agreed to accept if she were to be
asked. Ferraro has previously established that Geraldine was positive she would never be chosen as the nominee, so Geraldine’s agreement to “stay open” does not reveal Geraldine’s interest in the position, but rather has little meaning. Geraldine’s surprise at being recruited further reflects her tendency to underestimate herself.

Ferraro also portrays Geraldine as ignorant about the steps taken to encourage her candidacy: “Now, unbeknownst to me, the team started dropping my name in discussions about the vice presidency in political circles”(79). Although Ferraro portrays Geraldine as naïve about what the women were doing, it is also quite possible that Geraldine was aware of Team A’s plans but purposely did not involve herself. Still, it is evident that Ferraro seeks to portray Geraldine as having a passive role in her candidacy, reflecting traditional gender assumptions that define passivity as a feminine trait.

Ferraro goes on to portray Geraldine as not only lacking ambition for the nomination, but not even wanting it, as she considered the pros and cons of withdrawing her name from consideration:

If I withdrew now, I would betray the hard work and dreams of every woman political activist in the country by my ‘thanks, but no thanks.’
If I didn’t pull out, I had to accept the possibility that I just might become the vice-presidential nominee. I felt as if I were a kid on a high diving board looking way down at the water, knowing she had to jump. (Ferraro 97)

The fact that Geraldine struggled with the idea of having to “accept the possibility” of potentially becoming the nominee signals that she did not want the position.
Ferraro’s comparison of Geraldine to a child illustrates her feeling of a lack of control. In particular, “knowing she had to jump” indicates that Geraldine felt she had no choice but to accept the possibility of becoming the nominee. Ferraro further emphasizes this point when commenting on Geraldine’s interview with Mondale as a possible vice-presidential candidate: “I had to go, though my heart wasn’t in it. The approbation of my colleagues and other Democratic groups was one thing. Being part of the actual vice-presidential selection process was another. I was almost embarrassed” (Ferraro 97). Ferraro’s assertion that Geraldine’s “heart wasn’t in it” clearly confirms that Geraldine did not want the position. In addition, Ferraro employs “embarrassed” to show that Geraldine felt uncomfortable being considered, which undoubtedly correlates with the women’s status as the Other.

Considering the fact that Geraldine was being evaluated alongside other male candidates, Ferraro’s portrayal as being uncomfortable reveals Geraldine’s hesitancy to challenge her inferior position in society. If there was any doubt about Geraldine’s lack of interest in the vice-presidency thus far, Ferraro makes it unmistakably clear with: “‘Please take my name out of consideration,’ I told Mondale. ‘I do not want to be part of this process anymore. I never really did want it’” (105). Although Geraldine’s reason for attempting to remove herself from consideration stemmed from a negative *New York Times* article about her interview with Mondale, Geraldine’s claim that she “never wanted” the position is never later refuted. Ferraro’s choice to directly state that Geraldine never wanted the position reveals a strong desire to deny Geraldine’s ambition, a stereotypically masculine trait. Mondale eventually talks Geraldine out of removing herself from consideration for
the position. However, even Ferraro’s description of Geraldine’s reaction to earning the nomination serves to deny her ambition, but in a masculine way:

‘Will you be my running mate?’ he asked. I didn’t pause for a minute. ‘That would be terrific,’ I answered, and then added the extra phrase I’d been saving for my planned response: ‘I want you to know Fitz, that I am deeply honored.’ And I still am. But did I feel emotional, did my heart race and my palms sweat? No.’ (Ferraro 110)

While Geraldine’s lack of an emotional response illustrates her as possessing a “masculine” trait (e.g. toughness), Ferraro’s purpose in portraying Geraldine as emotionless serves to highlight Geraldine’s femininity by denying her ambition. Ferraro’s use of “terrific” as Geraldine’s impulsive response symbolizes Geraldine’s mixed feelings about her nomination. While it has been demonstrated that Geraldine viewed her nomination as very positive in terms of feminist goals, the fact that Geraldine herself did not want the vice presidency drives her fear of the position. In addition, Ferraro specifies that the second portion of Geraldine’s response was prearranged in order to indicate her lack of genuine excitement. Ferraro’s choice to depict Geraldine as not having an emotion reaction to being offered the nomination reinforces Geraldine’s lack of ambition for the position.

**Conclusion**

In her review of Ferraro’s memoir, Kathleen Hoeth of *The Library Journal* writes:
‘The Reagan/Bush ticked triumphed by an 18-point margin, but Ferraro’s candidacy was also a triumph. Ferraro’s concession speech says it best: ‘the days of discrimination are numbered. American women will never be second-class citizens again.’ (Hoeth 1)

However, while Ferraro’s real-life candidacy certainly helped advance the goals of women, Ferraro’s memoir does not always reflect such progress. Rather, Ferraro’s memoir reveals her conformity to gender assumptions about women. Ferraro portrays Geraldine’s political ambition as non-existent by denying Geraldine’s involvement in her candidacy to become the vice presidential nominee and asserting that Geraldine “never wanted” the position. In this sense, Ferraro characterizes Geraldine as passive, thus conforming to gender stereotypes and expectations about how women should behave. Ferraro’s motivation for portraying Geraldine in this way within the context of feminist theory is that, like all women, Ferraro has been subjected to conditioning as “the Other.” However, unlike the other female politicians discussed in subsequent chapters, Ferraro does not use motherhood as a main focus of her memoir. While Ferraro does mention the struggle Geraldine faced by sacrificing time with her family to pursue a career, Ferraro does not comment on the effect of her career on her children. Ferraro’s ability to overcome conditioning to view motherhood as the ultimate goal of women could perhaps be explained by the fact that Geraldine’s children were grown when she entered the political arena. However, as we will see in the third chapter, Nancy Pelosi’s children were also grown by the time she took office, yet Pelosi still presents her protagonist in conformity with the feminine mystique in regards to motherhood.
In the next chapter, we will examine Pat Schroeder, a politician who had young children while in office. In view of that fact, it is not unexpected that Schroeder provides a more complicated and problematic depiction of motherhood than Ferraro. In addition, Schroeder’s portrayal of political ambition is more complex than Ferraro’s. While Ferraro outright denies Geraldine’s ambition, Schroeder both reveals and minimizes Pat’s ambition. While there are clear differences in their depiction of political ambition and family life, both politicians represent themselves as protagonists according to gender stereotypes about women.
Chapter II

Pat Schroeder’s House Work:

A Failed Effort

Introduction to Pat Schroeder

Patricia Schroeder was the first woman from Colorado elected to Congress. Like Ferraro, Schroeder was also “fulfilling her femininity” around the time the *The Feminine Mystique* was published, having gotten married the year before. Schroeder made the keynote speech at a tribute to Betty Friedan in 2006 sponsored by the Woman’s National Democratic Club. In her speech, Schroeder called Friedan a “savior,” and compared her contributions in *The Feminine Mystique* to a firefighter:

Betty Friedan was like a fireman. She came roaring in on this firetruck, and put up this extension ladder to those stupid pedestals we were supposed to be sitting on. You know, you were born and they plopped you on one of those, and said ‘aren’t you lucky,’ and there wasn’t anything you could do up there except iron, vacuum and be perky. And she put up the extension ladder and said, ‘you know, you don’t have to be up there, do you want to climb down?’ And a lot of us did. (Schroeder 1)

In her biography on Schroeder, *Pat Schroeder: A Woman of the House*, Joan A. Howy asserts: “feminism came naturally to Schroeder”(Howy 12). In concurrence with this assertion, Schroeder references herself as “Ms. Feminist,” and describes her
dedication to women’s causes in her memoir. In addition, Schroeder points out the benefit of more women in politics: “study after study shows that women make a real difference when they finally become a critical mass in any institution” (Schroeder 169). Although Schroeder clearly identifies herself as a feminist, she is not immune to the expectations of women outlined in Friedan’s work.

As in the previous chapter on Geraldine Ferraro, I will use “Schroeder” to refer to the author and “Pat” to refer to the character. Like Ferraro, Schroeder also uses the topic of political ambition to characterize Pat as feminine. Unlike Ferraro, however, Schroeder also uses the subject of family life to create a feminine image of Pat. While Schroeder certainly uses blunt language in her memoir, her characterization of Pat is wish-washy and inconsistent, revealing an acceptance of gender stereotypes that is less obvious than in Ferraro’s memoir.

The reviews of Schroeder’s memoir focus on her humorous portrayal of other politicians. The Publisher’s Weekly review states: “Clearly the heart and soul of this book is her descriptions of other politicians” (“Nonfiction” 1). David Rosenbaum from the New York Times declares: “The book is best when she is telling stories” (Rosenbaum 1). These reviews comment on the entertainment value of the memoir, but fail to address the inconsistencies in Schroeder’s characterizations of Pat.

In her discussion of political ambition, Schroeder’s allusion to Pat’s ambition represents progress from Ferraro’s characterization of Geraldine as possessing no desire for the position of vice presidential nominee. However, Schroeder also minimizes Pat’s ambition to a large extent, which results in a confused and somewhat passive impression of her protagonist. Schroeder’s approach to the subject of
motherhood is similarly unclear. In contrast to Ferraro, Schroeder focuses on the subject of motherhood by dedicating two chapters to her family. Schroeder defends Pat as successful in balancing her roles as a politician and mother without compromising her children. Schroeder’s defense represents partial conformity to the feminine mystique, simply because of Schroeder’s choice to characterize Pat as a “successful” mother. In addition, Schroeder portrays Pat as a nontraditional mother, who doesn’t engage in typical domestic duties. However, Schroeder also defends Pat’s nontraditional behavior as a consequence of limited aptitude, rather than a personal choice. Therefore, Schroeder’s memoir provides another example of a female politician whose memoir reveals an acceptance of gender stereotypes, rather than a rebellion against traditional attitudes.

**Political Ambition**

While Ferraro denies Geraldine’s political ambition altogether, Schroeder both reveals Pat’s ambition and minimizes it to a large extent. Schroeder’s attempt to underplay Pat’s ambition indicates the author’s hesitation to portray her protagonist as possessing “masculine” traits. Overall, Schroeder’s depiction of Pat’s ambition reveals a desire to present a feminine image to her readers.

Throughout her memoir, Schroeder employs a pattern of simultaneously revealing and minimizing Pat’s ambition. In first chapter of her memoir, Schroeder describes Pat’s entrance into the political world. Pat’s husband, Jim, was serving on an ad hoc committee looking for a candidate to run against the incumbent Republican
congressman from Denver. Schroeder portrays Pat’s husband’s task of finding a
democrat to run as incredibly difficult. Schroeder asserts: “anyone good who was
approached by the committee said no thanks, thinking it was a kamikaze
run”(Schroeder 5). Considering Pat eventually agrees to run, Schroeder’s use of
“anyone good” implies that Pat did not consider herself a qualified or serious
candidate. In addition, Schroeder’s description of entering the race as a form of
suicidal behavior sets up her characterization of Pat as highly skeptical about her
chances of actually gaining the seat in Congress. As seen in the previous chapter with
Ferraro, Schroeder also uses self-doubt as a method of minimizing Pat’s ambition.

However, Schroeder’s description of Pat’s entrance into politics reveals the
character’s ambition:

One night Jim came home from a committee meeting just as I had
finished bathing the children and reading Goodnight Moon for the
eight hundredth time. ‘Guess whose name came up for Congress?’ he
asked. I shrugged. ‘Yours,’ he said. (Schroeder 6)

By emphasizing the amount of time Pat spent reading the same book to her children,
Schroeder implies Pat’s desire for something more than motherhood. In this way,
Schroeder reveals to the reader that Pat does possess ambition, although Schroeder’s
overall characterization of Pat attempts to undermine this.

This shift in characterization is evident by examining the remainder of the
episode, as Schroeder consistently downplays Pat’s ambition:

My first reaction was ‘Don’t tease me, I’m tired. Why should I be the
designated kamikaze?’ But he was serious. ‘There’s no way you’ll
ever win this thing,’ he said. ‘You probably can’t even win the primary. But if you don’t get in the race and articulate the issues, they will not be discussed.’ I wondered what they served at this meeting—was he nuts? After some sleep, and some more arm-twisting, I finally agreed. I was certain my candidacy was a well-meaning and short-lived exercise in futility. (Schroeder 6)

Schroeder included Jim’s assumption that Pat “probably can’t even win the primary” to show that Pat agreed to run without considering herself a serious candidate. In addition, Jim’s assumption illustrates that Pat’s own husband didn’t believe in her, which likely contributed to her self-doubt. The fact that Jim’s recruitment of Pat to run stemmed from a desire for her to “articulate the issues” also undermines Pat’s seriousness as a candidate, not unlike third party candidates who run to further certain causes, but are rarely viewed as actual competition. In addition, Schroeder’s use of “nuts” implies that Pat did not view herself as someone who would run for office. Schroeder’s use of “arm-twisting” and “agreed” indicates that Pat did not actively want to run for office, but rather was convinced. Although Pat does become a candidate, Schroeder paints Pat as never intending to actually hold the position by labeling her first entry into politics “a short-lived exercise in futility.” Pat’s inability to embrace her ambition may be a result of her conditioning, as Beauvoir asserts: “it is natural that she should not seek by her own efforts to create her place in the world or should do so but timidly” (Beauvoir 369).

In keeping with her previous description of Pat’s initial entrance into politics, Schroeder sets up the presidential candidate episode to reveal Pat’s ambition before
hiding this aspect of Pat’s personality. In this episode, Pat had been co-chairing Gary
Hart’s presidential campaign until he dropped out of the race. Schroeder depicts
Hart’s decision not to run as driving attention to Pat as a potential candidate: “After
Hart dropped out, friends and supporters began to urge me to take a look at the
presidential race myself. That’s all it was—a look” (Schroeder 178). Although
Schroeder clearly minimizes Pat’s consideration of a presidential run by labeling it “a
look,” the fact that Pat would consider running at all indicates a level of her ambition.

However, as in the first episode, a shift occurs as Schroeder’s depiction of
how Pat became involved in the race demonstrates Pat’s efforts to mask her own
ambition:

In June, less than a month after Hart dropped out, my “look” exploded
on the front page of the New York Times and the television news. (It
was surely a ‘leak.’ I never seem to learn that there’s always a trusted
someone on staff who wants to win points with reporters). I was on a
plane headed to Denver, and when I got off, the world was there. I
never had to call a press conference. (Schroeder 178)

Schroeder purposely includes this assertion about the leak in order to show that Pat
didn’t intend her consideration of running for office to become public knowledge. In
addition, Schroeder structures this scene where Pat considers running, which becomes
public knowledge and leads her to step off the plane as a candidate, in order to
characterize Pat’s decision to run for President as passive. Finally, Schroeder uses
the claim “I never had to call a press conference” to minimize Pat’s activeness in
pursuing the office. Schroeder’s use of this statement parallels Ferraro’s use of Team
A to depict Geraldine as having limited involvement in her candidacy, as both authors attempt to diminish the perceived ambition of their protagonists.

Schroeder’s efforts to veil Pat’s ambition directly reflect the ideals encouraged by the feminine mystique, as explained by Friedan: “the mystique would have women renounce ambition for themselves. Marriage and motherhood is the end; after that, women are supposed to be ambitious only for their husbands and their children” (Friedan 355-6). Therefore, it is understandable that Schroeder would attempt to minimize Pat’s ambition as much as possible, as Schroeder falls victim to her own conditioning reinforced in society.

However, Schroeder does again reveal Pat’s ambition again in a later scene. In Schroeder’s chapter “The Presidential Weep-Stakes”, Pat announces her official exit from the presidential race:

My message was a paradox: My summer exploration had been so successful that I was not going to run. I wanted to make clear that my decision was based on my knowledge that winning would take a lot more preparation, time and money that I had. (Schroeder 185)

Pat’s withdrawal from the race reveals her priorities: she would rather leave with dignity, than fight to get something she wants.

Pat’s decision to withdraw from the presidential race can be examined in the context of Beauvoir’s theories on feminine conditioning. Pat’s abandonment of her desire may reflect conditioning dictating that women should be satisfied with their life, and not ask for more: “woman is easily reconciled to a moderate success; she
does not dare aim too high” (Beauvoir 700). However, a dramatic shift occurs as Pat recognizes her strong desire to become president:

When I reached the crucial part of my speech and said I would not be running for president, the crowd groaned. People shouted, ‘No, no,’ and began to chat ‘Run, Pat, run.’ My heart sank, and I began to cry. I had underestimated how much I wanted to pursue the presidency.

(Schroeder 185)

Although Schroeder acknowledges the overwhelmingly negative treatment she received from the media for expressing emotion, in reality Pat’s tears reflect her ability to come to terms with her ambition and embrace her yearning to become President of the United States. In addition, Pat’s public display of her ambition demonstrates an even further step in her development, as she is finally honest with both herself and society about her ambition. However, even Schroeder’s portrayal of a “masculine” trait of Pat’s is framed in a feminine manner, as tears are associated with emotional weakness, a “feminine” trait. Moreover, Pat’s action of removing herself from the race exposes her unwillingness to fight for something she wanted. Pat’s choice to quit the race connects back to women’s conditioning against aggressiveness and “tough games.” However, Schroeder’s general portrayal of Pat is somewhat inconsistent and contradictory, as Schroeder both hints at Pat’s ambition and masks this ambition.

A major difference between Ferraro and Schroeder’s treatment of political ambition lies in Schroeder’s portrayal of Pat as truly wanting the presidency.
However, like Ferraro, Schroeder still attempts to characterize Pat as passive by minimizing her ambition during the early stages.

Motherhood

Schroeder’s portrayal of Pat as a mother represents a similarly feminine message. Schroeder discusses Pat’s role as a mother in two chapters, “Family Values,” and “Domestic Engineering.” These chapter titles reflect two important characterizations present in Schroeder’s depiction of motherhood. Schroeder depicts Pat as both nontraditional and adept at balancing her work and home life. Schroeder’s portrayal of Pat’s children as benefitting from Pat’s attempts to compromise her seemingly opposing roles as a mother and politician reveals a slight conformity to the feminine mystique. While Ferraro describes Geraldine’s personal struggle with leaving her children, and importantly does not make it a major topic of her memoir, Schroeder does not mention any struggle or conflict between the roles and simply asserts Pat’s success in raising them. Tellingly, male politicians rarely mention their children in their memoirs, which focus on their experience with and impact on the political world. Schroeder’s choice to defend Pat’s ability as a mother places a great deal of focus on Pat’s role as a mother, which in turn forms a feminine image of the character.

David E. Rosenbaum’s New York Times review of Schroeder’s memoir claims: “a better guide may never have been written about how a woman politician successfully balanced her political and personal lives”(Rosenbaum 1). However,
Schroeder’s dialogue about Pat’s balancing roles does not function as a guide, as seen in Pelosi’s construction of Nancy’s evolution, but rather provides evidence of Pat’s ability to raise her children while in office. Male politicians do not generally use their autobiographies to defend their absences from home, and Schroeder’s choice to do so presents a feminine image of Pat. Furthermore, Rosenbaum asserts that change has occurred since Schroeder first took office:

When Pat Schroeder entered the House of Representatives in 1972, she was a novelty. If another mother with small children had ever been elected to Congress, no one could remember it…But times have changed. When Schroeder, a Democrat from Colorado, retired last year at the end of the 104th Congress, 48 women were in the House, 8 were in the Senate and a special room had been set up near the House floor for Congresswomen who were nursing mothers. (Rosenbaum 2)

While it is certainly true that more women have been elected to political office, the fact that Schroeder felt the need to defend Pat as a mother reveals a disturbing lack of change in attitudes about working mothers.

Schroeder uses several instances to defend Pat’s success at raising her children. In her chapter “Family Values” Schroeder describes an instance of Pat employing her parenting skills for the benefit of her children:

There are no funds for congressional family travel. Consequently members’ families are usually parked back home in the district or left in Washington. Our kids had a choice: If they got good grades in public school, the family coffers could be spent on travel. If their
report cards suffered, the money would go for private school. The plan worked. The kids loved having their travel accounts. They became real self-starters about studying, and their exposure to the world was immense. (Schroeder 134)

Here, Schroeder contrasts what other members’ families are subjected to with the plan Pat so cleverly devised to allow her more time her with children while at the same time encouraging academic success. Schroeder highlights Pat’s plan in order to demonstrate how well Pat handled her responsibilities as a mother and politician, respectively. Schroeder even illustrates the children as benefiting from Pat’s attempt to balance her roles. Schroeder does not only assert “the plan worked,” but also portrays the plan as contributing to the children’s development (i.e. “they became real self-starters”).

Schroeder describes another instance of Pat’s unique ability to balance work and family in this same chapter: “It’s been documented that children who do well in school have dinner every night with their families almost every night. My rules for my colleagues were: You can have me for breakfast and lunch, but you don’t get dinner”(Schroeder 140). Schroeder uses this episode to show that Pat always had the best interest of her kids as a priority. Additionally, consistent with the previous episode, Schroeder portrays Pat’s position as advantageous to her children. Instead of simply representing Pat as a loving mother who wanted the time with her children, Schroeder reveals Pat’s motives as looking out for her children’s wellbeing.

Schroeder uses a third example in this chapter to provide proof that Pat’s mothering skills benefited her children:
Here’s how they turned out: Scott graduated from the foreign service school of Georgetown University; worked for the U.S.I.A. at a world expo in Brisbane, Australia; spent a year at ABC News; spent another year as a paralegal at a law firm, where he decided he didn’t want to be a lawyer; got an MBA at Columbia Business School; and is now working for American Express. Jamie went to Princeton, majoring in Chinese, and then taught for a year at the University of Dalian, in northern China. Jamie decided to get a master’s degree in education at Cambridge University and is now studying for her Ph.D., eventually hoping to work in educational television. (Schroeder 149-150)

Schroeder uses this long paragraph about Pat’s children, not necessarily to brag as a loving mother might, but to prove to the reader that Pat succeeded at her job of raising her children. Schroeder provides a comprehensive list of the accomplishments and career paths of Pat’s children in order to demonstrate that Pat’s children were not disadvantaged because Pat wasn’t a stay-at-home mom. In addition, the prestige and impressiveness of all the institutions listed substantiates Schroeder’s claim that Pat succeeded as a mother, at least to the extent a parent can take credit for a child’s accomplishments.

Despite Pat’s apparent success at mothering, the fact that Schroeder felt it necessary to validate Pat as a good mother indicates Schroeder’s subscription to the feminine mystique. According to Friedan, the feminine mystique dictates that the “highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity” (Friedan 47). In addition, the feminine mystique views maternity as the
ultimate fulfillment of a woman’s femininity. By having a career outside of the home, Pat is clearly in violation of the feminine mystique. However, Schroeder buys into the feminine mystique by attempting to prove that Pat was not neglectful in her central role as a mother by her career in Congress.

Schroeder also uses several episodes to characterize Pat as a non-traditional mother. In her “Family Values” chapter, Schroeder describes Pat’s reluctance to engage in typical housewife duties, such as cooking and cleaning:

Plenty of professional women were making jams and jellies at 3:00 A.M. because they thought they owed it to their spouse for the privilege of working outside the home. Jim was lucky if he got store-bought jelly on a peanut butter sandwich; microwave popcorn was a homecooked meal. Our house was never a page out of House Beautiful, but after my election I had a great excuse for the way it looked. I was doing House work elsewhere. The press would ask what my biggest fear was, and I always answered: ‘Losing our housekeeper.’ It was a real fear because without one, the Environmental Protection Agency could declare our home a Superfund site. (Schroeder 131)

By using 3AM as an example, Schroeder exaggerates the situation of women to highlight the absurdity of the expectations society place on women. In addition, Schroeder uses this example to differentiate Pat from women who accept these expectations, portraying Pat as a non-conformist, even feminist, figure. However, the joking reference to Pat’s fixation with keeping her housekeeper as a political concern
undermines Schroeder’s characterization of Pat as defying traditional expectations of women. Through this comical remark, Schroeder conveys her belief that the household chores were Pat’s responsibility, not her husbands, although she was able to delegate them to her housekeeper.

Later on in this chapter, Schroeder reveals Pat’s feeling of guilt for not being a traditional mother:

I often found myself going to guilty extremes to be a more traditional mom. When Scott was in first grade, his school had a bake sale. I come home from work very late and set about making a cake (out of a box, of course). The next day, I asked him how the bake sale went. ‘Fine,’ he said, ‘but the rich kids just brought money.’ I realized he didn’t care if his mother was Betty Crocker. (Schroeder 137).

This episode reinforces that Pat’s nontraditional ways were not entirely by choice. Schroeder also defends Pat’s untraditional mothering in this scene by claiming: “he didn’t care if his mother was Betty Crocker.” Schroeder uses this claim about Pat’s son to indicate that Pat’s children weren’t negatively affected by her unconventional ways. In addition, Schroeder uses the rich kids as a contrast to imply that Schroeder was a dedicated mother for even attempting to provide a baked good.

Schroeder continues her defense of Pat’s unusual mothering on the same page in a third episode that characterizes Pat as simply not possessing the skills required of a traditional mother: “In the 1950s when I was in high school, home economics was a required course. It was my lowest grade” (Schroeder 137). Schroeder underscores Pat’s lack of homemaking skills in order to show that Pat’s mothering was
nontraditional, not because of choice, but because she was simply incapable of anything else.

Schroeder includes the “Domestic Engineering” chapter primarily to reemphasize her point about Pat’s inability to be a traditional mom. First, Schroeder directly states her characterization of Pat as inept at traditional housewife duties: “I am fairly hopeless at traditional domesticity”(Schroeder 190-1). In addition, on the same page, Schroeder describes Pat as “cooking-impaired” and describes an incident where Pat won a chili cook-off by having her caterer make the chili. Friedan’s explanation of the feminine mystique helps the reader understand Schroeder’s choice to characterize Pat as inept at being a traditional housewife:

Beneath the sophisticated trappings, it simply makes certain concrete, finite, domestic aspects of feminine existence—as it was lived by women whose lives were confined, by necessity, to cooking, cleaning, washing, bearing children—into a religion, a pattern by which all women must not live or deny their femininity. (Friedan 43)

Therefore, Schroeder’s choice to characterize Pat as “cooking-impaired” reveals Schroeder’s need to defend Pat as not intentionally denying her femininity. While Schroeder’s depiction of Pat as non-traditional does not contribute to Pat’s feminine image, Schroeder’s choice to emphasize that Pat was not non-traditional by choice indicates that Schroeder is not challenging the image either.

Conclusion
As a self-identified feminist, one would expect Schroeder’s memoir to express her refusal to conform to societal expectations. However, Schroeder’s depiction of political ambition and family life reveals her subscription to gender assumptions about women. The theories of Beauvoir and Friedan help explain Schroeder’s surprising characterization of herself as Pat. Although Schroeder does possess ambition, the feminine mystique dictates that women deny this aspect of their identity. In addition, feminine conditioning to view motherhood as the only commitment of women aids the reader in understanding why Schroeder feels the need to demonstrate Pat’s success in raising her children. Beauvoir’s deconstruction of feminine conditioning also shows that feminine skills, such as cooking, cleaning, and other housework are communicated to women as the few areas they can contribute to in society. Therefore, Schroeder’s characterization of Pat as nontraditional is a defense, indicating that Pat did not reject her traditional duties, but simply did not possess the skills necessary to fulfill these duties.

Although Schroeder’s characterization of Pat is certainly complicated, an even more complicated characterization of a protagonist is seen in the final memoir being discussed. In the next chapter, Nancy Pelosi’s characterization of herself as a protagonist is enormously contradictory. While the first two memoirs discussed depict their protagonists as passive regarding their own ambition, Pelosi crafts an evolving characterization of her protagonist to show women how they can overcome conditioning. However, Pelosi’s depiction of her protagonist as a mother completely undermines what she accomplishes in regards to political ambition. Like Schroeder, Pelosi also defends her protagonist’s commitment to motherhood. Furthermore,
Pelosi portrays her protagonist as finding ultimate fulfillment only through motherhood—something both Beauvoir and Friedan identify as a major problem that women are conditioned to believe. While Pelosi provides the most complex characterization of her protagonist, all of the politician-authors studied perpetuate gender stereotypes by demonstrating some level of compliance with the feminine mystique in their representations of themselves as protagonists.
Chapter III:

Nancy Pelosi’s Contradictory Message

Introduction to Nancy Pelosi

Nancy Pelosi was the first woman to serve as Speaker of the United States House of Representatives. Like Ferraro and Schroeder, Pelosi’s coming of age in terms of her femininity coincided with Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, getting married the same year it was published. Pelosi acknowledged Friedan’s accomplishments in the following statement: “Betty Friedan has played a central and unique role in many of the advancements toward gender equality in the last 40 years. It is rare that a book so exposes quiet truths and changes the national debate as did Betty's Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*” (Pelosi 1).

Although dozens of newspapers have referred to Pelosi as “a self-identified feminist,” I was unable to find a single instance in which Pelosi publicly used the actual word “feminist” in describing herself. I even placed a phone call to Pelosi’s Washington D.C. office to ask the question, and received a less than conclusive response: “I don’t actually know. I would think so.” The young woman answering the phones directed me to the issues section of Pelosi’s website. Although Pelosi does have a page dedicated to “women’s issues,” the word “feminist” does not appear. Nevertheless, Nancy Pelosi does support feminist initiatives in her autobiography by advocating for the importance of women in politics: “I couldn’t help think about how women were especially blessed with heightened intuition to
decide or to advise” (Pelosi 34); “We want more—more women and minorities to have seats at the table” (Pelosi 124); “Nothing has been more wholesome for the politics and the government of our country than the increased participation of women” (Pelosi 127).

As we will see, however, although Pelosi certainly makes strong feminist assertions, Pelosi’s portrait of herself is more nuanced. Continuing the trend from the previous two chapters, I will use “Pelosi” to refer to the author and “Nancy” to refer to the character in order to make a clear distinction between the author’s roles. Pelosi does not characterize Nancy as always being the strong, empowered woman seen in the real life politician today. Rather, Pelosi crafts Nancy’s experiences in politics to reveal the evolution of the character. In contrast to Ferraro and Schroeder, Pelosi acknowledges passivity as an undesirable trait, and portrays Nancy’s journey to overcome her passivity. Pelosi uses Nancy’s battle against her feminine behavioral conditioning to show “America’s daughters” that these ideals are instilled in everyone, even the powerful. Furthermore, Pelosi aims to show readers that it is possible to succeed in spite of such conditioning, though it requires reform within oneself. A contradiction to this thinking lies in Pelosi’s treatment of family life, which she uses to portray Nancy as feminine. Therefore, Pelosi demonstrates how women can overcome the conditioned trait of passivity, yet she also buys into traditional gender roles by portraying Nancy as exclusively fulfilled through motherhood.

*Political Ambition*
Nancy’s struggle against conditioning in Pelosi’s memoir is depicted in five distinct stages, in which Pelosi describes Nancy’s journey from ambitionless housewife to a strong and confident political figure. In the first stage, Nancy is characterized as a passive, ambitionless woman. In the second stage, Nancy’s passivity lessens as she recognizes a passion that leads her to accept a leadership position in government. In the third stage, Nancy further reveals her ambition, but also introduces a new cause of passivity: an unwillingness to compete. In the fourth stage, Nancy overcomes her passivity by disregarding the wishes of others and making a decision based on her own wishes. In the fifth and final stage, Nancy sheds her passive identity and lets her ambition be known. These five stages detail the development of Nancy as she acknowledges but ultimately rejects traditional gender roles, and comes to terms with her right to lead.

**Stage I: The Eternal Feminine**

Pelosi establishes the first stage of Nancy’s evolution by presenting a scene that takes place at the middle of her career. The scene begins with Nancy’s visit to friend and then Congresswoman Sala Burton, who was hospitalized during her final stages of cancer. During this visit, Burton let Nancy know that she would not be seeking reelection due to her poor health, and asked Nancy to run for her seat.

In this first stage of Nancy’s evolution, Pelosi characterizes Nancy as the passive feminine woman:
And so the time came to say goodbye. A circle of her friends, whom [Burton] had summoned, gathered around her bed. Solemnly she announced the sad news: She would not be seeking reelection because she was very ill. She then turned to me and asked me to run for her seat. She wanted me to accept her endorsement on the spot. I still held out hope that she would get better. Finally she convinced me that my agreement was the only answer that would bring her comfort, and so, with great sadness, I promised I would run for Congress. (Pelosi 6-7)

Pelosi carefully crafts this intentionally tear-jerking scene to show Nancy’s candidacy as the subject of a dying woman’s final wish. Pelosi uses word choice, omission, emphasis, and structure to portray Nancy’s passivity. Pelosi’s use of “convinced” illustrates to the reader that Nancy did not actively want to run for office, but rather fell subject to persuasion. Pelosi’s choice of “agree” further demonstrates such passivity, as it reinforces the impression that running for office was something Nancy conceded to. Moreover, Pelosi’s assertion that Nancy’s agreement to run for office “would be the only answer that would bring [Burton] comfort” implies her decision was something she was obligated to do for a woman on her deathbed. Pelosi’s portrayal of this scene purposely downplays Nancy’s ambition, connecting back to the idealized “eternal feminine” that Nancy was taught to model herself after. Most importantly, Pelosi’s inclusion of “on the spot” implies that Nancy had to make a spur-of-the moment decision. However, the reader will later understand Pelosi’s representation of this scene as untruthful. Ninety-two pages later,
Pelosi reveals the reality of the situation: “Sala had earlier told me the purpose of the meeting, and had asked me to be prepared with my decision” (Pelosi 99). This new information completely changes the reader’s perception of what occurred during the visit. While Pelosi’s first depiction of the scene represents Nancy’s visit to Burton as a final goodbye with the endorsement as a side-note, this new information reveals that Nancy met Burton with the intention of accepting her endorsement. Pelosi also uses different terms to describe the interaction in her original representation and later revision. In the opening pages, Pelosi uses “visit a friend who is dying,” which highlights the interaction as a personal one. In the later revision, Pelosi uses “meeting” to describe the interaction, which has business connotation, thereby revealing the interaction as less personal than Pelosi originally led the reader to believe.

Pelosi clearly misrepresented the opening scene to portray Nancy as passive. Knowledge that Nancy had decided to run for Burton’s seat prior to the meeting reveals Nancy’s ambition—she did not, in fact, fall subject to persuasion, but carefully weighed the idea and made a decision in favor of it. The question remains: why did Pelosi manipulate the facts in this way? According to Beauvoir, as part of their feminine conditioning, young girls are trained to avoid ambition; being taught passivity will gain them the ultimate status of a married woman (Beauvoir 280). Therefore, Pelosi may have chosen to open her memoir with a passive Nancy in order to demonstrate how women are conditioned to behave. In addition, Pelosi’s use of a passive Nancy allowed Pelosi to show where women generally begin their journey to empowerment.
Stage II: “No, I am not making pasta e fagioli. I am reading the newspaper”

Nancy must overcome her passivity demonstrated in the first stage when she is offered the position of library commissioner at the beginning of her career. Nancy’s first political position comes about when San Francisco Mayor Joe Alioto offers Nancy an appointment to the Library Commission, in recognition of her previous volunteer work for the library. Although this episode appears in the memoir after the Burton episode, in reality it reflects Nancy’s very first experience in developing her career. Pelosi uses the library commission episode to show how Nancy first recognizes her ambition, thus beginning her resistance against her conditioning.

At the beginning of this episode, Pelosi utilizes characterization of Nancy and word choice to portray Nancy as still trapped in the first stage of her evolution. Pelosi begins this episode by stating: “my occupation was a full-time mom, so anything else I did was strictly on a volunteer basis and without an official position” (Pelosi 56). Pelosi characterizes Nancy as a stereotypical housewife by implying that because Nancy was a full-time mom, she could not involve herself in another “official” occupation. Pelosi’s characterization of Nancy is a direct reflection of what Friedan deems “the feminine mystique”: “the feminine mystique says that the highest value and only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity” (Friedan 43). Pelosi reinforces Nancy’s characterization as a contented housewife in Nancy’s dialogue with Mayor Joe Alioto. “I don’t need official
recognition. I’m happy to work as a volunteer,” she says, thus devaluing her own contributions. A victim of the feminine mystique, Nancy deliberately underplays her contribution to the library, because such contributions are unrelated to the fulfillment of her femininity.

However, a shift occurs in terms of Nancy’s ambition as she develops into the second stage and begins to overcome her passivity. Pelosi is able to overcome her passivity established in the previous episode by recognizing her passion in this episode. While Nancy initially rejects the offer to become a Library Commissioner, her transition to acceptance stems from her own desire. Nancy’s change of heart only required contemplation of her passions: “I thought about how much I loved words, books, libraries—and San Francisco. I decided to accept the appointment” (Pelosi 56). In contrast to the opening episode, Pelosi characterizes Nancy’s decision to accept an official position as something she wanted to do, instead of something she felt obligated to do. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan states: “we can no longer ignore that voice within the women that says: ‘I want something more than my husband and my children and my home’” (Friedan 32). In this episode, Pelosi portrays Nancy as finding that voice within her, helping her to admit her desire for the position. Because Nancy’s feminine trait of passivity reflects superficial conditioning, and not her true nature, self-reflection and understanding of her genuine interests and passions allows her to overcome her conditioning. Pelosi does this to show that although women are conditioned to be ambitionless, inner reflection can help to overcome this.
Stage III: “Please find someone else”

While in the previous episode Nancy was able to overcome her passivity by recognizing her passions, this next episode shows that passion is not enough when competition is a factor. Although Nancy seemed to have overcome her passivity and recognized her own ambition in the second stage, another obstacle of her “eternal feminine” conditioning is presented as she transitions into the third stage. In this episode, which directly follows the library commissioner episode, Nancy is recruited to run for chair of the California Democratic Party. Pelosi begins the episode by describing Nancy’s involvement in California Governor Jerry Brown’s 1976 presidential campaign, which led to her recruitment. However, Nancy chose to run for a different position, because she was uncomfortable running against two other candidates for party chair.

Pelosi uses word choice, purposeful inclusion, and characterization of Nancy to illustrate Nancy’s struggle to recognize her worth. At the start of the episode, Nancy has a negative reaction to recruitment, because she does not believe herself to be sufficiently qualified: “That fall, I received a call that Jerry wanted me to run for chair of the California Democratic Party. I was honored, but also taken aback” (Pelosi 65). Pelosi’s choice of “aback” signals the return of Nancy’s passivity, as she is stunned by the mere suggestion of her in a leadership position. Nancy was surprised, because she believed her political activities were not adequate qualifications, and because “the chairmanship was elected office” (Pelosi 65). For Nancy, accepting a nomination was acceptable, but actively campaigning was not—revealing a fear to
show ambition. Nancy’s hesitancy towards running for office can be explained by the prevalence of the feminine mystique: “girls are afraid to aim too high, because the adolescent girl does not think herself responsible for her future; she sees no use in demanding much of herself since her lot in the end will not depend on her own efforts. To please they must abdicate, take a passive role” (Beauvoir 335). Nancy has been conditioned to view ambition as unnecessary and undesirable, resulting in a hesitancy to run for office.

However, the main reason for Nancy’s negative reaction was that there were two other democrats vying for the position. “Moreover, two other leading Democrats, highly regarded in the party, were in the midst of a very hard-fought battle for the chairmanship” (Pelosi 65), she says. Pelosi’s use of “moreover” signifies the hierarchical importance of her two reasons for Nancy’s decision against running for state chair. Nancy’s resistance to competition is unsurprising, as it is an internalization of the eternal feminine ideal of women as subordinate, not pushy or forward, and eager to please. In her deconstruction of how women are constructed to buy into “the myth of the woman,” Beauvoir notes the signs of conditioning as evident at age thirteen, while boys are at the peak of their aggressiveness, girls renounce “tough games”, and are unfamiliar with the experience of competition (Beauvoir 280). Although Pelosi does not indicate the gender of Nancy’s competition in her memoir, Charles Manatt won the election for state chair that year. Nancy’s reluctance to compete against Manatt reveals her identification as the Other, which may never triumph over the Subject. In addition, Pelosi describes the state of campaigning as “a very hard-fought battle” in order to emphasize the aggressive
environment Nancy would have to endure. Pelosi’s choice to highlight the aggressive environment suggests that Nancy is still caught up in her own conditioning, which defines women as weak and men as tough.

Despite this aversion to competing with “the boys,” a subtle shift in Nancy’s ambition does occur in the episode. Pelosi’s structuring of the episode as a whole reveals that Nancy has overcome her reluctance to admit to her own political ambitions. Due to Nancy’s hesitancy to run against other candidates for chair of the California Democratic Party, Speaker Leo McCarthy suggests that she run for Northern Chair so “nobody would have to be pushed aside for the top job” (Pelosi 65). In contrast to the first two episodes, Nancy immediately agrees to run and does not deny her own ambition. Unfortunately, Nancy’s choice to run for Northern chair signals that, contrary to the library commissioner episode, she was not able to overcome this particular obstacle of ambition, instead side-stepping the issue by running for a lesser position without competition.

Furthermore, Pelosi emphasizes Nancy’s passivity even after she has decided to run for Northern Chair. Pelosi portrays Nancy as continuing to devalue her own potential contributions through purposeful inclusion of Nancy’s campaign slogan – ‘Nancy Pelosi—Volunteer’” (Pelosi 65). By labeling herself as someone who freely offers her time, Nancy downplays the fact that holding the position would grant her a certain level of power. Nancy’s reluctance to embrace power may stem from the feminine mystique present in society, which holds an unfavorable view of women possessing power. While Nancy is able to make strides in her passivity by admitting her desire to run for office, she still maintains part of her passive identity. Pelosi uses
the Northern Chair episode to show Nancy’s struggle to overcome her passivity when competition is involved.

**Stage IV: “I tried to dampen their enthusiasm”**

There are two possible interpretations of the fourth stage, where Nancy overcomes her passivity by deciding *against* running for office. Members of Congress encourage Nancy to run for Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, in order to help Democrats win the 1994 congressional elections. Nancy denies wanting to run for Speaker, calling members who suggested the idea “crazy,” because she was only in her third term as a Congresswoman. She also denies having interest in any leadership position, “especially that of Speaker”(Pelosi 100).

The transition from the previous episode, where Nancy is recruited to run for a sectional Chair of her state’s democratic party to this episode, where she is first recruited to run for Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, is quite abrupt, as there is a major gap in time; her decision to run for Congress and her first few terms in office are not described at all. At this point Pelosi provides no obstacle for Nancy to overcome in her decision to run for Speaker. The conclusion of this episode differs from the others—since Republicans won majority of the House that election year, Nancy did not have the opportunity to make a final decision about whether to run for Speaker.
Interpretation I: Nancy overcomes her passivity

While the previous two episodes are focused on Nancy overcoming her passivity in order to fulfill her ambition – with mixed success - Pelosi uses the next episode as an example of an instance when Nancy overcomes her passivity by choosing not to fulfill her ambition at that time. Pelosi’s choice to use Nancy’s lack of significant time in Congress indicates that Nancy didn’t want to run because she didn’t feel ready. When members of Congress expressed their belief that they needed a female Speaker to win the elections, Pelosi did not budge, “I tried to dampen their enthusiasm”(Pelosi 100). It can thus be inferred that Nancy was not willing to compromise her personal preparedness in order to please members of her party. In contrast to two of the previous episodes where Nancy tries to overcome her passivity, Nancy is not passive in the fourth episode because her denial of a position is completely on her own terms. Here, Nancy’s claim to have no interest in a leadership position stems from her self-assessment that she was not ready for the role. This is not to say that Nancy is without ambition, but rather feels it is not the right time. In addition, Nancy defies the idea that the goal of women is to please others, because she ardently rejects the pleas from members of the house that they need her as Speaker to win congressional elections.

Interpretation II: Nancy resumes her passive ways
Another possible interpretation of this episode is that it reflects Nancy’s regression back towards her passivity. Nancy’s view of her experience in Congress as inadequate preparation for Speaker reflects her own self-doubt, as the members encouraging her to run clearly view her as capable. Nancy does not ever say that she will not run, but rather denies her interest in the position and claiming to “dampen the enthusiasm” for her candidacy. It is possible that Nancy wanted the position, but was uncomfortable admitting her ambition. In this case, Nancy’s statement “I tried to dampen their enthusiasm” can be interpreted as an effort to mask her ambitions, showing that she neither initiated nor encouraged the idea of herself as Speaker. Pelosi writes that Nancy received some backlash from supporters of then current Speaker, Tom Foley, due to the talk about her potential candidacy. Pelosi’s inclusion of this information supports the regression interpretation, because it is clear from the previous episode that she struggles with the idea of competition. Although Nancy has been able to overcome her passivity at certain points, it makes sense that she would dismiss the idea of challenging a male incumbent as “crazy.”

Beauvoir suggests that women are quite aware of their position as the Other: “as she becomes more mature, masculine superiority is perceived more clearly. Relative rank of the sexes is first brought to her attention in family life. Then everything helps to confirm this hierarchy”(Beauvoir 286). Therefore, this episode could be taken to reflect Nancy’s continued struggle with competition.

It is difficult to determine which interpretation of Nancy’s passivity in this episode is more likely. However, an examination of the other stages with special consideration to the final stage shows the first interpretation as lending itself to a
clearer arc in terms of Nancy’s evolution. While it is certainly possible that the episode reflected Nancy’s passivity, it would create an abrupt and doubtful transition to the next stage where Nancy has triumphed over her conditioning. Therefore, I am using the first interpretation in my summary of Nancy’s evolution, although a conflicting interpretation has been acknowledged.

Stage V: “I was ready to be leader”

In each of the previous episodes, Nancy is clearly in a phase of development: she battles obstacles within herself as she comes to terms with her own power and her right to run for office. Pelosi uses this last episode to present the final result of Nancy’s transformation—an empowered and defiant feminist figure who is anything but passive or ambitionless. Pelosi characterizes Nancy as a confident, ambitious and feminist figure. Two years after Nancy’s refusal to run for Speaker (which was ultimately irrelevant when Republicans retained majority in the House), Pelosi presents Nancy’s final role in politics as stemming from her own ambition. Nancy assumes office out of her own right—because she believes it’s best for the country. “Because I wanted to have a bigger impact on the Congressional campaign in 2000, I decided to run for Whip, assuming a Democratic victory, which would have created an opening” (Pelosi 102). Pelosi, for once, does not cite encouragement or recruitment as the primary reason for Nancy’s involvement. In keeping with her representation of the characterization of male politicians, in the Speaker episode (and thus in direct contrast to her previous characterization of Mayor Alioto and Speaker
McCarthy), Pelosi classifies the other members of Congress as oppressive to women: “‘who said she could run, they said’”(Pelosi 102). Pelosi then transforms Nancy from the accepting subordinate into a defiant powerhouse: “By running for Whip, I would defy more than two hundred years of men following in each other’s footsteps for all the major leadership positions” (Pelosi 102).

In this final episode, Nancy embodies the ultimate goal of feminist women. She is defiant, operates on her own terms, and is not afraid to pursue her ambition. In this episode, Nancy represents what all women have the potential to become. Pelosi uses this final characterization of Nancy as a defiant powerhouse to show women that although they may be conditioned to model themselves after the mythical eternal feminine, eventually this conditioning can be overcome as she aptly demonstrates by transforming from ambitionless housewife to one of the most powerful women in the country.

Pelosi crafts these episodes of ambition to demonstrate Nancy’s battle within herself, as she struggles to overcome the feminine traits and ideals impressed upon her since childhood. While Pelosi joins Ferraro and Schroeder in characterizing Nancy as passive, Nancy’s ability to overcome her passivity sends a drastically different message to readers.

**Motherhood**

Similar to her treatment of ambition, Pelosi uses her memoir to focus on her inner struggles about motherhood. An examination of the subject of motherhood in
Pelosi’s autobiography reveals two themes. First, Pelosi characterizes Nancy as fulfilled and content with her life as a mother. Secondly, Pelosi defends Nancy as a good mother.

These themes can be explained in part by Beauvoir’s deconstruction of the myth of motherhood as the feminine destiny. Pelosi’s choice to downplay Nancy’s ambition outside of being a housewife is a direct result of her conditioning. As Beauvoir explained, women are made to believe that their sole purpose in life is to bear children. Although Nancy’s actions seem to tell a different story, Pelosi makes an effort to portray Nancy as being completely satisfied with her role as a housewife, because that’s what Pelosi has been conditioned to believe is right. In addition, it is understandable that Pelosi would feel the need to defend Nancy as a good mother, since women are conditioned to believe their purpose in life is to raise children, not have careers.

In the previous section, Pelosi purposely crafted her story regarding her own ambition to show her ability to overcome her passivity. However, Pelosi’s depiction of motherhood reveals her conformity to the conditioning Beauvoir describes. By characterizing Nancy as fulfilled through motherhood and defending her as a good mother, Pelosi gives in to ideas about traditional femininity. None of the book reviews address this critical contradiction ruling Pelosi’s memoir. The *Publisher’s Weekly* review of Pelosi’s memoir claims that:

Pelosi’s message is one of possibility and promise and her encouraging advice comes across clearly in her own inspired reading. The final result is sure to inspire scores of young listeners, and reaffirm what
many older listeners have known for a very long time: possibility is not limited to members of a particular sex, age or social class. (“Know”1).

However, Pelosi’s message, though complicated, may not be “one of possibility and promise,” to the extent that she reinforces the concept of motherhood as the ultimate destiny of women. Although Pelosi’s treatment of political ambition eventually characterizes Nancy as possessing a “masculine” trait (i.e. ambition), Pelosi’s depiction of motherhood undermines this development by presenting an image of Nancy that is dictated by the feminine mystique.

Pelosi uses three episodes to depict Nancy as a fulfilled mother with no further ambitions. While Pelosi’s treatment of political ambition represented a move away from gender stereotypes when compared with Ferraro and Schroeder, Pelosi’s treatment of family life reflects a deeper compliance with the feminine mystique than both of these politicians. Although Schroeder’s discussion of family life revealed her subscription to gender stereotypes by defending Pat as successful at balancing work with family, Pelosi’s choice to portray Nancy as completely fulfilled through motherhood unmistakably promotes gender assumptions. In the opening scene, when Nancy accepts Sala Burton’s request to run for her seat in Congress, Pelosi represents Nancy as a happy, ambitionless housewife: “I was forty-seven years old, a mother of five, happily married, and never—not even once—thinking or wanting this to happen to me”(Pelosi 7).
Pelosi describes Nancy’s discussion with her husband Paul after she was asked to run, and includes Nancy’s decision to ask her youngest daughter’s permission. Nancy’s ambition is obvious—Pelosi states:

Paul and I had to seriously evaluate the impact my running for office would have on our family. The question was ‘Is it worth it?’ From my own experience and from observing the careers of many of women colleagues, depending on one’s own personal situation, the answer is yes. (Pelosi 71)

Thus Pelosi presents somewhat contradictory statements – the first indicating complete fulfillment in her homemaker role, and the second showing an ambition to seek fulfillment outside the home, even with the impact it will have on her family. However, consideration of Beauvoir’s deconstruction suggests that Pelosi feels it necessary to hide Nancy’s ambition because it suggests Nancy was not completely fulfilled by achieving her feminine destiny. As Beauvoir considers the concept that a baby can provide justification for a woman’s life to be an “illusion,” it is possible Pelosi agrees with Beauvoir and is seeking her own validation by entering into the world of politics. However, because of the myth that rearing a child is a complete method of self-fulfillment, Pelosi’s use of statements about Nancy’s happiness may be an attempt to at least appear to conform.

In contrast to the opening scene, Pelosi reveals some of Nancy’s ambition in the next scene, but shows her as prioritizing motherhood over career. This scene occurs in the fourth chapter, when Nancy has married her husband and become the mother of three girls. Pelosi emphasizes Nancy’s seemingly easy decision to suspend
her ambition: “I was a very happy young wife and mother, and for the time being I put aside my thoughts of law school. My life revolved around diapers, feeding schedules, playtime in the park, errand with babies in tow—and I loved it” (Pelosi 39). In contrast to the first scene, Nancy does admit to having ambition beyond her role as a housewife, but is perfectly happy to put aside her ambition in order to fulfill her feminine destiny.

In this statement, Pelosi shows Nancy’s acceptance of maternity as the ultimate goal of women, even though she has other aspirations for her life. Nancy never attended law school. This is exactly the situation described by Beauvoir as occurring, where women relegate themselves to “the Other”.

It is often astounding to see how readily a woman can give up music, study, her profession, once she has found a husband. She has clearly involved too little of herself in her plans to find must profit in accomplishing them. Everything combines to restrain her personal ambition, and enormous social pressure still urges her on to find social position and justification in marriage. (Beauvoir 369)

A few pages later, Pelosi provides an interesting distinction between her role as a mother and housewife: “I was personally content because for me, there was nothing more exciting than having and caring for new babies. Yet I always knew that I did not want to deal only with the meals, the laundry, and the house forever” (Pelosi 42). Pelosi continues her portrayal of Nancy as satisfied with her life as a mother, yet expresses a desire for something more. This implies a hierarchy in conditioning—while Pelosi allows herself to show Nancy possessing desires beyond her role as a
housewife, she refuses to portray Nancy as anything but fully satisfied as a mother. Therefore, Nancy is still unable to overcome the feminine mystique of motherhood as the ultimate destiny and purpose of women.

Pelosi re-enforces this characterization a few pages later when she describes being sworn in as Speaker of the House. Here, Nancy’s self-identification is explicit: “more than anything else, I am a wife, mother, and grandmother. If I had never done anything in addition to being a mother to our five children, and now a grandmother, I would consider my life a happy success” (Pelosi 168). However, the reader can understand this statement to be untrue, as Nancy previously expressed a desire to do more than housework with her life. Nancy has not completely internalized the feminine mystique, but feels the need to make it seem that way. Again, Pelosi uses this statement about motherhood in order to characterize Nancy as completely fulfilled and content with her role as a mother.

Although it could be assumed that female politicians have demystified the feminine mystique in order to have the courage to run for political office, Pelosi’s characterization of Nancy as fulfilled through motherhood shows that even powerful women cannot completely overcome this aspect of their conditioning.

Pelosi uses several mini-scenes to characterize Nancy as a caring and loving mother. In the first episode, Pelosi characterizes Nancy as nurturing and caring by describing her struggle to let go of her children. In this scene, Nancy worries about remembering to pick up her car pool, even after her children start taking the bus. Pelosi uses characterization of Nancy and her children to emphasize Nancy’s maternal instincts. Nancy experiences a “sudden feeling in the pit of [her] stomach”
whenever it got to the time she would normally pick up her children from school. Pelosi includes this vivid description of Nancy’s emotions in order to highlight the call of duty she experienced. Pelosi purposely includes this experience to portray Nancy as nurturing and caring. Beauvoir provides an explanation for this: since women are conditioned to view motherhood as the sole purpose of their existence, pursuing a career other than housewife is not acceptable. Thus, Pelosi may be compensating for her own insecurities as a mother, feeling it necessary to justify her dedication to her children after becoming a politician.

Pelosi then describes a parallel situation occurring years later, when Nancy asked her children to live with her in Washington, and they rejected her offer with this response: “’Mother, not only do we not want to live with you, we don’t want to live with each other. We love our siblings, but we want to live with our friends. We are in college, you are in Congress. Why don’t you just forget we are in the same city’”(Pelosi 20). Although Nancy’s actions reveal that she does not completely buy into the concept of motherhood as the “highest value and the only commitment for women”(Friedan), Pelosi tries her best to make it seem this way. Pelosi uses this response from Nancy’s children to show that Nancy was not needed, even rejected, to perform her motherly duties while serving in Congress. Again Pelosi uses this story to justify to herself that she was not neglecting her children by running for and serving in Congress.

Pelosi continues to characterize Nancy as a dedicated and attentive mother by describing in detail her routine with the children each morning:
In the morning, after they made their beds (required) and put their rooms in order (strongly suggested), they came down to the kitchen, where I would have breakfast waiting for them. Before we headed out the door, I would do an inspection of shoes, uniforms, and teeth. Paul and I would comb their hair. The big question was braids or ponytails, and one day, in our haste, Jacqueline went to school with one of each. Often as not, I was driving a car pool (occasionally with my nightgown on under my coat). (Pelosi 52)

Pelosi uses this description to accomplish multiple goals. First, Pelosi provides this list of Nancy’s duties every morning in order to establish that Nancy did not neglect her children. Secondly, Pelosi uses aspects of this description, such as stating that the children made their own beds and cleaned their rooms every morning, to portray Nancy as successful in raising her children. Thirdly, Pelosi specifies that Nancy sometimes drove her children to school in a nightgown to demonstrate Nancy’s unwavering dedication to her family. Pelosi’s summary of Nancy’s routine is illuminated when considering Friedan’s observations on the subject:

Judging from the women’s magazines today, it would seem that the concrete details of women’s lives are more interesting than their thoughts, their ideas, their dreams. Or does the richness and realism of the detail, the careful descriptions of small events, mask the lack of dreams, the vacuum of ideas, the terrible boredom that has settled over the American housewife. (Friedan 7)
Although Pelosi may have intended to use her message on Nancy’s responsibilities to demonstrate her dedication as a mother, consideration of Friedan reveals that the list may also represent a lack of fulfillment Nancy experiences from motherhood.

Pelosi’s fourth episode serves the purpose of showing that Nancy remained a caring mother even after gaining a position of power. In this scene, Nancy asks her daughter’s permission to run for Congress: “I didn’t have to wait long for an answer. Alexandra said ‘Mom, get a life!’ I was trying so hard to be a great mom, giving my little heartfelt speech, and my youngest put it all in perspective for me in three works—‘get a life’—and so I did” (Pelosi 73). Pelosi includes Alexandra’s reaction in order to emphasize that Nancy’s career did not inhibit her duties as a mother. In addition, Pelosi uses Nancy’s “little heartfelt speech” to further illustrate her characterization of Nancy as nurturing and caring.

Pelosi uses a fifth episode to demonstrate Nancy’s devotion to her motherly duties, although the chapter title suggests otherwise. In this scene, Nancy’s daughter Alexandra labels her mother a “pioneer” for deciding before other mothers to stop cooking. This label combined with the chapter title “Remember when you used to cook?” implies that Nancy had a realization, perhaps after entering Congress, about prioritizing what’s important in life. “Remember when you used to cook?” has a slightly self-deprecating tone, as if dealing with critical issues facing America made Nancy realize cooking dinner every night wasn’t as important after all. However, Nancy’s response to Alexandra completely undermines this interpretation: “I admit that after cooking meals for five children for twenty years, I had started to pick up more prepared food” (Pelosi 142). Pelosi deliberately includes the number of years
Nancy cooked in order to emphasize Nancy’s dedication as a mother. In addition, Pelosi’s use of cooking serves as a symbolization of Nancy’s compliance with her feminine conditioning, because as a child “while boys are expected to play outside, girls are taught housekeeping, cooking” (Beauvoir 282). While the title would suggest otherwise, in reality Pelosi uses this little scene to create the image of Nancy as a good mother.

Pelosi uses the sixth episode to identify Nancy as prioritizing her family, despite her political career. In this scene, Nancy, now elected Congresswoman, was scheduled to accompany President Clinton on his trip to the Middle East. The morning the plane was scheduled to depart, Nancy’s daughter went into labor. Nancy decided to skip the trip: “going there was not a hard decision. Not even close” (Pelosi 167). By conveying that Nancy’s decision to choose family was not difficult, Pelosi emphasizes Nancy’s dedication to her role as a mother. Pelosi’s characterization of Nancy as a good mother further demonstrates the difficulty women face in overcoming their conditioning to view maternity as their feminine destiny, as it reflects Pelosi’s insecurity in taking on an official role besides housewife.

**Fulfillment through Politics**

As previously established, Pelosi uses mini-scenes through her memoir in order to portray Nancy’s fulfillment through motherhood. In two instances, Pelosi also provides examples of Nancy’s fulfillment through political involvement. Although Nancy was initially hesitant to accept a position as library commissioner,
Pelosi makes Nancy’s enjoyment in the position clear: “when I was a commissioner, the Library Commission decided to give more people an opportunity to participate by moving its meetings out of the main library and into the community, to the smaller library branches throughout the city. I quickly learned that when I went to these meetings and showed up as a commissioner with a vote, people cared about what I thought. They called me to ask my opinions. I was now officially involved in the community. And I loved it” (Pelosi 57).

Pelosi demonstrates Nancy’s thrill at being involved again towards the end of her memoir: “No matter how swept up I get in my work in Washington, I have to make choices, just as all women do who are trying to balance home and work” (Pelosi 165). Although Pelosi uses this sentence to preface an example of Nancy choosing family over career, Pelosi’s use of the verb “swept up” is quite telling. Pelosi uses “swept up” to show Nancy’s tendency to get completely engrossed in her work. Although Pelosi attempts to establish Nancy’s fulfillment through motherhood, it reflects her conditioning rather than reality. However, Nancy does experience true fulfillment through an independent means of success—as a leader in her community.

Conclusion

In accord with Ferraro and Schroeder, Pelosi also characterizes her protagonist as passive. However, Pelosi departs from Ferraro and Schroeder when she crafts several episodes about ambition to portray Nancy’s journey in overcoming her ambition. Having titled her memoir: *Know Your Power: A Message to America’s*
*Daughters*, Pelosi clearly intended to communicate her messages to young female readers who may view her as a role model. Pelosi’s treatment of ambition in her memoir is feminist in nature: she uses an evolving portrayal of Nancy to set an example for young women on how to overcome their passivity and run for office. Pelosi’s treatment of motherhood, however, contradicts feminist efforts by promoting the feminine mystique and thus sending the message to young women everywhere that their role as a mother should always remain the priority. Pelosi, like Ferraro and Schroeder, emphasizes her femininity in her representation of herself as a protagonist, thereby encouraging gender stereotypes.
Conclusion

In my thesis I examine the portrayal of political ambition and family life in these memoirs to understand how each female politician created a feminine image. I discovered that although each female politician treats these subjects differently, they all create a similar gender identification of their protagonist.

While Ferraro uses the lack of political ambition to characterize Geraldine as passive—and therefore feminine—her treatment of family life does not contribute to this overall characterization. Schroeder uses political ambition, not to deny Pat’s ambition, but rather to minimize this masculine trait. Unlike Ferraro, Schroeder uses family life to present Pat as feminine by discussing the success of Pat’s mothering while in office.

Like Ferraro, Pelosi uses political ambition to characterize Nancy as passive. However, Pelosi crafts her narrative in order to highlight Nancy’s evolution from reluctant to ambitious. Here, Pelosi uses Nancy as an example for all women on how to overcome their feminine conditioning. Oddly, Pelosi uses family life to characterize Nancy as entirely fulfilled through motherhood thereby denying her ambition for further endeavors. In this way, Pelosi’s characterization of Nancy in terms of motherhood undermines Pelosi’s message of prevail against conditioning.

Almost thirty years after Geraldine Ferraro became the first female vice presidential nominee of a major political party, women are still underrepresented in United States elective offices. Women currently hold just 18.1 percent of seats in the
113th United States Congress: 20 percent of seats in the Senate and 17.7 percent of seats in the House of Representatives ("Women" 1).

The presence of women in statewide elective executive offices throughout the country is only slightly higher at 23.4 percent: 20.7 percent of state senate seats and 25.3 percent of state house of representatives or assembly seats ("Women" 1).

An examination of the memoirs of female politicians published in the last fifteen years sheds light on some of the contributing factors to this enduring issue of underrepresentation. Although their treatment of political ambition and family life differs, Geraldine Ferraro, Pat Schroeder and Nancy Pelosi all promote their femininity through characterization of themselves as their own story’s protagonist. As summarized in the introduction to this thesis, scholars have found that gender stereotypes influence how voters evaluate candidates, finding that voters prefer candidates with masculine traits. Therefore, it could be concluded that reinforcing gender assumptions about femininity is detrimental to success as a female politician.

Ferraro, Schroeder, and Pelosi were not seeking elective office when they published their memoirs. In fact, these women published their memoirs either in retirement or towards the end of their careers. However, the fact that a common thread among these memoirs is an emphasis on traditional gender roles and traits is not insignificant. These memoirs reflect gender stereotypes that are both inherent in society and perhaps in the minds of potential candidates for office. By choosing to emphasize these traits, these prominent women politicians may have unwittingly contributed to the ongoing underrepresentation of women in elective office.
Although men still vastly outnumber women in politics, there is hope for the future. This past year, New Hampshire elected an all-female delegation to Congress. Carol Shea-Porter and Ann McLane Kuster were elected to the House of Representatives, joining Senators Jeanne Shaheen and Kelly Ayotte. In addition, a record number of women were elected to the 113th Congress—although the 81 women still make up a small percentage of the 535 politicians in Congress (“Women” 2). Furthermore, one female politician’s more recent autobiography breaks the pattern of masked ambition and commitment to motherhood.

Sarah Palin, the controversial 2008 Republican vice presidential nominee, published *Going Rogue* in 2009. Although Palin’s title is aimed at her experience on the 2008 campaign, “going rogue” also symbolizes a move away from the typical emphasis on femininity seen in female politicians’ autobiographies of the past. Unlike the autobiographies cited in the Introduction, Palin does not attempt to mask or undermine her political ambitions. Nor does Palin make her children a central feature of her story or feel the need to explain her dedication to her children. The following paragraph from the first few pages of Palin’s autobiography encapsulates her approach to the topic of ambition and family life:

I had a drive to help, an interest in government and current events since I was a little kid, and I had become aware of the impact of common sense public policy during the presidency of Ronald Reagan…So I got involved…In 2002, as my second mayoral term wound down, my husband, Todd, and I began to consider my next step. With four busy kids, I would certainly have enough going on to keep me occupied,
even if I chose to put public service aside. And for a while, I did. But I still felt a restlessness, an insistent tugging on my heart that told me there were additional areas where I could contribute. (Palin 3-4)

Similar to male politicians, Palin embraces her political ambition. She attributes her entrance into politics as stemming from a desire to help implement change. Palin does not discuss her children at length, but does include descriptions of the birth of her children, her discovery that she was carrying a special needs child, and learning that her teenage daughter was pregnant. The latter two issues were the subject of much media coverage during the 2008 campaign and, therefore, had to be covered in her book.

Unlike Schroeder, Palin does not discuss her children in relation to her career or to provide insight into her role as a mother. And unlike Pelosi, Palin does not emphasize her role as a mother as superior to her role as a politician. “My energies remained in my full-time job as mayor and in raising a family. There were times when I thought; you know what I could really use? A wife”(Palin 89). By claiming that she could use a wife, Palin reveals her unwillingness to sacrifice her career in order to be fully available for childrearing duties.

Palin’s memoir provides a counterpoint to the memoirs studied in this thesis, taking an approach to the subject of political ambition and family life more like that found in the memoirs of male politicians. But is one approach the right approach? Is deeming your profession as a politician a noble calling any “better” than claiming you had no intentions of running for office until you were recruited? Is it “better” to barely mention your children than to make family a central focus of your story? Is it
feminist to expect women to behave like men? These are questions that do not have easy answers. However, the emphasis on femininity revealed within the memoirs of female politicians indicates that more research must be done on the role female politicians play in representing themselves according to gender stereotypes, perhaps starting by expanding my analysis on gendered self-representation in the memoirs of three female American politicians to the memoirs of international female politicians, such as Margaret Thatcher and Angela Merkel. Future research could also examine speeches, television advertisements, and campaign literature of female and male politicians for differences in self-representation.

If increasing the representation of women in political office is at stake, one must consider whether women should present themselves in a more “masculine” manner as a means to a desired end. In her much anticipated book, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*¹, Facebook CEO Sheryl Sandberg advises women to begin dismantling the interior barriers that are currently holding them back. Female politicians could provide some leadership in this respect. After all, politicians are used to formulating their positions after considering public opinion—isn’t that why they take polls? Perhaps presenting themselves as having masculine attributes could be viewed as just one more instance in which politicians give the public what they think they want.

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¹ Sandberg’s book was not yet available, as its release coincided with the due date of my project
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