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Where are the Women: An Analysis of Gender Disparity in Congress

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Abstract

Despite progress in many workplaces, only 20% of the current United States Congress is female. In order to understand why there are not more women in Congress, I will explore sexism in the workplace as experienced by the staffers on Capitol Hill. My study concludes that one of the reasons there are so few women in Congress is because of the perceptions of gender dynamics among the staffers who work for them. This study uses data from the gender makeup of staff positions and interviews with current and former U.S. staffers to analyze how women are deterred from seeking higher office and impacting the legislative process.

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LAKE FOREST COLLEGE

Senior Thesis

Where are the Women: An Analysis of Gender Disparity in Congress

by

Chelsea McDonald

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The report of the investigation undertaken as a
Senior Thesis, to carry two courses of credit
in the Departments of Politics and Sociology/Anthropology

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Abstract

Despite progress in many workplaces, only 20% of the current United States Congress is female. In order to understand why there are not more women in Congress, I will explore sexism in the workplace as experienced by the staffers on Capitol Hill. My study concludes that one of the reasons there are so few women in Congress is because of the perceptions of gender dynamics among the staffers who work for them. This study uses data from the gender makeup of staff positions and interviews with current and former U.S. staffers to analyze how women are deterred from seeking higher office and impacting the legislative process.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my family who have made everything I have accomplished possible. They have listened to endless planning, pro/con lists and been there for every success and failure. Thank you.

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Although the United States Constitution defines the role that United States House of representatives plays, the role staffers' play is controversial, evolving and not well understood. In addition to the names of representatives called out at roll call, there are currently 15,000 staffers in the wings shaping national policy. This shifting dynamic between United States congressional representatives and those who staff them is also affected by the complex nature of how gender plays out in the workplace, both for the members of the House and the individuals that work for them.

When studying the gender dynamics of a workplace it is necessary to understand internal and external pressures. A representative's congressional office is a unique workplace due to political pressures of election cycles. The success of the office is measured by the public perception during the re-election of the representative that the office serves. The stakes of the re-election also mean that every two years, everyone in a congressional office is risking unemployment – not due to their own merit, instead, they depend on their office successfully maintaining a positive public perception while handling unexpected legislative and national issues. This thesis explores if and how gender affects the workplace in congressional offices through an analysis of the staffers who work there.

Research Questions

Despite the research on the role of staffers, the staffer-to-office pipeline, and the experiences of female representatives, there is a lack of focused researched on the females who work in congressional offices. The following questions are guiding my own research on this topic:

Are fewer females in staff leadership roles in congressional offices? Second, does having female leaders on staff change the gender composition of the congressional office staff? Since,

previous research indicates congressional offices resemble workplaces sociologically, and that gender inequality exists, my first hypothesis is that if gender inequality exists in congressional office, then women have a proportionately lower chance of being in a position of leadership and higher chance of being in the district office. Additionally, my second hypothesis states that if women are more likely to hire another woman than a man then if the representative or Chief of Staff is a woman, there are likely more women on staff than offices with male leaders.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a lack of research about how gender expectations impact the influential work of congressional office staffers. Although prior research has examined institutional characteristics of congressional offices (Gerrity, Hardt and Lavelle 2008; Leal and Hess 2004), the structure of staff roles (DeGregorio 1995; DeGregorio 1988), the sexism representatives experience (Griffiths 1996; Hawkesworth 2003; Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie and Reichard 2008; Paxton, Kunovick and Hughes 2007; Pearson and Dancey 2011), and how staffers become representatives themselves (Hammond and Bawden 2004; Herson 1994), the effects of gender has not been examined as it relates to the experience of the staffers who work in congressional offices. Existing research is incomplete as to the unique pressures of the congressional institution and how gender affects it.

The Congressional Office and the Staffers

The role of staffers on Capitol Hill has evolved greatly since the founding of the country because of changing technologies and responsibilities. A staff for a U.S. representative is usually split between two offices with divided responsibilities. The staff in Washington D.C. is composed of a Legislative Director and Aides, whom oversee the representative's legislative policies. Usually included in each D.C. staff are a Scheduler who manages appointments and ensure attendance for the representative, a Press Secretary who is in charge of communicating with the media, and a Legislative Correspondent who responds to mail from constituents in the representative's district (Moore 2013). Each representative also maintains a separate office in their district that serves as the place where Caseworkers handle constituents' requests and help the constituents deal with federal agencies. Although congressional offices vary based on the needs of specific representative, most have this similar structure.

The structures of congressional offices differ in theory and practice. This office structure has been heavily studied and debated amongst scholars such as Christine DeGregorio (1988), Robert Salisbury (1981), Kenneth Shepsle (1981), and David Leal and Frederick Hess (2004). Some, such as Christine DeGregorio (1988), suggest that the expansion of the role of contemporary staffers have had a positive impact on representatives by increasing access to expert information and the efficacy of representatives. One of the expanded roles of staffers is to act as a resource for the representative. They contend that representatives previously would rely on one another for the expertise necessary to draft legislation and make informed decisions, whereas the Congresses of recent times rely more on the unelected experts employed as a part of their staffs (DeGregorio 1988:460). They argue that this shift occurred in part due to a change in how representatives interact with each other. Representatives in contemporary times are expected to hold near expert opinions on nuanced bills that vary from global terrorism to the promotion of a technology literate workforce. Therefore, as a way for representatives to be knowledgeable in these varied areas, the representative will be likely to defer to the expert opinion of their aides (DeGregorio 1988:460). In addition, staffers act as gatekeepers and segregates. Staffers filter information, individuals, and special interest groups that come to a congressional office to advocate for their interests. Then staffers use this information to create summaries and interpretations for their representative in order to save them time (DeGregorio 1988:459). This is seen as a positive development. In response to concerns that congressional members are no longer as strongly linked to their constituents due to the professional staffs that buffer the two groups, DeGregorio (1988) studied how the relationships between constituents and representatives function and found that congressional members had little direct interaction with constituents but rather staffers interacted with constituents as a proxy (459). Through interviews

with committee chairs and staff directors, DeGregorio (1988) found that representatives prefer staffers that have worked with them the longest, thereby demonstrating loyalty (462). A modern representative has less direct interaction with their constituents allowing staffers to fulfill many of the responsibilities previously completed only by representatives. However, representatives are highly selective about which staffers and tasks they are allowed to do. This means the representatives have more control over the legislative process than it might seem at first. For DeGregorio (1988), staffers increase efficiency.

Robert Salisbury and Kenneth Shepsle (1981) further illuminate the roles of the congressional staff by drawing comparisons to small companies. They hypothesize that the current size and structure of congressional staffs are analogous to a modern workplace, therefore, making sociological research about modern workplaces applicable to the congressional office as well (Salisbury and Shepsle 1981:382). To Salisbury and Shepsle (1981), “the member of Congress may best be understood... as an enterprise” (382). This means that although the public thinks of their representative as fulfilling all of their duties alone, there is actually a team of individuals having to collaborate. Salisbury and Shepsle go on to argue that the legislative branch is no longer effectively described by the job description for the 435 representatives and Senators laid out in the Constitution. Instead, they claim Congress should be thought of as a “collection of organizations or member-centered enterprises,” whose relationships, with other congressional offices make up what amounts to economic activity (Salisbury and Shepsle 1981:382). Be it competition, or collusion, between congressional offices or general decision-making within the organization, congressional offices act in the same ways as a businesses firm would. Each congressional office should therefore be understood as its own small company, working to survive in a highly competitive marketplace with high-stakes workplace reviews that

occur every two years (Salisbury and Shepsle 1981:382). The staffers work together to cultivate a product, the image of the representative, which becomes a brand much like a business (Salisbury and Shepsle 1981:383). Staff members “are hired to serve the policy, electoral, and even ideological objectives of the members who lead the various congressional enterprises—personal offices, committees, subcommittees, etc.” (Salisbury and Shepsle 1981:383). Staff members are hired based on the ideological homogeneity that the office is trying to create for the representative.

These identity-driven hiring practices lead to strong ties between the representative and those who work for them similar to a more conventional workplace. Salisbury and Shepsle (1981) contend that these ties are so strong that they end up eclipsing the staff member’s personal identities. The work done as a staff member is never labeled as a personal accomplishment. Instead, staffers exist in anonymity, without credit for speeches, amendments, or political maneuvers given to the representatives or the office as a whole. This mentality reflects a willingness to be “on tap, not on top”, (Salisbury and Shepsle 1981:383). Therefore, staffers are willing to act as a resource for the achievement of the representative instead of prioritizing personal recognition. The identity of the staffer is superseded by the identity of the member of Congress to the constituents who re-elect them, the lobbyists and other offices with whom they interact. Due to these characteristics, congressional offices can be studied in a similar manner as business offices.

David Leal and Frederick Hess (2004) describe discernable differences in how representatives decide whom to hire, exploring possible compounding variables besides gender that may influence hiring practices. One important difference between veteran members of the House of Representatives compared to freshman representatives is that veteran representatives,

for the most part, are not as limited by the composition of their personal staffs due to the additional resources that they accrue during their time on Capitol Hill (Leal and Hess 2004:652). These resources range from the additional committee staff they oversee when they are a chair or ranking member of a committee or subcommittee, as well as a range of bureaucratic, congressional, and lobbyist contacts who can help them. In contrast, freshmen representatives often lack these resources and are therefore far more dependent on their personal staffs because they lack the other staff (Leal and Hess 2004: 652). These are the kinds of considerations that influence the hiring decisions of U.S. House Representatives.

However, as Salisbury and Shepsle (1981) contend in their work, staff experience might not be that influential on hiring decisions of new representatives. When looking at the extent to which new Representatives and Senators hire staffers based on their prior work in the U.S. Capitol, they found it has become more common to recruit experienced personal staffs. This is evidence of the ties-that-bind hypothesis – that new representatives and Senators recruit their staff from personal acquaintances and campaign staffs in their home states or districts, instead of long time Washington D.C. staffers, despite the fact that congressional party leaders often advise otherwise. Party leaders encourage the use of veteran staffers as a way to have someone to guide the representative through the political process, but representatives choose instead to work with the individuals they personally know in other ways because the close links between the identity of the representative and their staff.

The trend of favoring personal ties over professional experience is not true for all demographic groups in Congress. One group who favors hiring experienced staffers is women. On average, female representatives hire experienced staffers six percent more often than their male counterparts (Leal and Hess 2004:661). Salisbury and Shepsle (2004) speculate that the

female representatives felt it was necessary to have more veteran staffers so that the staffs could be relied on as tools to navigate the unfamiliar territory and to negate any of the lingering “old-boy’ network on the Hill” (662). Female representatives will rely on seasoned staffers so they can overcome sexist attitudes that would otherwise prevent them from being taken seriously. The fact that there is a tendency for the hiring practices of women representative to be limited in this way is important to note, as Leal and Hess (2004) state, hiring their staff is often some of the little power representatives actually have, “while they [representatives] cannot easily change the political or institutional context in which they serve, their personal staffs are entirely subject to their [the representatives’] discretion” (655). Leal and Hess (2004) demonstrate some of the constraints different representatives have when hiring members of their staff.

Moreover, Leal and Hess (2004) argue that staffers have huge effects on the policy passed in Congress and therefore, it is important that they are hired based not only on seniority (652). This is especially true because of previous studies, which show that gender and race patterns in the staff affect the legislation that ends up on the floor of the capital. This research has demonstrated that staffs serve a critical role in policy formulation, power acquisition, and constituency service, which not only helps representatives keep their jobs, but also aids them in achieving prominence in the house (DeGregorio 2004:459). In the words of Polsby (2003), staff members have "extraordinary opportunities to affect public policy” (654). This ability is why it is critical to understand who is successful in this workplace and why.

If women representatives are focusing their hiring practices around who will help them gain the respect of their male counterparts, it might follow they are choosing to hire men over women to be their legislative representatives, because if a female representative cannot expect to be respected, it is unlikely her female junior staffer will be either. If women staffers are being

shut out of these roles, it could have huge ramifications on United States policy. “Previous research suggests that gender has an impact on policy questions, whereby women exhibit a greater willingness to fund programs for the disadvantaged and needy. The literature also shows that female state legislators are more sympathetic than their male colleagues toward social and family issues” (Leal and Hess 2004:657). Based on the model used by Leal and Hess, staff’s hiring decisions are impacted by the gender of the member of Congress, which could have major impacts on the laws the Congress passes in the future.

The Pipeline

Gender dynamics of political staffers may have an impact on the future composition of Congress itself, due to the pattern of congressional staffers running for office themselves. Robert Salisbury and Kenneth Shepsle (2004) reason that many staffers who work for Congress are looking at their own long-term careers, and most fall into one of three categories. A staffer may be: seeking a credential, pursuing the financial returns of the revolving door into private sector careers, or hoping to one day run for office themselves (1981:383). The only thing almost all staffers share is a refusal to see their current job as a lifelong career, creating the phenomena known as a pipeline career, meaning that being a Staffer is one of the jobs that individuals often hold before considering their own run for office (1981:382-383). The pipeline is one of the reasons the staffers’ experience in politics becomes significant, since a positive experience would increase the likelihood of them running for Congress.

Paul Hernson (1994) argues while not all former congressional staffers run for office, and not everyone who is a representative was a staffer, there are crucial trends that deserve to be addressed. It should be noted that while Hernson’s findings are 20 years old, there is nothing to suggest there has been a significant shift since he completed his research. One of Hernson’s

(1994) most significant finding is that while former staffers make up just 4% of the individuals seeking a congressional office, nearly 15% of elected members of the House of Representatives were once staffers (137). In other words, if staffers run, they are more likely to win than non-staffers. These large success rates are due to their ability to navigate the political world and use their contacts to raise money and run campaigns. The most interesting argument put forth by Hernson (1994), however, is the staffers' ability to occupy a role that is similar to what a representative does. This is due to the staffer's role in working in the political arena and interacting with the constituents in the house district of their representative, in the way that candidates from state legislatures would. However, unlike the elected officials that they work for, staffers do not suffer any political ramifications from policy decisions that went against local interest of public opinion. Even if the staffer were to run and lose, it would not permanently end their career as it likely would an elected official because any failings can be blamed on the representative they worked for rather than themselves. The advantages that the "manifest office" offers could be why former congressional Staffers have the greatest probability of winning a primary over any other kind of candidate. On average, office holders who are former staffers win 52 percent of their elections compared to people who have never worked as a congressional Staffer (Henson 1994:149). Being a staffer greatly increases one's ability to attain public office for oneself. Hernson's study begins to explore why the Staffer to Office Holder pipeline is so important.

Susan Webb Hammond and Allison Bawden's (2004) further exploration of this trend reveals what happens once former staffers are in office. Though representatives who are former staffers are in the minority, for the 108th Congress, (2003-2004) they were 12.3% of the body, and they often were in the leadership. "In the 100th Congress (1987-1988) four of the five top

House leaders, Foley and Michel, and Trent Lott (R-MS) and Tony Coehlo (D-CA) were former high-level congressional staffers” (2004:2). The rise to power is facilitated by contacts and knowledge, but also by the groundwork staffers can create while still working for their congressional boss. Staffers also benefit from being able to work in both Washington D.C. and the congressional district, or move back to the district for the term preceding their boss’s retirement to prepare the infrastructure necessary for a campaign (2004:8). Former staffers may not be a huge statistical part of congress, but as group they, hold a large proportion of power. Especially when considering the small percentage of former staffers in the population at large.

The pipeline is important because of its large effects on who ultimately becomes a representative. If women are preemptively eliminated from being congressional staffers, then it creates large effects on the future gender composition of Congress. This has direct implications for what perspectives are represented in Congress, and why it is important to understand the experiences of current Staffers.

Gender Roles in the Workplace

Though there is a lack of research exploring the experience of female staffers on Capitol Hill, how gender roles play out in other workplaces is well documented. Gender roles are dictate behaviors considered acceptable for a person to exhibit based on their perceived gender, which are regulated through social sanctions and norms. For much of American history, it was perceived as desirable to keep women out of the work force if at all possible, but as more and more women began to work outside of the home, gender roles and expectations have shaped the workplace culture.

Madeline Heilman and Alice Eagly (2008) argue that most often in the workplace, women’s careers suffer more from gender role expectations than men. This is due in large part

both to men's dominance in many occupational fields, as well as stereotypes that prevail in western culture about a woman's "nature". Heilman and Eagly (2008) outline a paradox that many women become trapped in. Though many stereotypes of women appear to be more positive than stereotypes about men – that women are the nicer, kinder sex – these are the same qualities that make them the victims of prejudice in the workplace. This paradox is explained by a mismatch of stereotypes, where the more positive stereotypes are seen as ineffective mannerisms in the workplace. This mismatch is often evident in employee evaluations, which hold women's careers back due to what seems like positive labels. For example, if a woman was seen as being very kind, which is generally a positive connotation, this could hold her back since she wouldn't be seen as fit for supervising positions that require a more stern personality (Heilman and Eagly 2008:393). Heilman and Eagly point out that these stereotypes most adversely impact women in higher-level jobs, with higher rates of sex discrimination occurring against women in senior jobs, which have greater status and wages. This is especially the case when men dominate the jobs (Heilman and Eagly 2008:394). Jobs that are viewed as more masculine include an auto sales person, or a real estate agent, whereas jobs that are viewed as more feminine are secretary or a director of a day care center (Heilman and Eagly 2008: 395). Gender roles affect expectations and employees' ability to advance across workplaces, though women in different careers experience different ramifications for their gender.

Multiple studies have looked at the impact of gender in different areas of social life. Economists Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse (2000) found that when orchestras in the 1970s and 1980s began allowing musicians to audition behind a screen so the identity, gender and race were concealed from the jury, an interesting trend emerged. In 1970, before blind auditions, the top five symphony orchestras in the United States, had a pool of musicians who were less than

12% female, in 1997, it had increased to 25% female (Goldin and Rouse 2000:717). When auditioning behind a screen, the likelihood that a female will advance out of preliminary rounds increased 28.1% and the chance a woman would win a final round increased by 1.6 when she is allowed to play from behind a screen (Goldin and Rouse 2000:727). This suggests that women were being kept out of the top orchestras in the country not because of skill, but because of their perceived skill level as a woman. The unique nature of the job interview for an orchestra makes them an interesting study for the major ramifications gender can play in advancing a career.

Multiple studies demonstrate that those stereotypes about gender impact almost every aspect of how women are compared to men in the workplace. In the joint research of Stefanie Johnson, Susan Murphy, Rebecca Reichard, and Selamawit Zewdie (2008), they found a consistent prejudice against female leaders in the work place because female leadership was associated with sensitivity, whereas male leadership was linked to concepts of masculinity, strength and tyranny. Ultimately, they found that for female leaders to be seen as effective, they had to balance sensitivity and strength but males only needed to seem strong (2008:40).

Furthermore, women in the workplace are also affected by social stigmas around physical beauty. In popular culture, Olga Khazan covered an interview between a Facebook staffer and former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton refers it to as a “makeup tax”, as seen in an Atlantic article on August 5, 2015,

‘Every morning, as my boyfriend zips out the door and I spend 30+ minutes getting ready, I wonder about how the ‘hair-and-makeup tax’ affects other women—especially ones I admire in high-pressure, public-facing jobs,’ Brittain wrote. ‘I know these questions can seem fluffy, but as a young professional woman, I’d genuinely love to hear about how you manage getting ready each morning (especially during your time traveling as Secretary of State and now on the campaign trail) while staying focused on the ‘real’ work ahead of you that day.’

‘Amen, sister,’ Clinton responded, because she’s relatable. ‘You’re preaching to the choir. It’s a daily challenge.’

This exchange is telling because it shows a strong correlation with how experiences women have in the workplace are discussed in academic research and popular media. Nancy Etkoff, Shannon Stock, Lauren Haley, Sarah Vickery and David House (2011) contend that women who wore makeup were perceived as “natural”, were judged to be more trustworthy, and competent by people looking at their pictures. If a women’s physical attractive can affect factors such as trust and competency, which often define one’s success in the workplace, they can be greatly held back in their careers, due to factors out of their control. How women are perceived in the workplace, often has very little to do with their actual work (Etkoff, Stock, Haley, Vickery, and House 2011). Understanding how gendered expectations of physical appearance can affect women who have risen far in political society, such as Hillary Clinton, demonstrates the many issues in the public sphere that women face. Understanding the realities that these women face is important for understanding the choices women are making in their professional careers.

Being a Representative

The connections between representatives and their staffs are critical to understand how gender plays out in these unique workplaces for both the representatives and their staffers. As of 2015, there were 84 women serving in the United States House of Representatives, making up 19.3% of the body. In the Senate, out of a 100 Senators, 20 are women. As of 2015, Delaware, Mississippi and Vermont had never elected a woman to either House (Rutgers 2015). Incidents of sexism toward representatives are more documented than incidents amongst the staffers, in part because such incidents against representatives are often recorded in the media. These incidents range from comments such as in 2010, when Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid referred to Senator Kirsten Gillibrand as the hottest member of the Senate at a fundraiser (Habberman 2010). Or when Senator Arlen Specter told representative Michele Bachmann when

they were debating on a radio show, "I'm going to treat you like a lady. Now act like one," (Thrush 2010). Media also create these cases of sexism themselves, from the obvious, such as the 1992 New York Times headline, "Another Angry Woman Wins Senate Nomination," (Apple 1992). Moreover, in 2007 the main coverage in the Washington Post of then Senator Hillary Clinton's speech on the floor of the Senate on the cost of higher education opened with the sentence, "The cleavage registered after only a quick glance. No scrunch-faced scrutiny was necessary. There wasn't an unseemly amount of cleavage showing, but there it was," (Givhan 2007). These incidents demonstrate not only how women are treated even when they are a part of one of the most powerful legislative bodies, let alone the experiences of the women who work for them.

Understanding how representatives gain power is critical for women, who despite being elected the same as their male counterparts, often struggle to gain respect and power. Martha Griffiths, a representative elected in 1954, once said, "being a woman in Congress is like being a fragile goldfish among the barracuda," (Griffiths 1996). Pamela Paxton, Sheri Kunovich and Melanie Hughes (2007) show that for women, politics is still a difficult arena. Across the world, "women's overall representation remains low. Although over 60% of countries have reached at least 10% women in their national legislature, fewer have crossed the 20% and 30% barriers. By February 2006, only about 10% of sovereign nations had." (Paxton, Kunovich and Hughes 2007:265). Within the United States, as of 2007 (when they were writing), women held 23% of the seats on the state level and 10% of state governors office, though fewer than 30 women had been elected to that position since 1925 (Paxton et al. 2007:265). Paxton, Kunovich, and Hughes (2007) blame the lack of women in politics on socialization, saying "the supply of women available for political office is therefore determined partly by gender socialization, which

influences women's interest, knowledge, and ambition regarding politics, and partly by large-scale social structures, which enhance or limit women's opportunities for education and employment,” (266). They also cite Fox and Lawless (2004), who found that of four pipeline careers for elected office—law, business, education and politics—women were much less likely than men to aspire to political office (Paxton et al. 2007:267). For women, there are many social forces that discourage them from running for higher office. According to Kathryn Pearson and Logan Dancey (2011) the idea that women do not feel welcome in public office, may not be completely unjustified. Pearson and Dancey found in their research that “[Female] representatives perceive that they must work harder than their male colleagues as they seek to establish credibility with the press, colleagues, and constituents,” (Pearson and Dancy 2011:910). Throughout the political process, women are discouraged from participating.

CHAPTER 2: DATA & METHODS

To test these hypotheses, I used data collected from the website Legistorm, which tracks demographic information of congressional staff in order to find out the current gender breakdowns. I collected employment records for the current offices for a hundred randomly selected representatives as of December 2015. In order to understand more of why the trends in the data are occurring, I conducted 13 interviews with current and former congressional staffers on their experiences to provide possible explanations. The study's focus was limited to the U.S. House of Representatives, as they have smaller, simpler staff structures, with less structural variation than Senate offices. These two data sets offered both a quantitative and qualitative perspective on what is happening in these offices, in terms of the statistical trends of gender ratios in the offices, and personal perspectives and insights about why individuals thought gender differences might be occurring.

The quantitative data from the staff records of the congressional offices provide insight into the quantitative patterns of how gender has any influence in those offices. While the most comprehensive information available is the quarterly "Statement of Disbursement" from congressional offices, required by law, the collection and presentation of that information does not follow a protocol that allows for data harvesting and quantitative analysis. As a consequence, researchers must rely on third party data providers such as Legistorm, which uses the data from the State of Disbursement and converts it into a more user-friendly form. I used a randomized sample of 100 representatives I decided to randomly select based on gender and party affiliation of the representative to make up my sample because these are two of the variables for which I will control. Although, because out of the 435 current representatives only 22 are Republican women, I collected all of the Republican women, and selected 28 Democratic women so that

both gender and party in my sample would remain somewhat balanced. To ensure a random sample for the Democratic men and women, and the Republican men, I made a list of each by their last names alphabetically. I then used a random number generator and counted down the list, and collected the data for whatever office was that number. I repeated this process 100 times for each office. This ensured a random sample of congressional offices for my analysis of how their offices are organized.

Once I had selected the 100 offices, I collected the same data for each office. I recorded each paid staff member, excluding unpaid interns and fellows, as each office did not uniformly report them. For each staff member, I collected their name, job title, gender, education level, start date, salary, office's location (if they worked in the Washington D.C. office or the district office), representative, and representative's party affiliation. Each representative has about 15 individuals who work in their office, and my total sample amounted to 1,468 congressional staffers, with 384 individuals working for Democratic men, 346 working for Republican men, 425 working for Democratic women, and 314 working for Republican women.

Table 1: Number of Staffers per Type of Congressional Representative

Type of Congressional Representative	Number of Staffers
Democratic Men	384
Republican Men	346
Democratic Women	425
Republican Women	314

Note: Data Collected from Legistorm in December 2015

Controlling the sample in this way limited the possible any bias of data for representative's gender and party affiliation. These variables were then manipulated as independent variables in the analysis.

The dependent variables included whether the staff works in the Washington D.C. office and the local district office and their job title as an indicator of position level or leadership role. Gender of the staff was used as a dependent variable to answer the first question and an independent variable to answer the second. How much they are paid was not reliable because many staff started their positions at different dates during the fiscal year, but needed to be modified using the start date.

The interviews were useful in providing a qualitative richness to the gender disparity that is occurring in the congressional offices that quantitative data cannot capture. I collected 13 interviews from 10 congressional offices from across the United States. Because of the sensitive, political nature of their work and the subsequent need for strong trust between the interviewer and the subject, I used a snowball sampling technique. Political staffers represent their representative to the constituents. They are therefore trained to not disclose any possible negative information about the office and representative to any third party sources. Snowball sampling is a technique for recruiting interview subjects through their acquaintances. I started with congressional staffers that I had previous relationships and foundation of trust, and had them recommend me to others that they knew. This biased my sample towards staffers of Democratic representatives. My interviewees included six current and seven former staffers. Eight of my interviews were of staffers who worked in Washington D.C. and five worked in the district offices. As well as including multiple different job positions, I interviewed both three men and

ten women. All my interview subjects answered the basic demographic questions (See Appendix A for the interview protocol).

Demographic variables provide important information for several antecedent, independent and dependent variables. Age provided for important information about possible generational differences, as in the later half of the last century there were two waves of feminism that might have impacted the perspectives the staffers hold about women. Job title, educational level, and gender of the representative they worked for functioned the same as in the other data set, and allowed me to compare these staffers experiences with the statistical make-up of the current offices. Marital status and number of children provided important information in terms of the gender of the staffer, as several of my sources argue that gender differences in occupational achievement are due to women's perceived role and duties in prioritizing family and raising children over their own career. The length of their career and their career trajectory answered important questions about the gendered nature of career paths. See Appendix B for interview questions. These questions allowed me to address several ways gender may play out in this work place as suggested by preceding research. On average, the interviews took about twenty minutes and were conducted over the phone. The interviews revealed important patterns about how gender affected work experiences of individuals, and how expectations of gender affected how individuals perceived the job performance of others.

The combination of these two sets of datum illuminate how gender affects job placement throughout Capitol Hill and the district offices, the experiences of several individuals, and possibly the divergent experiences between staff of different genders.

CHAPTER 3: QUANTATIVE DEMOGRAPHICS OF CONGRESSIONAL OFFICES

Before starting an analysis of the relationship of gender and staffer positions in the offices of the representatives, it is necessary to look at the different job titles and gender breakdowns for each position. Each job title was placed into one of four hierarchical tiers. These four tiers are organized by the power associated with the jobs. The first tier is entry-level positions, and general administrative positions that are similar to other workplaces. The second tier are mid-level, specialized positions, such as junior aides, that require political knowledge. The third tier is senior staff members or advisors to the representatives (see more details below). The final tier was the Chief of Staff: the highest position in the congressional office. The sample size of each tier fit a traditional office hierarchy with higher percent of staff in lower positions and lower percent at the highest.

Table 2: Number of Staff Members in Each Tier

Division of Hierarchy	Number of Staffers in the Sample	Number of Staffers as Percent of Sample Total
Chief of Staff	97	7%
Tier 3-Senior Staff	362	25%
Tier 2-Specialized Staff	586	40%
Tier 1-Entry Level Staff	423	29%
Total	1468	

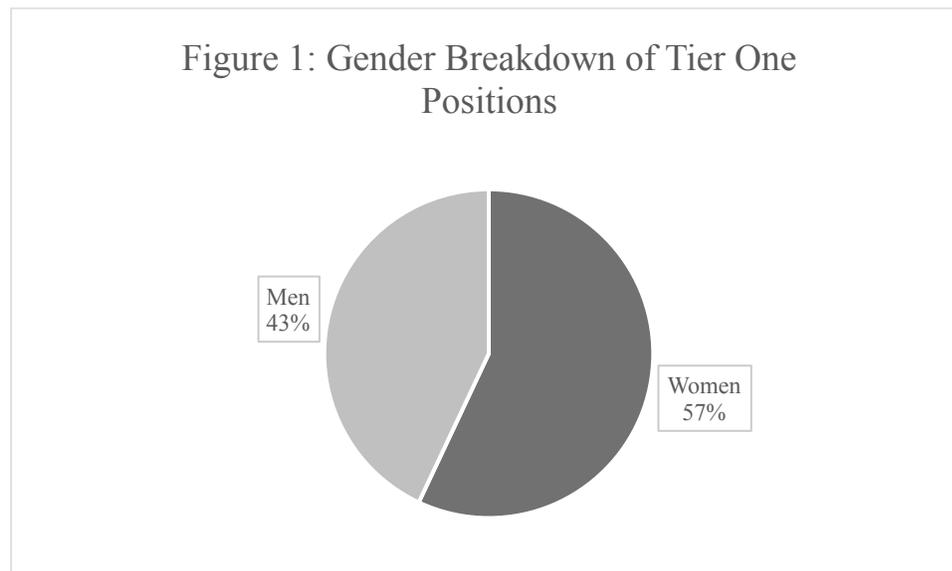
Note: Data Collected from Legistorm in December 2015

These tiers are used later analysis with the independent variables of gender and the antecedent variable of political party. Once the sample of 100 representatives and the 1468 staffers who worked for them in September 2015 are divided into these tiers patterns around

gender in the work place begin to appear. To understand each tier, the gender compositions of some of the main job titles demonstrate some of patterns driving gender inequalities.

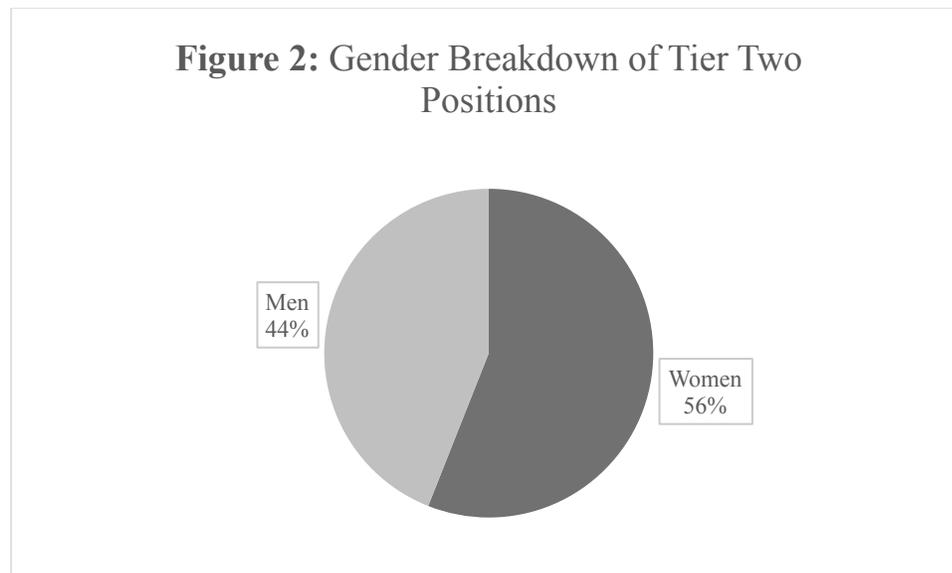
Tier One-Entry Level

Tier 1 staffers are those in jobs that are commonly seen as entry-level positions. This tier comprises 423 staffers in the sample. Their job titles include Aides, Community Liaisons, District Representatives, Schedulers, and Staff Assistants. For the most part, these positions are focused on the administrative business of running the office rather than legislative policies or constituent cases. As a whole, this tier has the highest percentage of women of any tier in the sample, with 57% of Tier 1 staffers in the sample being female. For some of the more specific job titles within the tier, this percentage is even higher. For example, Office Managers are 86% female, Schedulers—both in the district offices and Washington D.C office--are 87% female, and Executive Assistants are 95% female.



Tier Two-Specialized Staff

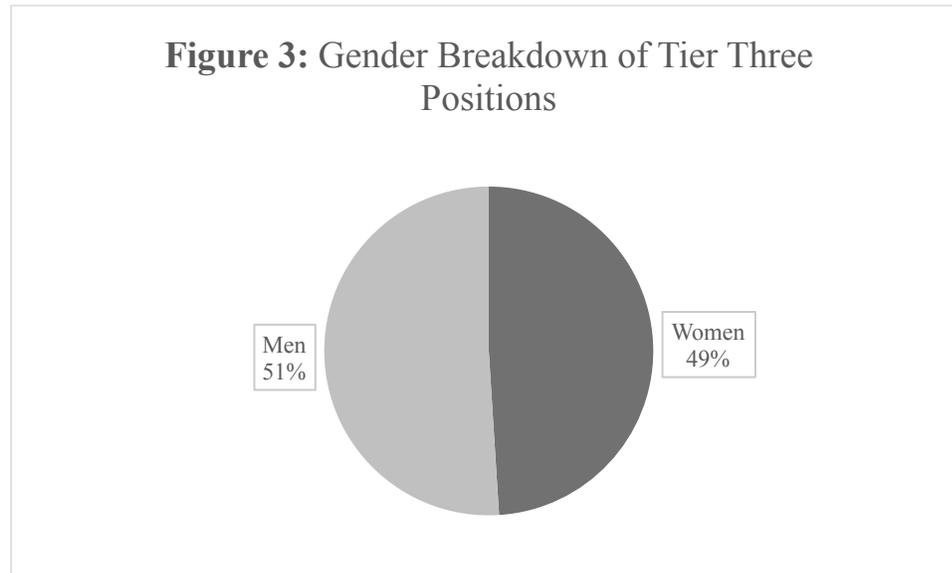
The second tier includes positions more specialized to the congressional office's policy and constituent work. Job titles in this tier include Caseworkers, congressional Aides, Field Representatives, and Legislative Assistants. The sample is made up of 586 staffers in this tier, of which 56% are female. Responsibilities of jobs in this tier focus on the constituents in the district, and the legislative process in Washington D.C., and therefore require specialized skills and knowledge. Staffers with jobs focused on the constituents, such as Caseworker and Constituent Service Representatives, are 71% female in the sample. This is in contrast, 42% of Legislative Assistants and Senior Legislative Assistants, are female. This, combined with the gender distribution in Tier 1, suggests that many positions in congressional offices are gendered.



Tier Three-Management

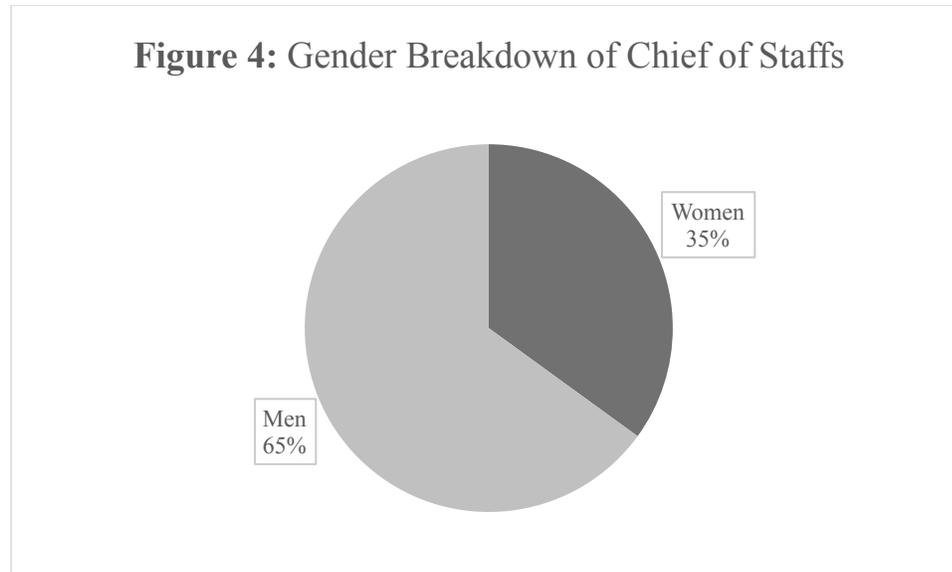
Tier Three is made of Senior Staff in the district and Washington D.C. offices or those with supervisory or management level positions. This includes job titles such as Communications Director, Deputy Chief of Staff, District Director, Deputy District Director, Legislative Director, and Senior Policy Advisor. Of the 362 individuals in the sample with job

titles that are members of this tier, 49% are female. However, variance exists job titles in the sample: District Directors are 55% female, Deputy Chief of Staffs are 46% female, Communications Directors are 40% female, and Legislative Directors are 29% female.



The Chief of Staffs

Of the 97 Chief of Staffs in the sample (three offices do not have anyone with the title “Chief of Staff”), only 35% are women. This job title is being kept separate from the other tiers since it is the highest non-elected position in the office, and because Chief of Staffs play a large role in the hiring of all other staff in the office. It is a position with common responsibilities across all offices, but unique to other job titles.



The Impact of Political Parties on the Tiers

As the tiers increase in the office hierarchy, political party plays an increasing role in the gender disparity of hiring practices. According to sample staff in Tier 1, the more entry-level positions, offices of Democratic and Republican representatives employ women at exactly equal proportions: 57% of sample staff in this tier are women. Female members of the sample in Tier 2 differ. Sixty-two percent of Tier 2 staffers that work for Democratic representatives are women, and Tier 2 sample staffs employed by Republican representatives are 50% women. In Tier 3, the difference continues to increase. Tier 3 staff in the sample that work for Democratic representatives are 57% women and those that work for Republican representatives are 42% women. Therefore, Democratic representatives have 15% more female congressional staffers at manager and supervisor positions than Republican representatives. Finally, there is a 19% difference in the proportion of female Chiefs of Staff, with Democrats employing 44% women Chief of Staffs, and Republicans employing 25% women. This demonstrates a large difference in the hiring practices of women by the different political parties.

Table 3: Gender of Staff by Political Affiliation of Representative for Each Tier

Tier	Political Affiliation of Representative	Percent Female	Percent Male
Chief of Staff	Democrat	44%	56%
	Republican	25%	75%
Tier Three	Democrat	57%	43%
	Republican	42%	58%
Tier Two	Democrat	62%	38%
	Republican	50%	50%
Tier One	Democrat	57%	43%
	Republican	57%	43%

Note: Data Collected from Legistorm in December 2015

The Impact of the District vs. Washington D.C.

Every representative's office is divided over two locations. One office is in Washington D.C. where most individuals deal with legislative work, and the district office is in the congressional district that elected the representative, which mostly works with constituents. In Tier One, the gender gap between the offices is 6%, with 60% of the district office being female, and 54% of the Washington D.C. office being female. The gender gap Tier 2 is 23%, with 40% of the Washington D.C. positions being filled by women, and 63% of the district office being female. For Tier 3, the difference between the locations is 9%, with 45% of the Washington D.C. office being female, and 54% of the district office is female. Chiefs of Staff are not included in this comparison, because they mostly work out of the Washington D.C. office. Across all the tiers, district offices are made up of more women, than those in Washington D.C.

Table 4: Gender Differences Between Congressional Offices

Tier	Office	Percent Female Staffers	Percent Male Staffers
Tier Three	District	54%	46%
	D.C.	45%	55%
Tier Two	District	63%	37%
	D.C	40%	60%
Tier One	District	60%	40%
	D.C	54%	46%

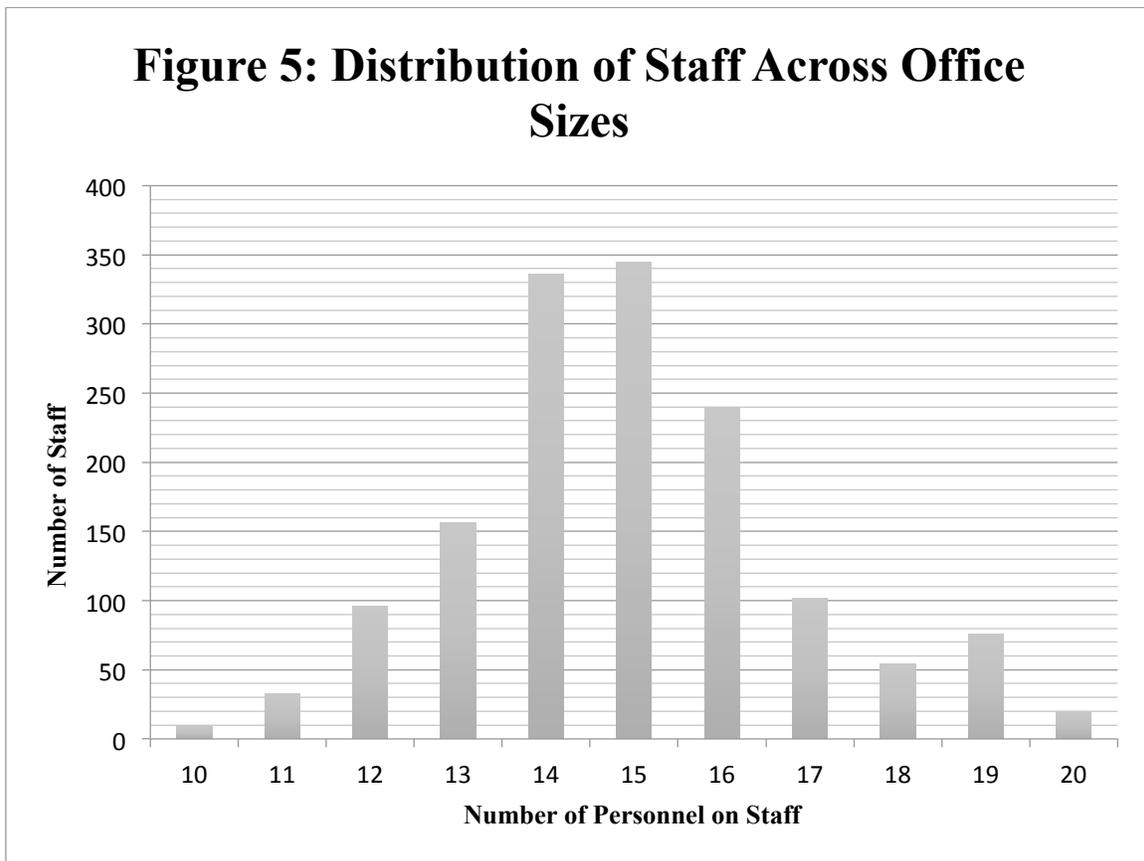
Note: Data Collected from Legistorm in December 2015

CHAPTER 4: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The employment records for congressional offices from the winter of 2015 provide a snapshot of possible gender dynamics occurring in the hiring practices of congressional offices. After controlling for several different variables, important trends around gender emerge.

Number of staff

Of the one hundred offices included in my sample the number of staff varies. For all hundred offices, the smallest office was 10 individuals, and the largest was 20. Though 73% of the offices fell with a range of having 13 to 16 staffers with the median of offices at 15 staffers.



Note: Data Collected from Legistorm in December 2015

However, there are slight differences across party lines, with Democratic offices having a greater range of office sizes, 10 to 20 individuals with the median of this data being 15 for the average office size. Republican offices have a smaller range in size, spanning 11 to 19 staffers. The median for Republican offices is 14, making their average office size slightly smaller than the Democratic offices. It is critical to understand how office size is acting as a variable throughout the data. Office size could act as an independent variable – as offices grow in size, they might just be more likely to hire women. For this reason, throughout the following tests, I control for the number of staffers in each office. On average, in the one hundred office is my sample, they are 53% female. The percentage of women in each office ranges from 25% to 83%. This demonstrates a wide range in hierarchy practices that are occurring in congressional offices.

Gender of the Representative and their Office

To test the hypothesis that if there is a woman representative, there will be more women in the workplace overall, I ran several tests. A regression analysis tests the impact that three independent variables, the party of the representative, the gender of the representative and the size of the office has on the gender distribution by percentage within both the offices. Of these three variables, the strongest and only statistically significant predictor of the percent of women in the congressional office was the party of the representative, with Democrats having 9% more women among their staff teams at a significance level of 99% and holding all other variables constant. The size of the office did not show statistical significance.

Table 5: Percentage of Increase of Females in the Office by Each Independent Variable

Independent Variable	Percentage Increase of Females Overall
Democratic Representative	9**
Female Representative	3
Size of Office	0

Note: Data Collected from Legistorm in December 2015

*p ≤ .05; **p ≤ .01

In order to capture more nuanced political ideology, beyond just party of the representative, every representative is given a nominate score based on how conservative or liberal their voting record is. Unlike the dichotomous political party variable, the ideology variable is richer because it is a continuous variable measured on a scale. The ideology score is available for 89 of the offices included in this sample. When testing the percentage of the staff that is female by office by the gender of the representative and the Size of the office, like political party, the richer ideology scale has a significance level of 99% while the gender of the representative and the size of the office are not statistically significant. The coefficient of the ideology scale is negative, meaning as one's score on the scale increases (indicating they are more conservative) the percentage of women among the office's staff decreases.

Table 6: Regression between Independent Variables on Percent of Females on Staff

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Ideology Score	-0.086*	0.02
Female Member	0.027	0.02
Size of Office	-0.00	0.01

Note: Data Collected from Legistorm in December 2015

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$

Moreover, this demonstrates that an increase of one standard deviation in ideological conservatism is correlated with 4.5% fewer women on the staff of a member of congress, when controlling for the gender of the representative and the size of the office.

Women in the Staff Hierarchy

Since my data divides the staff positions among three tiers, we can begin to see how gender changes throughout the positions. Each job is placed in one of three tiers in respects to the experience and prestige of the position, with tier one being the lower ranking positions, and tier three being the highest ranked positions (with the exception of Chief of Staffs). When we shift the focus of this initial analysis away from individual staff members to the congressional office itself, gender appears to be strongly associated with position. Of the 100 offices, females have a mean placement in the tier of 1.95. This means that the average of women staffers falls just below tier two. Men on the other hand have an average of 2.1, meaning that overall, men fall higher in the tier job positions than women do, just above tier two.

Table 7: Average Rank of Staffers within the Tiers by Gender

Gender of Staffers in each Tier	Mean	Standard Deviation
Female	1.95	0.29
Male	2.11	0.26

Note: Data Collected from Legistorm in December 2015

As the tiers increase in rank, the percentage of women in those job titles decrease. In tier one, women hold 56% of jobs. In tier two, women occupy 52% of the job positions and in tier three, women occupy 44% of the jobs.

Table 8: Percentage of Women in Each Tier

Tier	Percentage of Women in the Tier
Tier 1	56
Tier 2	52
Tier 3	44

Note: Data Collected from Legistorm in December 2015

For Tier 1, statistical tests indicate that neither the party nor gender of the representative, nor the size of the office significantly impact the percent of women in the office. The correlation between the political party of the representative has a p-value of .81, which is not significant. The correlation between the gender of the representative is not significant with a p-value of .99 and the size of office is not significant with a p-value of .42.

Table 9: Regression between Independent Variables on Percent of Tier 1 Women on Staff

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Democratic Representative	0.01	0.05
Female Representative	0.00	0.05
Size of Office	0.01	0.01

Note: Data Collected from Legistorm in December 2015

*p ≤ .05; **p ≤ .01

These three variables, gender and party of the representative and office size, also have no significance for the second tier. The correlation between the party of the representative has become closer to being significant with a p-value of .09, but still has not reached the threshold of .05. The gender of the representative is not significant with a p-value of .96 and the size of the office is not significant with a p-value of .3.

Table 10: Regression between Independent Variables on Tier 2 Women on Staff

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Democratic Representative	0.09	0.05
Female Representative	0.00	0.05
Size of Office	0.01	0.01
Constants	0.27	0.20

Note: Data Collected from Legistorm in December 2015

*p ≤ .05; **p ≤ .01

However, in the third tier, of the highest ranked job titles, the political party of the representative is statistically significant, at the 99% confidence level, as is gender at the 95% confidence level.

While the size of the office does not have a significant impact. Democrats and female

representatives are more likely to have a higher percentage of women in tier 3 of their staff compared to Republicans and male representatives.

Table 11: Regression between Independent Variables on Percent Tier 3 Women on Staff

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Democratic Representative	0.15*	0.05
Female Representative	0.09*	0.05
Size of Office	-0.02	0.01
Constants	0.64	0.18

Note: Data Collected from Legistorm in December 2015

*p ≤ .05; **p ≤ .01

When we test the placement of females in the tier system by gender of Chief of Staff through a t-test, an important trend appears. Of the offices with male Chiefs of Staff, the placement of women in the tiers is at an average of 1.89. Of offices with women Chiefs of Staff, women have an average placement of tier 2.04. The t-test demonstrates that the difference in gender composition between the offices of male and female Chief of Staffs is significant, with a significance level of 99%.

Table 12: Average Tier of Female Staffers by Gender of Chief of Staff

Gender of Chief of Staff	Average
Male	1.89**
Female	2.04

Note: Data Collected from Legistorm in December 2015

*p ≤ .05; **p ≤ .01

Women Chief of Staffs

The gender of the Chief of Staff was isolated as a variable, because they may be more involved in hiring decisions than the representative, which would make their gender act as an intervening variable. Another variable that could act as an independent variable is the gender of the Chief of Staff. Similar to the office size, it is important to understand the dynamics of this variable before progressing further in the tests. Because my sample was pulled as a stratified random sample controlling for the gender and party of the representative who was the head of the office, Chief of Staff is controlled for by party but not by gender – the political party of the Chief of Staff matches their representative, but not necessarily the gender. Moreover, three offices have no one with the title Chief of Staff. Of the 1,468 staffers included in my sample, 97 are Chiefs of Staff. While 54% of 1,371 individuals who are not Chiefs of the Staff, are women, and only 35% of the 97 Chiefs of Staff are women, which was statistically significant at the 99% confidence level. Women are much less likely to be a Chief of Staff compared to the rate with which they occupy other staff positions.

When this variable is split down party lines, like office size, important differences begin to occur. Of the 808 Democratic staffers, 56% are female, the 756 who are not a Chief of Staff are 58% female, and the 52 Chiefs of Staff are 44% female, which was statistically significant with a single tailed t-value of 0.056. A one tailed t-test is sufficient in order to see only, if one party is biased in employing less female staff and given the large sample size of staff. This value means there is a 5.6% chance the difference in averages was caused randomly, so it can be said that the difference is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level, but just beyond the standard 95% minimum level of significance. In other words, women are more likely than men to be on Democratic staffs, but they are less likely to be a Chief of Staff.

For Republicans, a two tailed t-test shows that females are less represented in the offices overall, especially in the Chief of Staff position. Of the 660 Republican staffers in my sample, 48% are female. The 615 who are not Chiefs of Staff, 49% are female, and only 24% of the 45 Chiefs of Staff are female, which was statistically significant with a single tailed t-value of 0.001. This value means there is less than a 1% chance the difference in averages was caused randomly, so it can be said that the difference is statistically significant at the 99% level.

By controlling for position of Chief of Staff among all the staff roles, we can see important gender nuances begin to occur, especially in respects to party. While in both parties, the likelihood that a Chief of Staff is a female is lower than the likelihood that a member of the rest of the staff is female, in the Republican party the difference is much more striking with half the rate of women chief of staffs relative to the rate of remaining staffer that are women. Women occupy the lower tier role on staff teams compared to the rate with which they occupy the most authoritative and powerful staff position.

The Effect of the Chief of Staff

One possible intervening variable I identified is the gender of the Chief of Staff on the gender composition of the rest of the office staff. The Chief of Staff acts a critical intervening variable because of most often they play a larger role in hiring the staff. In a regression analysis, testing the impact of the gender of the Chief of Staff and the gender of the representative, on the placement of women in the tiers, the gender of the Chief of Staff had a significant impact at the 95% confidence level while the gender of the representative was less significant. When this regression was controlled for by office size, the gender of the Chief of Staff remained significant. When looking at the impact of the gender of the Chief of Staff on the percent of women in tier 1,

it was not significant, nor was the gender of the representative (as reported earlier), the political party of the representative nor the size of office. However in the management positions in tier 3, when the gender of the Chief of Staff is added to a regression model of the gender of the representative and their political and the size of the office, the gender of the Chief of Staff is the only significant variable and it has a confidence level of 99%. This demonstrates that the gender of the Chief of Staff is indeed a controlling factor in the gender composition of the office, especially in the highest tier.

CHAPTER 5: HYPOTHESIS 1: “I DON’T WANT TO SOUND SEXIST”:

Qualitative data is useful in illuminating why gender may be effecting the congressional workplace. Much of this data speaks to the hypothesis that women in the congressional workplace will work lower in the hierarchy and/or in the district office.

There were two similar sentiments among the interview subjects when I asked them if gender played a role in their workplace on Capitol Hill. Firstly, in four of the thirteen interviews, the interviewees said that gender did not play a role in their workplace, but that it did in the offices of other representatives. All of the individuals who said this were women working in Democratic offices. This pattern could have occurred for two reasons. First, the Democrats hire the most women in general, and also to positions of power, so it may be true that some offices escape issues of sexism, though they are aware of the role it plays in the offices of other representatives. On the other hand, this data may not be completely valid because perceptions of the individuals I interviewed might not match the reality of the congressional office. Even though my subjects were interviewed with confidentiality, the impulse to protect the representative they work with is intrinsic in a workplace that is at grave risk if it were to fall into a scandal near an election cycle. Second, the women may feel a desire not to blame sexism for their situation because they themselves could be viewed negatively. There is evidence of this possibility because of the contrast in how the women phrased their answer, compared to one of my male interviewees. One woman said that “because we have a female representative and a female chief of staff, it is different from other offices with a male member or Chief of Staff, I was lucky that I was placed in the office I was.” This is in comparison to a male interviewee who worked in a democratic office who stated plainly that congressional offices as a whole are an “HR nightmare” when it comes to workplace issues around gender. He went on to say that the office structure

favors “people just out of college with the resources to live on not just a government salary, which favors, white men with at least a middleclass background.” While the Washington, D.C. workplace culture is hostile to women, especially those with children, the district office environment, provided a total different support system, which may be leading to the higher hiring and retention rates of women.

The second similar sentiment among the subjects was that everyone I interviewed who worked in a district office, commented on the higher rates of women, and a different atmosphere in those offices, though the district offices have jobs across all three tiers like the Washington D.C. offices. One subject credited the higher percent of women in the office with creating an environment that emphasized teamwork and compassion. Another interviewee expressed this idea as “I never wanted to go to DC. It is too competitive, and less team orientated. DC just seems too focused on people trying to gain for themselves.” She noted that the district is a place where individuals look out for one another more. One district office was described as “very much a nurturing environment. We had a breast-feeding area for a staffer who just had a baby so it was nice that the men in our office were able to embrace it and the women felt safer and in that since there was a gender difference.” This is in stark contrast to the workplace described by the Washington D.C. staffers who found their offices focused on youth, social ties with individuals in the office, and a culture where they are taught that they are “replaceable”. The district office creates an environment that is, overall, seen by the individuals who work there as more classically “feminine” and a better place for women to work.

While this may be the state of the offices, as they exist now, some of my interviews provided insight into why this might have evolved to be the case. One of interviewees suggested that women are better at having compassion and patience for the constituents, which is why they

are so heavily present in those jobs. This shows that the dominant myths about women in the workplace are present in the congressional office. Moreover, he added, this may be driven less by internal forces in the offices, and instead by external forces, such as the groups the representatives work with, like Labor Unions, and their perceived unwillingness to work with women. Other interviewees stated plainly that they do not know why the district offices have so many women, but they would welcome more men into their ranks if given the chance.

Perhaps, the best explanations come from the studies of other workplaces around the gendered nature of work. The root of the gendered nature of work comes from the sentiment repeated throughout my interviews, when both men and women would say, that they did not want to sound sexist, but, and then would place a limitation on what kind of work different genders could do.

Because of notions around what work women are best at, in particular the constituent work that is mostly located in the district office, women are put on specific career paths that limit their job opportunities and ability to progress through the hierarchy in the congressional offices, because many of the Tier 3 jobs, focus on skill sets developed in Washington D.C., such as the Legislative Director. However, these gendered expectations also affect the quality of life of the men who work for congressional representatives, especially those on Capitol Hill. When asked about a life-work balance while working for the representative, most of my interviewees first reacted with laughter, and shared stories that had common themes of 10-12 hour days, living life by a schedule that is not your own and having a life consumed by the job.

Some of my subjects were able to deal with this, but to very different extents based on where they worked. One of my interviewees who worked on Capitol Hill, took great pride in his ability to carve out consistent time in his schedule every week to volunteer, whereas, a District

Director who had been in her job for over a decade, was able to make time to pick her daughter up from school. Both are steps in upholding responsibilities outside the office, though it is clear being in the district office creates space to uphold greater outside commitments. As one interview pointed out, this has huge implications not only for the individuals working in our government, but also who are responsible for creating the policies that run our country. A system that requires complete commitment, is mostly filled by individuals right out of college, or a male in a heterosexual marriage with traditional gender roles, who are often white men from the middle class or above who are able to afford to live in an east coast city even though they are making only 20-30 thousand dollars a year, instead of individuals who are older, but have job experience in the industries our legislature regulates. The current workplace model in congressional offices not only relies on old-fashioned socially constructed notions of gender in the work places, but favors specific groups of homogenous individuals.

CHAPTER 6: HYPOTHESIS 2: “THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF WOMEN...”

In the 2016 United States presidential campaigns, former Secretary of State, Madeline Albright was criticized for repeating a phrase she had said since 2006-that “there’s a special place in hell for women who don’t help each other.” (Reilly 2016) For the purposes of this thesis, the quote describes a mindset that occurred throughout collected interviews. Namely, that there are two types of women, especially in the professional sphere. One of my interviewees described the dichotomy as women either as individuals who care about women on the lower level of a hierarchy and try to foster those younger women’s careers, or women who worked hard to get where they are and think that women on the lower levels should have to work hard too. This speaks to the second hypothesis; the number of women in positions of leadership has an impact on the number of woman lower in the hierarchy.

Many of my subjects stated that, in order to get jobs in the congressional office, personal connections are essential. When asked if they had a mentor, many credited their mentor as essential for if not getting them their first job, then for further promotions or jobs off of the hill when they left. Individuals who had mentors were able to access those mentors’ social networks, sometimes having the mentor, or even the mentor’s husband call hiring managers and leaders in the staff. Out of the ten total women in my sample, seven said they had a specific mentor. Six of those seven mentors were women. Of the other three women, only one female staffer stated their mentor was the representative she worked for, one staffer did not specify her mentor’s gender, and one staffer was unable to pick just one person as her key mentor. The only woman who had mainly male mentors, considered the representative she worked for as her mentor. For the two men who had mentors, both the mentors were male – with one of the mentors also being the representative. The third man I interviewed was the only one to say that he had no mentor at all.

For the women, mentors not only served as advocates in their careers, but they act as a “sounding board for career and life”, whereas the men I interviewed described their mentors as individuals who gave career advice and feedback on their performance. Due to the proportional lack of females in the higher ranks of the congressional office, if there is a divide of women in those leadership roles of those who help younger women and those who do not– a potential restraint on creating more equality in the workplace, is a lack of women to help younger women even get pass the entry level.

One reason for the gender differences in women predominately relying on women and men being mentored by men is reflected in other social aspects of the office. In one interview, a subject spoke of how male leadership in the office would go out for social events such as drinks and lunch with other men from the office, and not invite the women. This action in some workplaces, might be unnoticed or just regarded as a social preference, however, in the congressional office, these choices lead to ramifications in the workplace. One of my male interviewees described his job as a lot of socializing and a lot of work being done at the bar, creating a “Rolodex of connections.” In a workplace where social networks are critical for not only career advancement, but often the work of several of the current job titles, this creates another potential barrier to the equal advancement of women.

Mentors are important for several reasons for helping the careers of women in politics. Many of my thirteen interviewees came from offices with Democratic representatives. As my quantitative data shows, these are offices with higher rates of women in the workplace. An interviewee talked about the importance of having more women in power in the office she worked in. “They (the women higher in the hierarchy) wanted to give us (women lower in the hierarchy) a fighting chance.”. However, many of the mentors focused on not only helping

women advance through the hierarchy of existing congressional workplaces. One of my interviewees spoke of how her mentor encouraged her to run for office. Another, whose mentor was a representative, not only would encourage individuals to run, but would enjoy talking about how “studies show that when women run, they win their elections, but that women need to be encouraged to run far more than men.” Female mentors encouraged the careers of their mentees in many ways throughout the political and non-profit world.

However, having women in leadership positions in the congressional office does not eliminate perceptions of those individuals based on their gender. One interviewee credited having many women in leadership positions as leading to an environment of cat fights – though she also mentioned that using such a term was “terrible for a feminist to say.” She reported that having many strong women working together, little things become big issues. Another interviewee talked about a perception in her workplace that even though there were women in the leadership, the male representative trusted those women less as advisors and so they were respected less by the entire office than males in the leadership. These interviews show that while having women in leadership is important for having mentors for younger women, it does not inherently fix problems with perceptions of gender.

Another of one of the male staffers spoke about how in the Washington D.C. offices, it was rare to see individuals in their 30’s and 40’s in the offices, but especially women, and only then when they were single. Interestingly, this male staffer credited this gender difference to low salary and the lack of access to child care. This places the responsibility of child care on the women and implies that women prioritize family over home life, while men do not have the same demands. Staffers’ perceptions of women in the highest levels of the office demonstrate gender differences on every level of the hierarchy.

Despite some negative gendered perceptions of the women in leadership, many of my subjects credited women in power as important for setting a different tone in the office. One of the women I interviewed credited the leadership and work expectations of the representative as essential for creating an environment that she felt was positive, especially for the female staffers. Practices that made her office special included the ability to take the day for doctors' appointments or taking breaks because the representatives made sure they knew it was okay. Another interviewee said that her office had all women in the leadership, which "added joy" and created a culture that was more nurturing – though she added that both women and men were embraced on the lower levels of the hierarchy. Another said that women differ from men in communication style, and so her office, as it was led by a woman, focused on communication, both within the office and with the constituents. Women in leadership were credited by my interviewees for several positive changes within the culture of the offices.

All of my interview subjects said that gender played a role in the office to an extent. Whether they were women who were there to mentor younger women, as well as being seen in positive or negative lights, these women and their actions are highly subjected to the opinions of others in the office.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to test if there is a relationship between the gender of the representative and how that impacts the gender composition of the congressional office. Through the collection of staffing records and interviews with both current and former staff, I found that while gender plays a role in the congressional workplace, its burden is neither uniform across offices nor staff positions.

Research Questions

The research began with two research questions: Are fewer women in leadership roles in congressional offices? Second, does having female leaders change the gender composition of the congressional office staff? Some of the relevant data, such as what was the gender break down in congressional staffs, if certain roles in the staff are gendered, and how gender composition in staff differs for the offices of female representatives compared to male representatives, is available. Other details, such as if men and women are treated differently based on social expectations based on social gender expectations of how women should prioritize their families and their careers, explored in my interviews, but are limited by the nature of qualitative data. Though my initial research questions are not completely resolved due to limitations in available data, this study begins to explore how gender affects the staffers who work for congressional offices on both sides of the aisle.

Hypotheses

This work is shaped by two main hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that if a woman works for a congressional representative she is, on average, more likely to be placed lower in the

hierarchy or in the district office. Both aspects of this hypothesis are supported by data. My second hypothesis predicts that if there is a woman as either the representative or the Chief of Staff, it is more likely that there will be more women in the workplace overall. This is not supported. However, the political party of the representative is statistically significant with Democratic representatives, on average, having a higher percentage of female staffers.

The most illuminating result from my data was also some of the most straightforward. For example, both Democrats and Republicans employ women as entry-level staffers at the same rate of 57%. However, the number of women in junior and senior level staff positions is 15% different between the percent of women employed by Democratic representatives in the sample compared to Republican representatives in the sample. These numbers are indicative of the different opportunities for women in different congressional offices for advancement, especially when looking at the fact that 44% of Democratic representatives have women as their Chiefs of Staff, whereas only a quarter of Republican Chiefs of Staff are female.

During my interviews, a few people cite the idea that being a staffer is a hard job to have while being a mother, without mentioning the concept of fatherhood, which supports the idea that women are likely often phased out of the congressional workplace because they are seen as having other demands on their time that makes it difficult for them to do the job. My first hypothesis is supported because there are less women in higher positions in the congressional office, this would suggest that there are barriers to the advancement of women in the congressional workplace.

Another finding, that also supports my first hypothesis, is the difference in the percentage of women between the Washington D.C. offices for congressional representatives compared to their district offices. In the district office, across every part of the hierarchy, women make up

more than 50% of the office and in every level of the hierarchy; the district has at least 5% more females than the D.C. office. This demonstrates that women are more often placed in the constituent-focused roles, since most of the roles at district offices deal with interacting with the constituents. Overall, my first hypothesis, that if a woman works for a congressional representative she is, on average, going to more likely be placed lower in the staff hierarchy, or in the district office, is supported by my quantitative data.

My second hypothesis, which stated that if the representative or the Chief of Staff were a female there would be more women in the workplace, was not supported. For the entry-level staff and the junior level staff, the gender of the representative is not significant. For the senior staff, the gender of the representative is also not significant. Critically, the gender of the Chief of Staff did impact the gender composition of the entire office, with significance in tier 3 at a 99% confidence level. However, in these more experienced jobs, the political party that the representative belongs to is significant for the percentage of women who work in the office. Mainly, that Democratic representatives, regardless of their gender, on average hire significantly more women than their Republican counterparts. This finding is important as articulated by the work of social scientists such as DeGregorio (1998), and Leal and Hess (2004) who argue that not only do staffers act as gatekeepers to representatives, but they also have large effects on the policy passed in Congress as advisors. The correlation between the lack of women in advising roles in Republican offices, and the conservative policies that come from Republican offices around women's rights, would be an interesting subject for further research. Moreover, the fact that gender of the representative was less significant than their political party may support Salisbury and Shepsle's (1981) that speculated that female representatives felt it was necessary to have more veteran staffers on their staffs so that the staffs could be relied on as tools to

navigate the unfamiliar territory and to negate any of the lingering “old-boy” network on the Hill (1981: 662). Republican women may be using male staffers to match with the male dominated Republican representatives to network in the same way they relied on veteran staffers. Either way, this finding also suggests an important path for further research.

On the other hand, another possibility why there may be fewer Republican women in the ranks of the senior staff compared to the Democrats could be due to the Republican women acting in a way that is ideologically consistent, instead of the Republicans acting in a manner that is sexist. As many of my interviewees said, congressional offices, especially those in Washington D.C. are an “H.R. nightmare” due to lower wages for long hours, and schedules that are difficult to control or even predict. Republican women may be choosing to leave the workforce as a way to be ideologically consistent with their values. The very first section of the current Republican Party platform is about protecting traditional marriage for the welfare of children. If a Republican staffer shared her party’s mindset about the importance of prioritizing children’s wellbeing, she may be making a choice to leave an occupation field that requires compromise between work and home life. My qualitative sample was of mostly Democratic women, so further research should be done to discover if the lack of Republican women in leadership within the office is due to their choice to act in an ideologically consistent fashion, or if there is indeed a glass ceiling.

The significance of the congressional workplace makes it critical to understand if sexism is occurring and why. As previous theorists have shown, staffers affect the policy that is passed in the House of Representatives. If women and their perspectives are being kept out of this workplace, they are being kept out of forming policy on a national level. These implications for federal policy is why the number of women in congressional offices and the positions they hold

are more than just symbolism. Moreover, if women are unable to stay in congressional positions for very long, they may be cut off from the pipeline that allows staffers to go on to success in congressional campaigns for their own election. For these reasons, the lack of women in leadership positions in congressional offices, is more than statically interesting, it changes the dynamic of American law.

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Appendix A: Demographic Questions

Age:

Gender of the Representative you work for:

Race/ethnicity:

Gender:

Marital status:

Number of children:

Job Title(s):

Highest level of education achieved?

Current Occupation:

How many years have you been/were you a staffer? ...for this Congressperson?

What other positions on the staff have you held/did you hold?

Appendix B: Interview Questions

- 1) Why did you enter politics?
- 2) What were some of the biggest challenges you had while working for a congressional representative?
- 3) How did you decide what job position you wanted to have?
- 4) Did you have a mentor or someone who helped you in your career in politics? Why was that person helpful?
- 5) Do you feel like there is something you did/something about you that helped you be more successful in your career?
- 6) Did the staff you work with have a particular dynamic or character? [If little response]:
Was it more formal? Was there a clear hierarchy? Was it collaborative? ...competitive?
- 7) Do you think that gender plays/ed a role in the dynamic of the staff? if so how? Have you

ever experienced your gender impacting your work?

- 8) Do you feel like there is a life-work balance you have had to maintain? How do you prioritize your career vs. home life?
- 9) What role do you see your staff experience playing in your career trajectory?
- 10) What position do you see yourself in ten years?
- 11) Did you want to become a congressional representative before you worked on Capitol Hill?
- 12) Do you want to become a congressional representative yourself? Why/why not?