

**WOMEN INCUMBENTS IN CANADA AND THE
DECISION TO RUN AGAIN: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

by

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PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

In the
Department of Political Science

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Summer 2009

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ABSTRACT

In analyzing the problem of women's underrepresentation in elected office, many scholars have pointed to one dimension of the "supply side" problem: women are generally less willing to run for office. However, when it comes to the decision to run for re-election, women appear to be as likely, if not more so, to run again than their male counterparts. This exploratory study uses data from interviews with female Canadian MPs to explore this apparent paradox. The results of this study suggest that for female officeholders, the decision to run again is influenced by at least five factors. These are: a desire to seek a return on the investment that is made when entering a career in politics, a desire to carry out specific policy objectives, an increased sense of confidence, reduced role conflict related to work and family responsibilities, and an overall level of satisfaction with the experience of being an officeholder.

Keywords: women and politics; women legislators, women incumbents, re-election

Subject Headings: women in politics--Canada; women political candidates—Canada; legislators—Canada.

For Henry

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I offer my sincere thanks to my senior supervisor, Dr. Lynda Erickson, whose astute guidance, well-timed questions and suggestions, and unwavering encouragement made this enterprise far more enjoyable than I anticipated. Dr. Erickson helped me to think, read, and write as a scholar, but also, to trust my own instincts as my findings took shape. I truly appreciated her support and mentorship at every stage of this project. I would also like to thank the other members of my supervising committee, Dr. Genevieve Fuji Johnson and Dr. Catherine Murray. Their feedback was invaluable at the final stages of this project. I am also very appreciative of the work of Leah Craig and Karen Tracanelli, who helped with the careful transcription of my interviews.

I would also like to thank all of the women MPs who generously shared their stories with me, and took a genuine interest in my work. I am grateful for the opportunity to have met and learned from them, and I am inspired by their professional and personal journeys.

Finally, my deepest gratitude is reserved for my husband and best friend, Richard. For steadfast support and encouragement, critical insight and suggestions, numerous edits, and for patience and love that knows no limits, I thank you. This project is better because of you.

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1: INTRODUCTION

For three decades, the question of why there are relatively few women in elected office in Canada has been a central theme in the literature on women and politics. Scholars have identified a number of structural, institutional and social factors that have prevented women from being demographically represented in political life. From this body of literature there has come substantial evidence to support one dimension of the “supply-side” problem: women are generally less willing to run for office than men. However, when it comes to decision to run for re-election, a different picture emerges. In their comparison of female and male Canadian MPs in the twentieth century, Tremblay and Trimble found that “men are more likely than women to decide not to run again” (2004, 112). Data from three recent Canadian federal elections offer more recent evidence of women’s willingness to run for re-election: in 2000, 94% of sitting female MPs in Canada stood for re-election and in 2004 and 2006, the figures were 83% and 89%, respectively.¹ These figures are consistent with, and even higher than the average incumbent rate when both sexes are considered. For example, in the seven Canadian general elections held between 1968 and 1988, 84% of incumbents ran for re-election (Young 1991, 87).

This exploratory study seeks to provide some preliminary explanations for this apparent paradox: why do women, who are generally less willing than men to run for office the first time, run for re-election in such high numbers? A related objective of this study is to gain insight into the ways in which the experience of serving in office impacts

¹Calculations based on data obtained from
<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/parlinfo/compilations/HouseOfCommons.aspx?Menu=HoC>

the decision to run again. In other words, what factors contribute to the decision to run for re-election, and does the decision to run again reflect a female officeholder's overall satisfaction with a career in politics, or are there other explanations?

These questions are explored using data obtained from in-depth interviews with female Canadian MPs who ran for re-election after serving at least one term in office. The interviews were designed to elicit the respondents' personal stories about their decision to run for re-election, and about how the experience of their first term impacted their decision. The responses were interpreted using narrative analysis methods, and compared and contextualized with current literature on women and elected office.

The question of why women run for re-election is important for several reasons. First, while several scholars have probed the issue of why women are unwilling to run for office the first time, almost no academic attention has been directed at the question of why women remain in politics and to the related question of whether a woman's initial fears or concerns about running for office are mitigated by the experience of serving as an officeholder. Are the reservations that women hold about running for office justified, and in what ways do their attitudes and feelings about running change as they approach the possibility of a second term? Insight into these questions may be valuable for advancing an understanding of how well women adapt to political life, despite their initial concerns about running.

An underlying normative objective for this study is to address the problem of women's numeric underrepresentation in elected office. Specifically, a focus on female incumbents can help to identify the factors and conditions that contribute to a woman's willingness to seek re-election. Ensuring that women remain in political careers is

essential, since female incumbents have a pivotal role to play in addressing the underrepresentation problem. Carroll (1994) echoes this sentiment, and argues:

While recruitment and rate of electoral success are perhaps the most critical factors affecting the numerical representation of women, the political ambitions of women candidates are also important. If women who seek office lack ambition and do not plan to run again for the same office or for some other office, then large numbers of new candidates must be recruited each election year to maintain the size of the existing candidate pool. Moreover, the election of candidates lacking ambition can contribute only to short-term increases in the representation of women. (121)

Ensuring that women run for re-election is also instrumental to the development of a critical mass of experienced and knowledgeable women who can serve as role models. A study by Elder (2004) highlights the importance of having visible female politicians to serve as role models for younger generations of women who are considering running for office. A more recent study by Campbell and Wolbrecht (2006) confirms the role model effect, and concludes that the more visible women politicians are in national news coverage, the more likely adolescent girls are to indicate an intention to become politically active.

More importantly, the personal reflections of female incumbents may be particularly valuable in encouraging more women to consider running for office. The working hypothesis is that since women tend to run for re-election in high numbers, the experience of serving in office must, in some way, be personally or professionally fulfilling. This project seeks to test this hypothesis, and provide a framework for future research on why women choose to remain in political careers.

2: CURRENT KNOWLEDGE

In the scholarship on women and politics, little direct attention has been devoted to the question of why women run for re-election. The underrepresentation problem has historically been centred on examining structural or institutional barriers that prevent women from full inclusion in political life. Lawless and Fox note that “initially, the scholarship attributed women’s exclusion from the political sphere to discrimination and overt bias against women candidates” (2005, 20-21). More recent studies have challenged these early explanations, and have provided compelling evidence to suggest that in terms of fundraising and vote totals, two important measures of electoral success, women candidates fare as well as male candidates (Burrell 2005; Seltzer, Newman and Leighton 1997; Darcy, Welch and Clark 1994). While these studies focus on the experience of women in the United States, a number of Canadian studies lend support to these findings. In their examination of the 1979 and 1980 federal elections, Hunter and Denton (1984) found that after controlling for factors such as incumbent advantage, seat competitiveness and party affiliation, women did not receive fewer votes than men. More recently, Black and Erickson (2003) analyzed data from the 1993 election and found that women actually had a small vote advantage. Similarly, in their analysis of determinants of electoral success at the municipal level, Kushner, Siegel and Stanwick (1997) found that women also appear to have slight vote advantage, especially in larger municipalities.²

² In her study of the 2000 federal election, Young (2006) found evidence of a slight bias against female candidates but she concludes that if there is discrimination, it has a minor effect, and is not likely to change election outcomes.

Perhaps as a response to the increasing evidence that women face little or no overt bias or discrimination from the electorate, some researchers have looked to institutional explanations for the underrepresentation problem. Most notably, incumbency advantage has been identified by some scholars as “the single most daunting obstacle for the election of women” (Niven 1998, 22). Several studies suggest that high incumbency rates are an obstacle to the election of more women (Schwindt-Bayer 2005; Darcy, Welch and Clark 1994; Darcy and Choike 1986). In Canada, Young (1991) found that decreasing incumbency contributes to women’s re-election. Interestingly however, recent research on the effects of term limits, which are regarded by some as the solution to the incumbency problem, has been inconclusive, and as one author notes, “initial findings suggest that term limits have not had an overwhelming influence on the election of women” (Schwindt-Bayer 2005, 231).

The limitations of structural and institutional explanations for women’s underrepresentation have prompted many scholars to turn their attention to “supply-side” explanations, which focus on the lack of interested and capable women available to stand for political office. While there are many dimensions to the supply-side problem, a particularly relevant aspect for this study is the question of why women don’t come forward to run for office in greater numbers, despite the fact that they almost always run again. Although several studies have found lower levels of political ambition among women (Constantini 1990; Diamond 1977), the reasons for this phenomenon are only beginning to be explored. Lawless and Fox (2005) used data from the U.S. based Citizen Political Ambition Study to investigate the question of why women are less willing to run than men, and their work is one of the few comprehensive treatments of the subject.

They found that at least three factors make women less likely to consider running for office, and less likely to launch an actual candidacy. These are: “traditional” upbringings, early political socialization, and a tendency to underestimate their own qualifications. Somewhat surprisingly, they found that family structures and household responsibilities “do not, in and of themselves, keep women from thinking about entering politics” (13). On the other hand, in their in-depth interviews 65 percent of the women they talked to said that children did make seeking office a “much more difficult endeavour for women compared to men”(67).

Elder (2004) also explored the issue of women’s reluctance to run for office, and her results echo many of the findings of Lawless and Fox. She found that women are less willing to stand for office because of a multiplicity of factors, including: gender socialization, lack of confidence in their abilities, and the presence of relatively few numbers of visible women role models in politics. However, in this study, the impact of family structures and responsibilities were found to be significant, lending support to previous research which suggests that women are more sensitive than men to family concerns when making the decision to enter politics (Sapiro 1982).

In Canada, Carbert’s (2003) study of female rural activists adds a further dimension to the question of why women are less willing to run. In an attempt to understand why so few women were elected to public office in rural areas, Carbert interviewed rural community leaders in Atlantic Canada about their experiences and perceptions of public life and running for office. She argues that the most consistent theme to emerge from the interviews was the participants’ moral disapproval of and aversion to political life as they understood it in their local environment. Her findings

suggest that at least part of the reason for women's hesitancy to run lies in gender differences in perceptions about the nature of political life.

Collectively, the scholarship on women's willingness to run has fostered a better understanding of the reasons why women do not come forward as candidates in greater numbers. However, the critical question of why women choose to run again has yet to be fully explored. Palmer and Simon's (2006) analysis of congressional widows is one of the few studies to examine women's willingness to run for a second term. The authors use Schlesinger's theory of ambition to explore why some widows simply finish out their husband's term in office, while others pursue a career in the House. They found that the women were more likely to run for a second term if they were under the age of 60, had worked outside the home prior to serving their first term, lived outside of the South, and were elected in or after 1972. Although these findings may have some relevance to the question of why women run again, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the experiences of congressional widows can be applied to women who enter political races voluntarily.

The literature on gender differences in the career paths of politicians offers some, albeit limited, insight into the reasons why women choose to remain in political life. Once again, the literature in this area is scant, as relatively few studies incorporate gender as a variable in the analysis of political career trajectories. Moreover, the studies that do exist are helpful in illustrating general patterns in the career paths of male and female officeholders, but offer limited insight into the reasons for these trends. Comparing female and male Canadian MPs in the twentieth century, Tremblay and Trimble (2004) found no statistically significant difference between men and women in the duration of

their parliamentary career in Ottawa, and argue that this may be an indication that women are as politically ambitious as men. The same study also found that men are more likely than women to decide not to run again. These findings contrast somewhat with a U.S. based study by Lawless and Theriault (2005) which found that women serve as members of Congress for shorter spells than men do. This discrepancy suggests a need for more comparative scholarship on the experiences of Canadian and American female officeholders at the Federal and Congressional levels.

Why do women, at least in Canada, choose to remain in political life? This is the central question being addressed in this study, and one that has not been adequately considered in the literature. If, as Docherty (1997) suggests, female MPs in Canada “are less likely to experience satisfying political careers” (xxvii), how can we make sense of frequency with which they run for re-election? Tremblay and Trimble (2004) offer two possible ways of understanding the fact that men are less likely to run again:

The decision to leave parliamentary life of their own volition may be related to the fact that men do not have the same expectations as women for greater parliamentary and ministerial responsibilities. Being more numerous in politics, men have to manage more competition amongst themselves to inherit a ministerial portfolio...One could also suggest that men have more resources and opportunities than women outside parliament, enabling them to resume their professional careers. (112)

This exploratory study takes up the challenge of better understanding the reasons why women remain in political life, and sets the stage for more in-depth research in this area.

3: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Many previously published studies on women's willingness to run for office have relied on survey-based methods (Fulton et al. 2006; Lawless and Fox 2005; Elder 2004). Deviating from this tradition, this exploratory study uses narrative inquiry to investigate the question of why women run for re-election. This approach, derived and adapted from cultural and linguistic studies, takes as its theoretical orientation the notion that individual stories, or narratives, can be valuable sources for understanding political behaviour. Narrative analysis pays close attention to the stories that people tell, for it is through the act of constructing and telling stories that individuals come to make sense of their own reality, and create meaning from their experiences. As a research method, narrative analysis offers a unique opportunity to tap into this process of meaning-making, and to better probe the question of *why* people make certain decisions.

In keeping with the narrative tradition, this exploratory study places women's own stories about their decision to run for re-election at the centre of the analysis, and examines both the content and form of the narratives that they offer. The next section provides an overview of narrative inquiry and its value for political science research, and explains why and how the technique was adopted for this study. A discussion of the benefits and challenges of using narrative inquiry to explore women's motivations for running for re-election is also provided.

3.1 Narrative inquiry defined

Narratives, or the stories that people tell, abound in everyday life. Shenhav observes that “people think, perceive, imagine, and carry out moral decisions using narrative structures” (2006, 245). Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) reinforce the argument that narratives are ubiquitous and argue that storytelling is an “elementary form of human communication” and is a “universal competence” that helps to organize experiences and memories (57). Telling a story can also be, however, a transformative act – a process through which one comes to make meaning out of life experiences and events. Patterson and Monroe (1998) allude to this meaning-making function, and suggest that, while a narrative is “essentially a story,” it also refers to the “ways in which we construct disparate facts in our own worlds and weave them together cognitively to make sense of our reality” and help “understand ourselves as political beings” (315). Similarly, Riessman (1993) argues that “individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives” and “become the autobiographical narratives by which they tell about their lives” (2).

While most scholars acknowledge the pervasiveness of narratives in human communication, there is no clear agreement on what constitutes a narrative. One scholar defines narrative as “talk organized around consequential events” in which “a teller in conversation takes a listener into a past time...and recapitulates what happened then to make a point, often a moral one” (Riessman 1993, 3). Ospina and Dodge (2005) offer a more precise definition, and argue that narratives have at least five essential characteristics: they are accounts of characters and selective events over time with a beginning, a middle and an end; they are retrospective interpretations of sequential events

from a certain point of view; they focus on human intention and action; they are part of the construction of identity; and they are coauthored by narrator and audience (145). Defined in these terms, narratives are quite suitable for understanding social events and experiences, and can be valuable not only as vehicles for gathering descriptive information about an individual's decisions but also, for probing the question of *why* they came to those decisions.

Narrative analysis has been used in a variety of disciplines but has been “gaining a foothold as a useful concept in the social sciences in recent years, providing both insight into how knowledge is constructed and a methodology for rigorous research” (Patterson and Monroe 1998, 317). Shenhav (2006) confirms the growing importance of narrative inquiry, especially in the social sciences. In political science, narrative approaches have been used to explore a variety of questions, ranging from how populations understand the process of political development (Cohen, Jones and Tronto 1997) to how democracy developed in Kuwait (Tetreault 2000). Narrative analysis has had a particular impact in the field of public administration and, as Ospina and Dodge note, scholars in this field “have made excellent use of the idea behind the narrative turn, both to discuss the nature of the field and to do empirical investigations” (2005, 147). White (1999) makes a convincing case for going beyond traditional explanatory research methods in this field, arguing that the incorporation of more interpretive and critical modes will produce richer scholarship that is more relevant for scholars, practitioners, and the public.

There are several reasons why narrative analysis is an appropriate research method for this study. First, as an exploratory study, a primary objective is to provide

preliminary answers to the question of why women run again – an issue that has not been adequately addressed in the scholarship on women and politics. As such, it is less suited to traditional explanatory methods that are concerned with predicting trends, or with validating previous findings. The interpretive thrust of narrative inquiry makes it a useful approach for this kind of exploratory research, and for close analyses of a small number of cases.

Using a narrative approach also provides an opportunity to gather information from respondents that could not likely be obtained with other research methods. Ospina and Dodge argue that stories contain within them knowledge “that is different from what we might tap into when we do surveys, collect and analyze statistics, or even draw on interview data that do not explicitly elicit stories” (2005, 143). The act of constructing a narrative forces a teller to “move from accounts of discrete experiences to an account of why and how the life took the shape it did” (Personal Narratives Group, 4). This is particularly important when trying to understand the complex, personal, and often deeply emotional aspects of decision-making. In other words, narratives are rich sources for questions of this type because, when carefully interpreted, they can better “illuminate the logic of individual courses of action” (PNG, 6).

The contextually thick framework of narrative inquiry is also well suited to researching changes and patterns over time, and this is central to the issue of running for re-election. As Elliott observes, a narrative has a “temporal or chronological dimension in that it provides a representation of a series of events or experiences rather than describing a state of affairs” (2005, 15). Thus, narrative analysis is particularly beneficial for examining how a respondent’s attitudes may change or evolve between the

initial entry into political life and the time of re-election, and how experience of serving in office intersects with the decision to run for re-election.

Finally, narrative analysis has a well developed, if contested, association with feminist scholarship, and is regarded by many scholars as a valuable approach for researching women's lives. Although there is hardly a distinctive, singular feminist research method, there are certain features that characterize research processes as feminist. Bloom (1998) summarizes a number of these features, noting that feminist researchers typically "strive for egalitarian relationships with their respondents by making space for them to narrate their stories as they desire" and seek to "break down the one-way hierarchical framework of traditional interview techniques" (18). The structure of the narrative interview reflects this feminist commitment to cultivating a "route through which inter-subjectivity and non-hierarchical relationships between women researchers and women participants can be developed" (Kelly, Burton, and Regan 1994, 34), and attempts to minimize the interviewer's influence in directing responses. It has been argued that such an approach can help to elicit a less imposed and therefore more 'valid' rendering of the informant's perspective (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000).

3.2 Problems with narrative analysis

As is the case with all research methods, narrative inquiry introduces both theoretical and practical problems that must be addressed by the researcher. Narrative researchers must grapple with the complex issue of truth: what is the potential for narratives to reflect the "truth" or "reality" of an individual's experience? Shenhav discusses this dilemma, and insists that the issue can be understood "as a specific instance

of a larger question that has preoccupied generations of philosophers and thinkers: the relationship between language and reality” (2006, 249). Riessman also addresses the thorny problem of representation, and argues that “investigators do not have direct access to another’s experience,” and so, “are forced to deal with ambiguous representations of it” (1993, 8).

The problem of truth becomes even more complex when interviewing politicians. Almost all of the women who were interviewed for this study were current officeholders, and this public role undoubtedly influenced both the form and content of the narratives that they offered. It is difficult to know, for example, the extent to which their stories were influenced by their own party’s public position on matters relating to women and politics. Are these women speaking for themselves or for their parties, and to what extent does their public role influence the representation of their experiences? Moreover, would their stories change if they were told after leaving office? These questions highlight some of the particular challenges of conducting research involving elected officials.

In practice, the question of truth cannot be fully resolved, but rather, must be contextualized within the interpretive framework of the narrative approach. As some feminist scholars have pointed out, narratives do not always “speak for themselves, nor do they provide direct access to other times, places, or cultures” and they “may not always speak with clarity, or precision, or even sincerity” (Personal Narratives Group, 264). Narratives are interpretations, and in turn, require careful interpretations by attentive researchers who must carefully consider the context in which the narratives are constructed. Moreover, as Ospina, Dodge and Foldy argue, “no method can deliver an ultimate Truth, because no method guarantees an object approximation of an external,

independent reality” and interpretivist researchers “aspire to the faithful rendering of some truth from the perspective of socially situated actors” (2005, 290).

4: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Study Participants

For this study, nine in-depth interviews were conducted with women who ran for re-election at the federal level in Canada after serving at least one term in office. To improve internal consistency, an attempt was made to select women who began their political careers at approximately the same time, and who had served in office in the last ten years. Beginning with candidate lists from the 2000 and 2004 federal elections³ a list of female incumbents was compiled. In identifying potential respondents, an attempt was made to balance party affiliation⁴ and geographic location. A brief description of the project and a request for an interview was sent via email to twenty five potential interviewees. Nine women agreed to be interviewed, representing a response rate of 36%.

The final list of participants included MPs from all three major political parties in Canada, holding seats in seven different provinces. The average age of the respondents was 59, and all but one entered politics as a second career. All of the women worked outside the home before being elected to office, and five came from professions that have traditionally preceded a political career such as law and business. The others entered politics after working in fields such as teaching, social work, and medicine. None of the women came from overtly political backgrounds, nor did they have immediate family

³ The 2006 candidate pool was not used, as the proceeding parliament lasted for only two years and it was believed this was not representative of a regular term in office.

⁴ Unfortunately, no Bloc Quebecois MPs consented to an interview.

members who were involved in formal politics.

4.2 Interviews

A short list of interview questions was prepared in advance (see Appendix A). The questions were designed to elicit the respondents' personal stories about why they ran for re-election, and about their experiences with their first term in office. Brief demographic information such as age, previous occupational experience, marital status and education was collected at the start of every interview in order to create an aggregate profile of the respondents. The questions were deliberately open-ended, and at the start of each interview, respondents were encouraged to speak freely on each topic, and to offer thick descriptions of their experiences, feelings, thoughts, emotions and life-events (Riessman 2008). Throughout the interviews, respondents were given wide latitude in telling stories about their experiences, and were prompted by the interviewer only when there was an obvious need for follow-up -- to clarify a response or to explore an idea more deeply. Seven of the interviews were conducted by phone and two were done in person. All of the interviews were digitally recorded for accuracy, and later transcribed verbatim. Collectively, the respondents offered richly textured, honest, and often surprising stories about their lives in office, and were generous and forthcoming about sharing their personal experiences.

4.3 Analysis

The first step in the analysis was to identify the narrative sections of each transcript using the definition offered by Ospina and Dodge (see pages 10-11). The non-

narrative parts of the transcripts were analyzed separately, because although they were not central to the question of why the respondents ran for re-election, they raise a number of interesting questions for future research. The narrative sections of the transcripts were coded using a technique adapted from a classic work on narrative structure by Labov and Waletzky (1967). Although their specific focus was on the structural and linguistic components of narratives, their approach has been widely used and adapted by scholars in a variety of disciplines. Their model provides a useful analytical framework for isolating the core, recurrent features which comprise a fully formed narrative. They suggest that in addition to structural clauses that serve to establish, carry out and resolve the plot, most personal narratives contain an evaluative component through which tellers reveal the personal meaning or significance of the events they are describing. For this study, particular attention was paid to these evaluative components, as they provided the most useful insight into the question of why women decided to run for re-election. The bounded narrative sections of each transcript were then cross-compared to identify common themes and patterns, and the possible implications of these patterns were carefully considered. Key findings were contextualized and compared with existing research related to women's motivations for running for office.

Quotes from interview transcripts are included throughout the results section to better illustrate key themes raised by the respondents, and how they were interpreted by the researcher. A careful attempt was made to preserve the integrity of both the structure and content of the narratives. However, in order to respect confidentiality, identifying details are not included in the results. Similarly, pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of the respondents.

5: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Running for office the first time

In order to compare and contextualize the decision to run again with their initial reasons for entering political life, respondents were asked to reflect on the very first elected position which they sought, and the circumstances and motivations for seeking it. Most of the women in this study sought elected office at other levels of government before running federally: three women ran initially as school board trustees, one ran for city alderman, and three ran for seats in the provincial legislature. Only two women sought a federal seat as their first elected position. While the primary focus of this study is on their experiences with serving at the federal level, it was believed that their narratives about entering their first political race would lead to a better understanding of the complex factors involved in a woman's initial decision to run.

Previous perceptions about a career in politics

Although each woman's entrance into the political arena was unique, some broad patterns emerged from their narratives about running the first time. One of the most common themes is that, prior to putting their names forward, none of the women ever saw themselves becoming involved in politics in a formal way. More than half of the respondents indicated that they had no previous desire or interest in politics prior to the specific circumstances that led them to run. While Pam noted that she "was curious about party politics and interested, but not active," others were more unequivocal about their feelings about political life prior to stepping forward to run, and offered firm

declarations such as: “I didn’t know anything about politics at all and I wasn’t interested” (Helen), and “I had no interest whatsoever; I didn’t even like politics and never saw myself doing this kind of job” (Susan). Alice recalled that as a young adult, she had an interest in politics, but “never had any notion of getting involved in any way, and certainly not running.” Dana, who spoke at length about growing up in an isolated rural community, elaborated on this theme more fully:

Politics was just not something I considered...I think that most women my age at that time, especially from the poor background that I came from, didn’t ever consider these kind of possibilities. I mean really, you were lucky that you had a good marriage and you worked for a few years before you had children and then you stayed home. I never really expected to be doing this.

The tendency for women to perceive themselves as unlikely candidates for office is consistent with findings from recent studies. Elder (2004) found that women are less willing to stand for office because of a multiplicity of factors, including traditional gender socialization and gendered perceptions of political life. Lawless and Fox (2005) also found a correlation between gender socialization and an initial reluctance to run. While the scope of this study does not allow for a full exploration of why these women did not see themselves as potential candidates for office, it is a question that merits further investigation.

Policy interests

Six women indicated that their first connection with formal politics stemmed from concern or involvement with an issue that was personally meaningful to them, or to their families. For the most part, the women in this study did not set out to be politicians: they were drawn into politics as a consequence of pursuing issues that they believed were

important, or that were not being adequately addressed by the political system. All three women who initially ran as school board trustees were influenced, to some degree, by encounters with the board as parents. Two women recalled being frustrated by the board's response to their concerns and suggest that their decision to run was, in large part, motivated by this dissatisfaction:

I didn't particularly like what was going on at my daughter's elementary school. I think she was in grade four and they were going to show some sex ed films in mixed classes. So I objected, and I contacted the board and... I wasn't impressed with how they treated me. So I started going to board meetings just to watch how these decisions were being made and what was going on, got interested, and sort of attended board meetings and some committee meetings for about a year. And then they realigned the boundaries of the ward so the incumbent wasn't running where I lived so I ran. And that's how I got started. (Pam)

I was completely driven by trying to get extra attention paid to a gifted son and, you know, the trustee wouldn't return phone calls. So I got mad and said 'why the hell am I paying his wages if he can't even return my call'...then I complained loudly and two people in my family encouraged me to run myself and so I did. (Susan)

Helen described a more positive encounter with the school board when she successfully lobbied for French immersion in rural schools. She noted that her campaign for French immersion earned her a "solid reputation in the community" and "got her thinking that maybe [she] had a role." She believed that her successful campaign was the trigger that eventually prompted a sitting trustee to notice her skills and approach her to run for the board herself. These experiences appear to be typical of women who enter office at the school board level. A study by Deckman (2007) which explored gender differences in the decision to run for school boards, found that women were less likely than men to view running for school board trustee as a way to gain experience for higher office, but rather, saw it as an opportunity to influence government policy, and to work with people who shared similar ideals.

For the two women who entered politics at the provincial level, the initial spark was also policy-driven, and strongly connected to issues that were personally or professionally important to them. For both women, policies related to health care, children and social welfare were mentioned as specific areas of concern:

You know I came from the women's health movement so I was aware, well I didn't know to call them that then, but I was aware of the social determinants of health, poverty, violence...all of those things that were part and parcel of the women's health movement. They were bigger picture issues for me...it wasn't just, you know, trying to find a family doctor or e-health or all of that...I felt that the system was falling down around us in terms of primary care reform and that there wasn't really a spokesperson for patients, for nurses, doctors, social workers...and that was what initially got me involved. (Barbara)

My motivation was policy-driven in the sense that the driving force for me in all of this has been the belief that through politics you could actually affect change...but also, some specific policy areas that got me going were certainly in the area of health care and the whole future of medicare, and of course, child care. (Lorna)

Similarly, one of the two women who entered politics at the federal level claimed that she was "first and foremost motivated by what I perceived to be a direct assault on social policies" (Mary). Her previous professional experience in social work nurtured a particular interest in child and family support services, and she recalled that her decision to run was, "more than anything...a mainly policy-driven decision." This theme is consistent with other studies that have examined women's motivations for entering politics. For example, two surveys of electoral candidates found that women are more likely to become involved in politics when motivated by policy issues surrounding the interests of women and children (Swers 2002; Fox 1997).

Being approached or encouraged to run

The initial decision to run also appears to be influenced by the experience of being approached or encouraged to run. In their narratives about running the first time, many women described a specific conversation in which someone suggested that they consider running for office. For some, it was a person already involved in politics, while for others, it was a close friend or family member. Gillian remarked, “it is actually a good story when I think about it. I was having coffee with my fisherman friend, and she basically dared me to run.” Barbara recalled a conversation with a sitting MP with whom she had regular professional contact: “It was a routine appointment and we got to talking about things and he suggested I run and I have to admit I thought about it...and he mentioned it again the next time too.” Dana described an impromptu conversation with an outgoing city alderman:

It was a strange story...there was an alderman where I lived and he had worked for me so I knew him well...he had only been around for two years and just announced that he was leaving. I ran into him on the street one day and asked him who was running...and he said to me...well, this one man...[name withheld], and I thought I don't want this guy to be my representative...so I said to him, who else? And he said, so far nobody. And I said well you have to find someone decent to run and he looked straight at me and said why don't you?

Most suggest that they hadn't seriously considered the possibility of putting their name forward for office before it was directly suggested to them. This is consistent with studies which have found that women often need more encouragement than men to become political candidates (Lawless and Fox 2005; Witt, Paget and Matthews 1994), and those which have found that being asked or encouraged to run increases the likelihood that a woman will consider a candidacy (Lawless and Fox 2005). The fact that so many women in this study recall this type of interaction suggests its importance in

their decision-making process. It is difficult to know what specifically is important about the experience of being approached to run: on the one hand, it is possible that the suggestion helps to offset feelings of insecurity about being qualified. A more strategic explanation however, is that being approached to run increases a woman's confidence about her ability to win. A number of studies on political ambition have shown that potential candidates, whether male or female, are more likely to enter political races when they perceive themselves as likely to win (Stone and Maisel 2003; Black 1972). In either case, this finding underscores the importance of ensuring that party elites engage in active recruitment of prospective female candidates.

Family support

With one exception, all candidates were married at the time they sought their first elected seat, and most had at least one child. It is perhaps not surprising then, that many of the women make unsolicited reference to the support they received from their husbands and other family members in wrestling with the decision to run for office. Most were quick to identify this as a key reason for putting their name forward, and three women suggest that they might not have ran without this type of support. Most placed emphasis on the emotional and psychological support offered by their spouses. Dana described her first conversation with her husband after being approached to run, and recalled: "he just looked at me with a big grin and said, I think you'd be terrific, you should consider it." Lorna ended her narrative by insisting, unprompted, that her husband "...never wavered from thinking I could do it, and we could have only done this

together." Barbara credited her husband with helping her accept the implicit risks that running for office entailed:

My husband was unbelievably supportive. He is in a high-risk occupation, and he has always been thrilled with change. For someone like me, who probably came from a family that was more likely to hang in and do the same thing forever, you know, hang in there for the gold watch. He just naturally thinks people should do something different every few years. And that made me feel like I could do it too.

Many women were also buoyed by the practical support that their husbands offered, particularly with respect to children and other household responsibilities:

I was concerned about the kids for sure but my husband said to me that if I ran and won, that he would come home at night because the alderman job was an evening job more than anything else. And he actually did what he said he was going to do. And he got to know his children a hell of a lot better...it was better for everyone all around. (Dana)

I'm really lucky because I have a very supportive husband. He has done the job of both parents on many occasions and I knew that I could rely on him...I sat [my family] down and said to them, if I am going to do this, I am looking at taking years out of our family life and dedicating it to politics. And that means a different role for mom. So when you give me the thumbs up or thumbs down I want you to look at all of this and what it means at home. And they did, they really did. (Helen)

The frequency with which family support is mentioned in these narratives is not entirely unexpected, as there is some scholarly evidence to suggest that when making the decision to run for office, women feel obligated to consider family responsibilities more carefully than do their male counterparts (Fowler and McClure 1989; Sapiro 1982).

Self-perceptions of qualifications

At least two recent studies have found that women are less likely than men to perceive themselves as being qualified to run for office, and that this perception often results in fewer women becoming political candidates (Lawless and Fox 2005; Elder

2004). It is somewhat surprising then, that concerns about being unqualified to run for office do not figure prominently in the narratives in this study. When asked whether they felt qualified to hold office at the time of entry, most women recalled feeling some anxiety about their ability to do some aspects of the job, but only two admitted to feeling “hardly qualified...I didn’t have a clue what I was doing” (Gillian), or had “huge personal reservations because I thought I didn’t know enough” (Mary). By contrast, Pam said that she felt “eminently qualified” and Alice recalled that “I never thought that I might not be qualified.” Some offered more balanced appraisals of their initial concerns:

Well...hmmm...I never for one minute thought I wasn’t qualified at the municipal level, and I knew that I could handle whatever it was. It was never about my capacity to be able to do the job. It was more about my capacity to win and to handle some specific parts of the role...I knew I would be able to read the files and I would be fine. That part of it didn’t worry me. What worried me was the public relations aspect of it, the public speaking. Getting up and talking...I mean I was not that great at it and I was so nervous about that part. (Dana)

I think I, I felt...um, qualified. I probably felt that I had a lot to learn in terms of running a department. I certainly felt inadequate in terms of suddenly being thrown into the House and having to be ready to answer questions from opposition on topics that I didn’t know about...But I had a good amount of experience with debates and media and so on, so I don’t think I felt like I wasn’t qualified for the job. I always felt I could do it but I just had to get used to certain areas. (Lorna)

I had some concerns...ah, especially in terms of public policy. I immediately went and, um, even after I got elected, bought all the Bothwell books on Canadian history and did all the stuff. I sort of felt, you know, oh my god, I don’t know...but I know now that a lot of women think they feel that way...they think ‘isn’t there somebody better’ while men say ‘what time do I have to be there and do I need a tie?’ (Barbara)

While it is difficult to know exactly why this group of women felt more confident about their qualifications than the literature suggests, a few explanations are possible.

Concerns about being qualified may figure less prominently in these women’s narratives

because their experience in office has helped to mitigate their initial concerns. Existing studies of women's attitudes towards running for office have relied heavily on data from women who have not yet entered political life, and who have not therefore, had the experience of being able to assess whether their concerns were justified. Similarly, it is possible that these women, who have had years to develop their confidence and skills, may be disinclined to acknowledge, or even recall, the experience of feeling unqualified. Finally, it is worth considering the extent to which the decision to interview current officeholders impacts the type of narratives which emerge. It is possible that current MPs, particularly those with a desire or intent to run in future elections, may be more reluctant to admit to feeling unqualified for the position for fear that this would be perceived negatively by potential supporters.

5.2 Experiences with the first term in office

One of the objectives of this study is to better understand how the experience of serving in office impacts the decision to run again, and to assess the extent to which running for re-election is reflective of women's overall satisfaction with their career. Consequently, the women in this study were asked to reflect on their very first term as an MP, and to describe both the encouraging and discouraging aspects of the experience. It was hoped that these recollections would be useful in understanding some of the factors that contributed to the desire to run again, and conversely, to identify aspects of the job which might be a disincentive to running for re-election. This is an important step in addressing the problem of underrepresentation at the federal level of government in Canada.

Overall, a curious pattern emerged in the narratives about their first term. Almost every respondent elaborated much more fully on the discouraging or challenging aspects of their experience, despite being prompted to give equal consideration to both positive and negative elements. Only one respondent, Pam, had difficulty with recalling anything negative about her first term as an MP, and insisted that “really, the whole thing was just fabulous, and very exciting, you can’t imagine how exciting it was.” This pattern further amplifies the central paradox being explored in this study: the frequency with which women stand for re-election despite the many challenges they face while in office.

5.2.1 Discouraging aspects of the first term

Workload

In their narratives about their first term, almost every woman described feeling surprised and, at times, overwhelmed by the workload of an MP. Although several mentioned that they knew the job would be demanding, most underestimated both the scope and the intensity of their portfolios. One woman recalled that adjusting to the workload was the “single-biggest challenge” (Lorna) of her first few years in office.

Others made similar observations:

You know, what was really surprising to me right off the bat was the amount of work. Everyone has this idea that, you know, politicians and MPs kind of float around, that they golf in the summer and have big breaks and such, and I was floored by it. I still leave the house at seven and get back at 11. It was so much work...This is more than a full time job...it is a three times job, an all-consuming, weekends, evening, holidays...an all the time job. (Alice)

The job was ten times more demanding than anything I had done. Um...I thought I put in long hours when I owned my own business and I did, but that was quite easy compared to what it is now. I'm up at 6:00 every day and if I am back in my private dwelling by 9:00 at night then it's a good night. You do that from Monday to Friday then you get on a plane and fly back [home] and get on a plane Sunday to do it all over again...it never ends. (Helen)

Learning curve

Closely related to workload, many women recalled being intimidated, to some degree, by the steep learning curve they faced in their early years as an MP. Even Lorna, who had previous experience as a policy advisor and campaign organizer, recalled that the transition was a challenging one, and noted, "I was immediately appointed to Cabinet, so it was quite a nerve-wracking experience...I had [several portfolios], none of them major ones, but I was pretty green and they were pretty scary." Helen offered a similar reflection:

There was a great deal to learn, and it's pretty overwhelming, there are so many things you need to figure out for yourself...even just the orientation to the day to day. You walk in, and there are so many things to learn and so many places to go, so very confusing. It takes you months to even figure out where you are. And there was so much reading, background homework if you will. I mean if you are going to go into a committee meeting and don't have an understanding of what is going on, you aren't helping anyone.

Gillian, who entered politics after teaching for over twenty years, remembered being "terror stricken" at the prospect of delivering her maiden speech in the House of Commons and said, "I spent much of [my] first year in office just figuring out what I was supposed to be doing, and hoping no one would notice." She tells a lighthearted story about her first experience with hiring staff members:

I mean, who was I going to hire for staff? I didn't know a living soul [in Ottawa] but it turned out someone knew someone who had worked for an MP under Mulroney...so she came for an interview. And I thought, how do you interview

someone, here you are now, a professional, a member of parliament, and I didn't have a clue what an MP does. So I said to her 'what do you know about running an MP's office because I sure don't know anything.' And then she started talking about setting up the office and getting stationary and I thought, 'right, we need stationary' and things like that. Then she said who are you going to get for correspondence, letters and such...and I thought, I need somebody *else*? [author's emphasis]...and anyway, the interview lasted less than 5 minutes because I didn't know what else to say. I spent a lot of my first year not knowing what to say.

Only one woman, Pam, claimed to have been undaunted by the learning curve she faced when entering federal politics. Thinking back to her first few years as an MP, she noted, "Nope, I never really felt in over my head at all." Interestingly, Pam was also one of the two women who reported feeling very confident about her qualifications for officeholding.

Media

Comments about the harshness of the media also figured very prominently in the narratives about the discouraging aspects of the first term. There was virtual unanimity among respondents on this issue: all but one woman found dealing with the media to be one of the most challenging aspects of the position, and many admitted to feeling personally hurt by the negative media attention they received. Susan, who was forced to resign from a cabinet post because of a public scandal, recalled that the media's coverage of the controversy was "horrendous, just horrendous...reporters have to write a story and they want blood, so they don't report the issues accurately and it was very painful."

Helen recalled:

I suppose the most difficult part, is the media...they are particularly harsh. And it feels most of the time that they are out to get you. So, the trick or difficult part for me was to keep my heart soft and my outer shell hard. Cause it really, really, hurts. You could be running around wounded all the time if you took any of it too seriously, and I think you could spend your entire life correcting misinformation that is written about you.

Five of the eight women who talked about the media also suggested, without prompting by the interviewer, that they believed they were, at times, treated differently because they were women. Many emphasized the undue attention that was focused on their physical appearance:

I think the most discouraging thing that happened right off the bat was the way the media profiled me...I remember, like yesterday, the first piece they wrote about me as Minister...describing the colour of dress I was wearing, the stockings, the jewellery, right down to the, you know, every single thing. And not much about what I believed in and stood for, and I didn't see the same kind of approach with men. So, it was a double standard at the time. (Lorna)

I didn't like the media and the way I was treated, and still don't. I find that ah, unless you are young and beautiful, they don't want anything to do with you. Especially if you are a certain age or not exactly slim...the way you are treated in the media is sometimes is really awful. (Dana)

Alice's comments about the media were framed differently. She suggested that the most difficult part of her adjustment to the role of an MP was coming to terms with the importance of appearance, but says that this was an important step in "maturing as a politician." She described a specific incident in which a senior critic position was taken from her and given to a junior female colleague. She believed the demotion was directly related to her physical appearance, and insisted that the incident was ultimately an important learning experience:

The biggest difficulty for me was understanding that your appearance has a huge amount to do with your success in politics, and I think to some degree, that's particular to women. This is a good story...there was another woman elected

with me, who was an absolute knockout, drop dead gorgeous really....At one point, my critic position was taken away from me and moved to [her], and I was given a very junior position under another senior critic and um, that knocked me for a loop...I couldn't figure out why [she] would be given a post like that, cause in my view, she wasn't capable. So, I went through a couple of, sort of, calculations about why she got it and not me. And I figured out, eventually that it was really the way she presented herself. [Party leader's name withheld] said to me 'she doesn't really care about the can but she can sell the can, and we need that', and really, the media did adore her. And so from that I went to image consulting and learned to dress better and changed my hair and glasses because, you know, I realized how important appearance is if you want to be on the top tier in politics. So that was actually very helpful for me.

While the respondents' perceptions about gender bias in the media have undoubtedly been influenced by their negative and often painful personal experiences, there is fairly strong scholarly evidence to support the notion that female politicians are treated differently by the media than men, and specifically, to suggest that the media focuses more heavily on physical appearance when it comes to female politicians. A recent cross-national study of newspaper coverage of male and female candidates in Australia, Canada and the United States found that candidates in all three countries are often portrayed in terms of long-standing gender stereotypes (Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008). Devitt's (2002) study of gubernatorial candidates also found that news reports on female candidates were much more likely to focus on personal traits such as appearance or personality. In Canada, Gidengil and Everitt (2003a) analyzed Canadian leaders' debates in television news, and found that women were portrayed in much more confrontational terms than their actual behaviour warranted. A separate study by the same authors found that the speech of three women leaders in Canada were subject to more interpretation by the media and was reported in more negative terms than their male counterparts (Gidengil and Everitt, 2003b). Thus, there is ample reason to believe that

the reports of unfair treatment by the media offered by the women in this study are credible, and are not merely reflective of their own negative encounters.

Balancing work and family

Although the intense workload, steep learning curve, and treatment by the media were identified as significant challenges in the first term, by far the most pervasive theme to emerge in the narratives was the struggle to balance family responsibilities with a career in federal politics. This stood out very clearly for most women as the most significant challenge in the years following their first federal election. Many made specific reference to the difficulties associated with trying to balance a home and work life, and many alluded to personal costs that came with the decision to enter politics. Alice insisted that women considering a career in politics should “be fully prepared to calculate the cost on your family because there will be a real cost,” while Susan recalled:

It’s so difficult...very difficult I think for women under fifty because it is difficult to balance it all and keep it all together... You have to be a mother to your children no matter how great your husband is, you have to be a mother, and you have to be able to balance so many things, it is just tough stuff all around.

Helen, who had just become a grandmother shortly before the interview, suggested that the experience has made her more aware of the compromises that she made with her own children in order to do the job:

I have a different perspective now that I’m a grandparent, and I think I see things differently. I do have some regret, well maybe not regret exactly, but maybe I was selfish when I was young...selfish enough I suppose to know that my kids were in good hands with their father and that they were taken good care of, so I was free enough to go and do what I needed to do. Now that I am a grandmother I really want to be ten times more hands on as I was with my own kids.

Dana recalled that the tension of balancing her career and family responsibilities was felt most acutely during holidays or on special family occasions:

It was particularly hard at moments...I remember working Christmas Eve you know, till God knows when, not getting home until about one o'clock on Christmas Eve and saying to myself God, I am the mother, I'm supposed to do Christmas and it's not very easy to do Christmas Eve at 1 a.m.

Lorna recalled that for her, the balance became particularly difficult when one of her children was diagnosed with a chronic medical condition:

...of course I had to juggle kids and a job...You know we had a sitter, we had some care, but it was always a juggle because [her child] needed all kinds of medical appointments, blood work, you name it, it was really hard to balance it all... had a playpen in my office so that whenever he came to visit I had somewhere to put him and one day, one of the men stood up in the House and accused me of being a high priced babysitter and that was tough.

The repeated references to balancing work and family life in these narratives suggest very clearly that role conflict was one of the most difficult aspects of their adjustment to life as an MP. What is less clear however, is the extent to which this is a gendered phenomenon. While it may be tempting to assume that male politicians experience less conflict between their domestic and public roles, there is little data to support this claim. Sapiro's study of the intersection of family roles and political ambition challenged the prevailing belief that "men do not feel such conflicts and thus are able to pursue their political interests," and found that conflict between public and private roles is experienced "at least as much by men" (1982, 276). She found however, that men were more likely to develop and pursue political ambitions despite the existence of conflicting domestic commitments. This appears to be the case with the women in this study: while most spoke at length about the difficulties of managing their public and private roles, their decision to run for re-election suggests that they either developed

effective ways of managing these conflicts, or perhaps believed that benefits of running again outweighed these challenges.

5.2.2 Encouraging aspects of the first term

Read collectively, the respondents' reflections on the discouraging aspects of the first term in office frames an important question lying at the heart of this study: why did these women, despite being acutely aware of the personal costs associated with a career in federal politics, decide to run again? Preliminary answers to this question may be found in their reflections on the more encouraging or sustaining aspects of their early experiences in office. Although during the interview, this question was not explicitly tied to the question of why they ran for re-election, it is reasonable to assume that these factors may have played some role in shaping their decision to run again.

Making a difference

When asked to reflect on the encouraging aspects of their first term, several women made reference to the satisfaction of knowing they had made a direct positive impact on the lives of their constituents. In particular, they suggested that the most validating experiences were those involving individual cases. Helen recalled, "it [was] wonderful to be able to solve a problem for someone, and we solve problems here all the time but that is something that rarely gets noted in the media because there are confidentiality issues." Similarly, Mary said that "the small victories on behalf of individual constituents and families" helped to keep her motivated during difficult times.

Dana suggested that even as a member of the Opposition, it was often possible to make small but meaningful changes:

For me, it was working on the files dealing with people...representing people, that was wonderful...I remember immigration cases, which are always incredibly difficult, but you could go and stand with the Minister of Immigration and say, this is a problem. And you could help...you could actually get things done and these kinds of things make you feel good...make you feel that it is worthwhile.

This sentiment is also strongly embedded in Lorna's personal assessment of the reasons why women and men get involved in politics:

You know, I really think women actually get involved, as a rule, to affect change. They are not looking for big, you know, volcano like change, but things they deal with on a daily basis, in their families and communities and so on. I think men are more likely to enter politics for the feeling of esteem, of power.

Sense of camaraderie

Another encouraging aspect to emerge from the narratives was the sense of camaraderie that they felt with their fellow MPs, particularly with those in their own caucus. A number of the women suggested that the pressures and challenges of their first term were made easier by the sense of being "all in it together" (Alice). Thinking back to her first few months in Ottawa, Pam insisted, "even the loneliness wasn't so bad because everybody sort of all went to dinner together and knew exactly what everyone else going through...it was really good."

For some, the sense of camaraderie was felt most strongly with female colleagues, while others mentioned that they developed close connections with both men and women. Helen suggested that being a part of informal gatherings with other women in her caucus helped her manage the "ongoing pressures of a very lonely job," and recalled:

[The women] understand, because we are all in the same boat. And in our caucus we don't have what I would call a women's caucus per se, but we do have...hmm...a regular ladies night if you want to call it that. We just get around, go to one apartment or another or a hotel. Everyone chips in and we order in Chinese or whatever, just women...all women...talking about usually, our houses and our husbands and families, very little about politics.

Lorna, a member of another party, described a similar arrangement among female members of her own caucus, and suggested that this group “got together on a regular basis and supported each other, especially in difficult times.” Barbara also made frequent references to the valued support she received from senior female colleagues, and insisted that “none of us do this on our own, and I had incredible support from [three names omitted], and “it didn't matter what shit was going on around me, these women would just brush me off and send me back into the ring.”

Participation in the Women's Caucus

In addition to these informal connections with other women, three women felt that their party's formal women's caucus was also, at times, an important source of support. Susan recalled that this forum was helpful “on a personal level...and on issues, it was a forum where we could relate to things that we knew mattered.” Dana, who served one term as vice-chair of the Women's Caucus, said “well, not everybody participates and sometimes I find that it is not helpful, but other times it really is and it is really important to be involved because that forum is helpful in advancing issues within the larger caucus.” Barbara, who chaired the Women's Caucus in her party for several years, recalled:

[The women's caucus] was useful, and better than anything else we had. It was a sort of a cocooning that would happen each week, where women did behave better to one another than in caucus, and it was a caucus that never leaked. We

managed to work there to find language to describe what we were doing and the things we wanted so we didn't look like we were just whining. But it was helpful to have that forum, yes.

While the respondent's reflections on the more encouraging aspects of their first term are helpful in developing a richer picture of women's experiences in their first few years in office, it is difficult to know the extent to which these factors intersected with the decision to run again. For this reason, the respondents were also asked to reflect specifically on their reasons why they ran for re-election. Interestingly, while there was some overlap in the responses about encouraging aspects of first term and the reasons for running for re-election, most did not link their decision directly to the encouraging factors they had previously described. Consequently, it is important to acknowledge that the decision to run again may not necessarily be related to satisfaction with their careers, but may be the product of other calculations.

5.3 Decision to run for re-election

For these women, the decision to run for re-election was a qualitatively different experience than their decision to run the first time. While a few consistent themes emerged from both sets of narratives, their collective reflections on running for re-election suggest that the decision to run again, was in many ways, a less complicated one, involving a different set of personal and professional calculations. While it is true that the question of why women run again in such high numbers requires more systematic analysis than this type of exploratory research can provide, the recollections of these nine women offer preliminary insight into this question, and suggest the presence of consistent patterns for female incumbents that would benefit from further investigation.

Certainty

The most pervasive theme in the narratives about running for re-election is certainty about the decision. Despite offering detailed commentaries on the numerous challenges and personal costs associated with a career in politics, none of the women in this study claim to have had reservations or doubts about running again. When asked about the decision, there were remarkable similarities in both the form and content of their narratives. Almost all began with a simple, definitive statement about their certainty about running again, such as: “No, there was never any question that I would run again” (Pam), “running again was an easy decision (Lorna), and “I had absolutely no reservations about running again” (Dana). One respondent even appeared to be momentarily surprised by the line of questioning, insisting: “Oh...goodness..that was absolutely a no-brainer...I didn’t hesitate” (Helen), while another adds, “there was not even a doubt about running a second time” (Barbara).

Indeed, the certainty of running again presented an interesting methodological challenge. While most respondents provided very detailed recollections about their initial decision to run that required very little prompting by the researcher, the question of why they ran again did not, at least initially, generate overly detailed recollections from most of the respondents. Perhaps because they believed that the decision to run for re-election was an obvious one, a few women seemed to initially struggle with articulating their precise reasons for running again. This alone is an important observation, as it lends further support to the idea that the decision to run again is qualitatively different than the initial decision to run, involving a unique set of calculations and considerations.

In order to probe the question of running again more fully, the respondents were encouraged by the interviewer to reflect further on the question of why they believed the decision to run again was so simple. While this intervention necessarily raises valid questions about the interviewer's role in shaping the narratives that ultimately emerged, it was believed to be necessary for developing a more complete picture of the decision to run again. In this case, the intervention proved to be critical, as it ultimately led to much richer and wide-ranging reflections about the decision to run a second time.

Return on investment

A recurrent theme in the narratives about running for re-election was the desire to seek a return on the serious investment, both personal and professional, that they had already made in deciding to enter politics. Several women recalled feeling that they had already made very large personal sacrifices upon entering office and did not want those sacrifices to have been in vain. Alice captured this sentiment succinctly by saying, "I felt [I] had done something useful, that I had steadily gained some skill and expertise and um, that it would be crazy to throw in the towel after all the work," while Pam insisted that "I had put a lot of work into [the race]...and had built up community recognition....and I just thought, ok, let's make this work again." Similarly, Mary noted that "it just seemed sort of sad to me not to offer [my] services now that I had done it for four years." For these women, the decision to enter politics was one of the most significant decisions of their lives, and they seemed reluctant to abandon the hard work and effort they had put into establishing themselves as credible MPs.

Increased confidence and skills

Three women alluded to the fact that by the time of their second election, they felt much more confident about their ability to do the job, and wanted to capitalize on their increasing sense of confidence and self-assuredness. Alice said that after four years, the “stress of maturing as a politician had begun to ease up” and that she had already learned many of the critical skills that were essential to the role. In particular, she noted that she had developed a “thicker skin” and had come to really understand that “a lot of [politics] is a game, and...not always a very nice game.” Mary suggested that by the end of her first term, she felt she had earned the respect of her constituents, and had largely overcome any “personal reservations about my ability to do the job well.” Similarly, Dana insisted that she was much more prepared to do the job effectively in the second term and felt as if she had a “clearer perspective” on her responsibilities to her constituents:

By then I had developed and matured as a politician and I think I felt I could be even more useful to my community. I definitely had more knowledge of the system, of the issues, I was so much better prepared. Of course I still didn't know the files like I do now, but I mean I knew what I was getting into more so than when I first ran...and by then I had a reputation and it was a good one, so that helped.

Although the small sample size in this study does not allow for broad generalizations about women's experiences in office, these comments underscore the idea that while women may be less confident than men about their abilities when considering a candidacy, the experience of officeholding may serve to mitigate these concerns. Moreover, none of the respondents in this study indicated in any way that their experiences as officeholders served to reinforce their concerns or fears about being unqualified. Analyzed collectively, the narratives point to a strong positive correlation

between level of confidence and time served in office. This relationship warrants further investigation, as it would likely be an encouraging finding for women who are considering putting their name forward.

Unfinished goals and objectives

In assessing their reasons for running again, some women placed more emphasis on their desire to ensure that the goals and objectives that initially brought them into politics would be carried out successfully, and on their intention to complete projects that they had initiated. Helen insisted, “I am not a quitter by nature...I always finish what I start.” Barbara was more specific about the issues that she wanted to pursue in a second term:

I don't think I even thought about the possibility of not entering again. No, no...I had too much serious work to do. In fact, I hadn't even begun in terms of what I needed to do. I had been thinking seriously about this work on, this concept of citizen democracy between elections and I was finally beginning to get some momentum and perspective on how this representative democracy could work...so no, I think, I thought it was just the beginning.

Lorna recalled that over her first term, major successes were “few and far between” but insists that there were moments that reinforced her belief, that “through politics, you could actually make change.” She insisted that she wanted to continue, in part, “to keep working towards the values that brought me here to begin with, because none of that had really changed.” Specifically, she noted that she was motivated by a desire to “continue the fight for a national child care program.”

For Susan, there was an additional incentive for running again: her desire to vindicate her political reputation. Talking candidly about a scandal that forced her to resign from a cabinet post shortly into her second full first term, she insisted:

No, I absolutely had to, I had to run again...to set the record straight I resigned as Minister to fight back hard, and uh, I wanted to have another very positive election behind me so that if, at some point, I decided that I have had enough of this life, I, ah, would be able to do it with a clean slate...many people did not think I would run again after what I went through. But for me, after what happened, I had every intention of fighting back because I had to prove to everybody that they were wrong and that they had lied. (Susan)

While Susan's experience was exceptional, she believed she would have "definitely ran again" even if the controversy had not surfaced, and said that "I still had a lot to do and I had grown to love my community and wouldn't have let them down." It is interesting to note that Susan's involvement in a high profile scandal did not have the effect of deterring her from running again, but rather, increased her resolve to seek another term. This also underscores the idea that the experience of serving in office does not diminish a woman's confidence, even under unusually stressful conditions.

Reduced role conflict

When they entered office initially, most of the respondents had young children and were the primary caregivers in the family. Consequently, the adjustment to a career as an MP involved a re-negotiation of their private roles, and required them to develop strategies for managing their responsibilities at home. For most, this meant relying heavily on their spouses, or adjusting their routines so that they could be home on weekends when the House of Commons was in session. Two women said that the early arrangements they had made with respect to family responsibilities had "made it possible to do the job effectively" (Mary) and "overall, worked out reasonably well" (Dana). Therefore, they did not anticipate that the decision to run again would have any more negative implications for their families. It is likely that the first term in office provided

an opportunity for many of these women to accurately assess the benefits and costs associated with officeholding, and to evaluate the impact of their decision on their families. Three women also pointed out that by the time of their re-election, their family responsibilities were less onerous, and this reinforced their belief that they should run again:

Well, you know, my kids were both older then. I think they were both in high school and my husband worked closer to home than before, so the commute for him was better. And I knew the family was at a point in which you could, or I could, rather, with good conscience, not worry about it too much. (Pam)

My family was better positioned too...well, by that time my kids were a bit older and one had left home, so that was less of a concern. (Susan)

By then one of my daughters was in university and my son was headed there in two years and funnily enough, they were in Ottawa so it made it a lot easier to see them during the year. (Dana)

Satisfaction

In addition to articulating the more pragmatic reasons for running again, several women suggested that they ran for re-election because, despite the numerous challenges of the first term, they enjoyed the experience, and overall, felt that the job was personally satisfying. Pam noted simply that “I just loved it, and wanted to continue,” and Alice recalled feeling that the first term “had been enormously satisfying.” Others were more emphatic about their passion for the job:

Politics is like an addiction. Once it gets into your blood and you know that, by putting some hard work and effort into things you can become a leader in your community and change the direction of the way things are going and make it better...it's a passion, a natural high that makes a difference in someone's life. When you can make a genuine difference in someone's life, I can't think of a better feeling than that. (Helen)

Every job has its down days, but to me this was like a calling, it's a mission. And during that period before the second election, the momentum was building and it

was like I couldn't believe we got paid for it...a lot of us felt that way. This was what we had to do and the mission was strong...yeah, it was like we all used to laugh and say they pay us for this? (Gillian)

Two women claimed that they found the job to be much more satisfying than their previous careers. Dana said, "I think I realized quickly that I loved it, and I'm not sure what I was doing as an accountant; this has been such a great part of my life." Barbara believed that in some ways, the life of an MP has been easier on her, and on her family:

This is a funny story but awhile back someone from years ago stopped me on the street and asked me who had done my facelift and I said well actually I just sleep through the night in this job...I have learned in this job to constantly do a rigorous evaluation of energy in and energy out. I have to make sure that I always have more energy coming in then going out. I will cancel stuff, or not agree to do stuff that is stupid or sapping [sic]...and the funny thing is my family says they see more of me now that I moved to Ottawa.

The sense of satisfaction with their decision to enter politics was also evident in responses to a follow-up question relating to regrets about their decision to enter and remain in politics. None of the women, despite articulating the myriad challenges of being in office, expressed the slightest regret about entering politics, and there was remarkable unanimity in their responses to this question. Mary insisted that she had "absolutely no regrets," while Alice answered quickly, "None at all...it was a privilege and an honour, and so far it's been fabulous." Lorna insisted, "No regrets at all – the minute I have regrets I won't run again," and Helen remarked simply, "Not one regret, this is what I was meant to do, I think."

Similarly, seven women confidently noted that since their entry into politics, there had never been a time when they seriously considered stepping down. Even Susan, who talked at length about being forced to resign her cabinet post as the result of a scandal,

was quick to say that it never once made her re-consider her decision to run. Thinking about that period in her career she said, “I didn’t think about stepping down for one minute. God willing I have the energy and strength to fight and make a difference...when I become complacent than that is the time to get out.” Only two women suggested they had ever thought seriously about leaving politics. Interestingly however, both women insisted that their reasons for considering retirement were unrelated to satisfaction with the job:

Um, I did think about it at one point....because by then I was fifty-five and so I realized that if I wanted to have another career or do something different that it was time to make the move. Because then if I kept at politics it would be my last career...you know, with the ticking of the clock you can’t really get your teeth into a new career if I didn’t do it then. Um, so that was my series of calculations there. It wasn’t that I didn’t enjoy the job or anything like that. (Alice)

Hmm...I haven’t seriously thought of leaving so far. Although, during the 2006 election, I’ll be honest, I was mad at Martin and thought he was going to cost us the election. I was angry at him, for my own reasons, but ah, it wasn’t so much a question of leaving, it was more resentment at the actual election campaign than me not wanting to do the job. I am sure I will reach a point when I decide maybe I don’t want to do this anymore, when all I want to do is stay home and make some booties, but that really hasn’t happened yet. (Dana)

Incumbency advantage

Interestingly, only three women made reference to the strategic advantages of running as an incumbent. Mary recalled feeling “very confident” that she would win, while Lorna insisted that she was “reasonably sure” that she would retain her seat, particularly because her challengers were both new to the political process. Pam had the added incentive of the prospect of running in a smaller, re-distributed riding, and this boosted her confidence about winning:

Well, one thing was that as a result of the new census, my riding was split into two and became smaller and more compact, so much easier to campaign in. And

we were already riding high in the polls, so it was...you know, we went into the campaign knowing we were going to win. Whereas before...there was always that doubt. I am political enough to know that you just watch the polls and know that there is no way you're going to lose. So you go into the campaign with a big smile on your face.

Apart from these responses, there is little additional evidence in the narratives to suggest that the decision to run again involved strategic calculations about the likelihood of winning. This is a curious finding, as much of the literature on political ambition has tended to employ a rational choice paradigm that conceptualizes the decision to enter political contests as primarily, a strategic response to a political opportunity structure (Schlesinger 1966).

It is difficult to know for certain why strategic calculations do not figure more prominently in the narratives of these particular women. One possible explanation may be related to sex-based differences in response tendencies. Bledsoe and Herring (1990) suggest that women may answer questions about their motivation for seeking elected office differently than men because they have been socialized to disavow ambition, and therefore may “deny that the pursuit of elected office is to further their careers and claim they desire only to serve the community” (218). Alternatively, they argue that the tendency for women to de-emphasize strategic calculations may be:

more than simply a case of differing response tendencies, and may reflect real differences in motivation. To the extent that women accept and internalize gender roles that describe the female as communal, nurturant and other-regarding, they may be in fact more likely to pursue higher office out of a sense of service to the community rather than a desire to enhance their own careers. (218)

6: CONCLUSION

This project has explored a curious dimension of women's underrepresentation in elected office at the federal level in Canada. Although women are generally less willing than men to put their names forward as candidates for office at this level, the rate at which they seek re-election is consistent, if not higher, than the rate for male officeholders. A close analysis of the personal narratives of nine female MPs has helped to shed light on some reasons for this phenomenon, and has laid the groundwork for understanding how the experience of serving in office impacts the decision to run for re-election.

The results of this study suggest that for female officeholders, the decision to run for re-election is qualitatively different than the decision to run the first time, and involves a unique set of personal and professional calculations. Specifically, the decision to run again appears to be influenced by least five distinct yet interrelated factors which are not significant in the initial decision to run. These are: a desire to seek a return on the significant personal and professional investment that is made when entering a career in politics, a desire to carry out specific policy objectives which were pursued during the first term, an increased sense of confidence about personal qualifications and suitability for the position, reduced role conflict related to work and family responsibilities, and perhaps most importantly, an overall level of satisfaction with the experience of being an MP.

Underlying these findings is the notion of a positive correlation between the experience of officeholding and women's willingness to remain in political life. The

results of this exploratory study suggest that once women are elected, they adapt very well to the role of an MP, and come to perceive themselves as equally capable, if not more so, than their male counterparts. Moreover, there is no evidence in the narratives to suggest that women are *less* certain about their suitability for a career in politics as they approach a second term, despite the many challenges that they encounter during their first few years in office. This is a particularly important finding for women who may be considering a candidacy, but have personal reservations about their qualifications or abilities. It also serves as an important corrective for those may have been socialized to view politics as an inherently inhospitable environment for women.

Similarly, this study finds some evidence to suggest that overall, these female incumbents enjoyed the experience of being an MP, and find a career in politics to be satisfying. The narratives that emerged in this analysis paint a picture of life in politics as demanding and intense, but ultimately, highly rewarding. Particular emphasis is placed on how the experience of officeholding enhances one's personal and professional growth, and on an overall level of satisfaction with the decision to enter the political arena. Once again, this finding may be valuable in encouraging more female candidates to put their names forward.

It must be acknowledged however, that there may be other ways to interpret women's willingness to run for re-election. Tremblay and Trimble (2004) posit that women may be more reluctant to leave politics after one term because they do not have access to the same resources and opportunities as men to resume their professional careers. While this explanation is not directly supported by the narratives in this particular study, the suggestion requires deeper investigation. It may be the case for

example, that women politicians are simply reluctant to understand their decision to run again in these terms, and consciously choose to emphasize the more positive reasons for running for re-election so as not to risk damage their political reputations. One way to test this hypothesis is to conduct follow up studies with women MPs who retired after one or two terms in order to trace their re-integration patterns into other careers.

Similarly, it would also be useful to build on this exploratory study of motivations for running again by extending the analysis to both male and female MPs. This would allow for an assessment of gender differences in the decision to run for re-election. Such an approach would also contribute to a richer understanding of the career patterns of male and female politicians, and would help to illuminate significant gender differences in the experiences of officeholders. These are important steps in addressing the problem of women's underrepresentation in elected office in Canada.

APPENDIX A

Demographic Questions

In what year did you first run for federal office? In what years did you run for re-election?

How old were you when you ran for office the first time?

What was your marital status when you ran for office the first time?

Did you have children or family responsibilities when you ran for office the first time?

Did you work outside the home prior to running for office? What type of work did you do?

What is your educational background?

Narrative Questions

When did you first become interested in politics? Please describe your earliest form of political involvement.

Please tell me about some of the factors that impacted your decision to run for office the first time.

What did you hope to accomplish by putting your name forward to run? Did you have specific goals or objectives? Please describe.

What was the single most important reason you decided to run for office?

Did you receive support or encouragement from specific individuals or groups to run for elected office? If so, please elaborate. How important was this support in your decision to run for office?

Did you have major reservations or concerns about running for office the first time? If so, what were they? Were your concerns realized?

Did you feel qualified to hold public office when you made your decision to run?

What was the most difficult part of the experience of running for office? What was the most rewarding part for you? Please feel free to comment on any aspect of the nomination process or campaign.

Please reflect on your experiences as an MP. Were there aspects of the job that were especially rewarding or especially discouraging for you personally? Please elaborate.

Most MPs enter parliament with specific expectations about their role. Did the experience of serving in office live up to your expectations? Why or why not?

In what ways did the experience of serving in office change your life? Please comment on any aspect of the experience.

Please tell me about the factors that impacted your decision to run for office for a second term.

What was the single most important reason you decided to run for office a second time?

Did you have major reservations or concerns about running for office the second time? If so, what were they?

Was the decision to run a second time an easier or more difficult than the one to run initially? Please elaborate on the reasons for your response.

Did you consider leaving politics after one term? If so, why? Why did you ultimately decide to run again?

Were there aspects of the job that made you hesitant to run a second time? Please describe.

Did you receive support or encouragement from specific individuals or groups to run for office a second time? If so, please elaborate. How much did this influence your decision to run again?

Do you have any regrets about your decision to run for office? If so, please elaborate.

Do you think it is important to have more women in elected office in Canada? Why or why not?

Do you think that there are structural innovations or changes in the political system that would improve the experience of women running for office? Please elaborate.

What advice or suggestions would you give to women who are considering putting their name forward for elected office?

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