She Should Run: Custom Candidate Recruitment Technologies and Women's Mobilization Toward More Equal Political Representation

by

Lauren B. Hahn

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Communication)
in the University of Michigan
2023

Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Brian E. Weeks, Chair
Assistant Professor Ariel Hasell
Assistant Professor Shannon C. McGregor, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Dr. Mara Ostfeld

Lauren B. Hahn (Potts)

lbpotts@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-2054-0800

Dedication

For the family and friends who supported me, the colleagues who advanced my thinking, and the women who let me into their lives.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, thanks go to my chair, Brian Weeks, who stuck with me through the evolution of my research interests and was integral to my progress over the last six years. I wish every graduate student could have an advisor like you. Next, to Ariel Hasell, Mara Ostfeld, and Shannon McGregor, plus Angela Ocampo in the early days, thank you for being the committee of dreams and supporting me and this project from the get-go. My time at Michigan was so rich; I owe a debt to all the faculty and students I worked with and to the Politics and Communication Lab and the Political Communication Working Group especially. It was a privilege to be surrounded by such smart and caring colleagues. Outside the labs, I couldn't ask for better co-authors than Mara and Sara Morell. Nor can I overstate my appreciation for my cohort—I'm so glad I got to go through the program with you all. Thank you for the feedback, support, laughter, tears, study sessions, and game nights. Beyond the cohort, big thanks to some folks who started as colleagues and became dear friends (you know who you are). I am likewise grateful for the friends old and new who supported me during this work and continue to make life better. I'd also like to mention Josh Scacco, Ralph Webb, Natalie Lambert, and Steve Kulich, whose mentorship during my master's program helped set me up for the PhD. Finally, the family: Vielen Dank to my in-laws, who helped ease the transition to Germany and rejoiced with me at each doctoral milestone. To my parents, an enormous thank you for believing so strongly in education, never doubting I could do this, and making sure I didn't get stuck in ABD-land. Thank you for the phone calls and FaceTimes that lifted me up and propelled me forward. Thanks to Kelsey for

being the best sister and to my grandparents for their prayers. Last, thank you to Axel, for keeping me sane and cheering me on every step of the way. We did it!

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Appendices

Abstract

Despite record numbers of women running for and winning political office, men still hold two-thirds of local, state, and federal electoral positions in the U.S. Scholars debate why women are underrepresented but agree that improving candidate recruitment is critical to increasing representational equity. The proprietary digital platform developed by She Should Run (one of few nonpartisan organizations in the candidate recruitment space and the only one focused on women in the pre-candidacy pipeline rather than women sure to run or already running) exemplifies the latest evolution of woman candidate recruitment and a previously unexplored area of political technology. Through textual analysis of platform materials, ethnographic participant observation during events, and in-depth interviews with users and volunteers, this dissertation examines She Should Run's approach to the problem of underrepresentation and women's experiences with the She Should Run platform. Analyses reveal three major tensions: the tension between being positive to encourage women to run and adequately addressing the barriers women face to running and winning; the tension between featuring structured organization-defined modes of engagement and facilitating organic user-driven participation; and the tension between the imagined user archetype—who the platform is designed for—and the women actually using the technology. In exploring these terrains of struggle, the research contributes insights to candidate recruitment and political technology literatures as well as activists and organizations seeking to realize technology's potential to mobilize more women toward political leadership.

Chapter 1 Underrepresentation, Mobilizing Women, and Technological Potential

1.1 Introduction

Women's political participation in the U.S. has historically lagged men's (Burns et al., 2001; Verba et al., 2003), especially when it comes to running for office (Joshi & Goehrung, 2018; Paxton et al., 2007). Despite unprecedented representational gains in recent years, women still hold, on average, just a third of seats in the U.S. Congress and elected executive offices at the state level (Center for American Women and Politics, 2023a). Contrary to popular belief that local offices (e.g., school board member, mayor, city councilor, county commissioner, etc.) are more accessible to political newcomers and thus more representative, men hold around two-thirds of local offices, too (Center for American Women and Politics, 2023a). Political scientists have attempted to unpack gender-based participation gaps for decades, but the research largely substantiates the impact of gender rather than suggesting non-gender-based explanations (Burns, 2005, 2007; Burns et al., 2011; Hinojosa & Kittilson, 2020; Jardina & Burns, 2016; Schlozman et al., 1999; Verba et al., 1997). With regard to candidacy, women consistently contend with more limited financial resources, less well-connected networks, and fewer opportunities for entering the candidacy pipeline than do men (Burns et al., 2001, 1997, 2011; Schlozman et al., 1994, 1999; Verba et al., 1997). Further, women report lower levels of political ambition (Fox, 2003; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Lawless & Fox, 2013).

Why women are underrepresented in elected office remains a point of contention. Some assert that the political ambition gap is almost solely responsible—that more men than women

hold office because more men want to hold office so more men run—and eschew the idea that structural challenges still contribute to representational inequity (Fox, 2003; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Lawless & Fox, 2013). According to this view, institutional sexism plays only a minimal role in women's decisions to run for office or their experiences as candidates, such that being female is no longer a liability (Hayes & Lawless, 2016). Other scholars argue that the same inegalitarian forces responsible for the initial ambition gap continue to pose gender-related challenges for women on the campaign trail and after winning office. This perspective emphasizes that individual factors such as motivation and ambition are impacted by and cannot be understood apart from structural dynamics and the surrounding political context (Bos et al., 2021; Piscopo, 2019; Rule, 1981). In the U.S., the increase in women and women of color in office has not banished normative perceptions of men as best suited to holding political power (Schneider et al., 2016). Negative sociocultural views of women in politics can cause women to question their political abilities and throttle their political ambitions, an example of stereotype threat (Pruysers & Blais, 2017). Despite limited evidence to the contrary (Hayes & Lawless, 2016), sexist media coverage also bedevils women in politics enough that it diminishes political ambition among women considering running (Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2019). Even in the context of social media conversations about political campaigns rather than journalistic coverage, male candidates may be better able than women candidates to control the rhetoric about themselves (McGregor & Mourão, 2016). The obstacles listed here are just a few of the many structural barriers facing women in contemporary politics.

Regardless of their stance on the reason(s) for underrepresentation, scholars agree that improving woman candidate recruitment is essential to tackling representational inequity (Dittmar, 2015b; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Lawless, 2011; Morell, 2023). Unfortunately, traditional

approaches to recruitment can perpetuate the gender gap, with in-person, institution-based efforts inadvertently replicating the accessibility and inclusion issues they seek to mitigate (Hern, 2017; Preece et al., 2016; Swain & Lien, 2017). Even when women are able to complete in-person campaign trainings, non-Whiteness and working-class-ness are still negatively associated with candidate emergence, i.e., making the official decision to run for office (Bernhard et al., 2021; Piscopo, 2019). Recent years have seen the advent of digital candidate recruitment platforms as possible more equitable alternatives to in-person programming. In contrast with the time, travel, and monetary burdens of in-person programming, a woman only needs an internet connection and an internet-enabled device to engage with digital recruitment resources. Finances and family responsibilities can still hinder women at the stage of candidate emergence (Bernhard et al., 2021), but digital recruitment platforms could theoretically make those kinds of factors less prohibitive for women considering *entering* the pre-candidacy pipeline.

Though recent political technology work has articulated women's experiences as distinct from men's and worth understanding on their own terms (Kreiss et al., 2020; Kreiss & Adams, 2019; McGregor et al., 2017), these proprietary technologies (which I refer to collectively as custom candidate recruitment technologies, or CCRTs) and their users had not been studied prior to this project. Yet recruitment research stands to benefit from political technology's understanding of digital action potentials just as political technology must consider technology's role in woman candidate recruitment. CCRTs constitute novel avenues through which political information reaches people and provide new tools for participating in politics, inviting scholars to examine how digital communication dynamics shape recruitment within CCRT infrastructures (see Jungherr et al., 2020). This work is additionally valuable for practitioners and activists seeking to maximize the effectiveness of recruitment efforts.

Founded in 2011, the nonprofit organization She Should Run works to encourage women to consider candidacy or otherwise get involved with the fight for equal representation. As of 2023, over 30,000 women have created free accounts on the platform, and the organization has garnered media attention from such outlets as The Daily Show with Trevor Noah, Popsugar, Marie Claire, Newsweek, Essence, Business Insider, People, the L.A. Times, and InStyle, even launching a line of politically themed Barbie dolls with the toy company Mattel. She Should Run is also an ideal field site on grounds apart from its reach and press coverage. Most broadly, the platform represents a "data outcropping" (Luker, 2008), a site rich with the phenomena in which the researcher is interested. It is an area of highly concentrated activity around digital woman candidate recruitment that enabled me to focus on women's experiences and explore technology's potential to improve recruitment. Moreover, She Should Run targets women in the pre-candidacy pipeline, expanding the field of candidate recruitment beyond women already sure they want to run. Finally, She Should Run is nonpartisan, challenging the party- and issue-based organizing models that predominate.[1]

I find that custom candidate recruitment technologies (CCRTs) have high potential for improving recruitment but struggle to realize that potential for several reasons. Bringing together previously discrete literatures, Chapter 1 discusses women's historical work toward political enfranchisement (collective action) and how digital spaces can reconfigure the ways people and organizations strive for a common goal (connective action)[2], as well as four technological affordances, or features, that hold particular promise for woman candidate recruitment. Chapter 2

[1] Ready to Run, a national network of campaign training programs out of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics, is also nonpartisan. However, Ready to Run is not primarily digital and targets women more advanced in the candidacy pipeline than does She Should Run. Vote Run Lead is another nonpartisan training program, but again targets women further along in the pipeline.
[2] In the context of CCRTs.

describes the project's methodological approach and further explains the selection of She Should Run, details the methods used (textual analysis, ethnographic participant observation, and in-depth interviews), and provides interviewees' demographic information. Chapter 3 explores the first of three pressing tensions brought to light by the project: how the organizational imperative to cast candidacy in a positive light and motivate women to run clashes with women's desires for programming that satisfactorily addresses the real-life obstacles they face. Representational gains notwithstanding, structural barriers like lack of finances and weak political networks remain intractable obstacles for many. Focusing on internal issues, e.g., developing programming to shore up women's confidence, seems to be primarily helpful for women already privileged enough to be less concerned with external barriers.

Chapter 4 delves into the second tension: how She Should Run and its users attempt to negotiate connective and collective action logics within a single digital space where different areas of the platform accord with different participation logics. CCRTs must reckon with why and how people get involved under the direction of an organization (collective action) in tension with why and how people participate of their own volition in ways that grow and sustain online networks (connective action). This is especially the case for CCRTs that want to facilitate hybrid organizationally enabled connective action beyond organization-driven behavior, e.g., to foster an online community set up by the organization within the platform but with the goal of organic user-driven participation (see Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Bimber, 2017). Relatedly, CCRTs hoping to mobilize *all* women must grapple with the reality that divergent racial, socioeconomic, or partisan identities tend to be more meaningful for women than shared gender identity. As the chapter will show, nonpartisanship is easier said than done. Chapter 5 focuses on the tension between She Should Run's imagined user archetype and the women who actually use the

platform. Despite She Should Run's targeting of women new to the consideration of candidacy, CCRTs are difficult to find for women who are not already politically involved enough to hear about them from others, encounter them on social media, or Google something like "women running for office." Until CCRTs appear on the radar of more women even earlier in the pre-candidacy pipeline and provide content that speaks to the needs of women outside traditional politician demographics (White, well-connected, and wealthy), even digital candidate recruitment remains skewed to advancing certain women while excluding others. Relatedly, CCRTs must strike a tonal balance between feeling accessible and treating underrepresentation and candidacy with the gravitas these topics deserve. Last but not least, the technological glitches that plague CCRTs in their nascency hinder engagement and turn some women away entirely. Fully delivering on CCRTs' promise will require that organizations make the technology user-friendly and easy to integrate into women's technology usage practices. Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation with a discussion of the project's theoretical and practical relevance, its limitations, and implications for future research.

1.2 The problem of underrepresentation

At every level of U.S. government, women hold just one-third of elected offices (Center for American Women & Politics, 2023). For women of color, at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, disparities are even more pronounced. In 2023, only 12 states have women governors—a record high—and all of them are White (Center for American Women & Politics, 2023). As discussed in the previous section, municipal and local governments were long thought to be more accessible to women, likely to sport better numbers than the state- and federal-level offices that make up most of the data on underrepresentation. However, research conclusively demonstrates that women are similarly underrepresented at the lowest levels of

government, again holding just one-third of elected offices (Center for American Women & Politics, 2023). Though women have made electoral gains in recent years, the proportion of women officeholders still falls far short of the 50 percent threshold that would more accurately reflect the national population, and women in office do not reflect the diversity of women constituents across race and socioeconomic status (Beckwith, 2021).

This inequity persists despite evidence that the underrepresentation of women can negatively impact voter outreach and mobilization even as more equitable representation can burnish political parties' reputations and help people feel more positively about politics (Hinojosa & Kittilson, 2020; Holman, 2014). Further, descriptive representation can increase the quality of political deliberation and help shape policy better aligned with the interests of marginalized groups, not to mention increase the political participation of those groups (Bratton et al., 2006; Brown, 2014; Hinojosa & Kittilson, 2020; Mansbridge, 1999; Reingold et al., 2020; Reingold & Smith, 2012). By contrast, lack of diversity gives rise to a material cultural incompetence that can hinder the ability of public-serving leaders and institutions to competently represent their constituents (Anderson, 2013). In addition, women may be better leaders in crisis (Zenger & Folkman, 2019, 2020) and bring unique perspectives that can facilitate more effective policy responses to difficult problems (Garikipati & Kambhampati, 2020).

Beyond any single political race or institutional outcome, increasing women's presence among the political elite is crucial to creating broader conditions conducive to women's political participation (Hinojosa & Kittilson, 2020). Social contexts wherein women and women of color are perceived as able to govern can help challenge the normative view of White men as best suited for running for office, winning seats, and wielding political power (Anderson, 2013). Without more women in office, limiting stereotypes of women as unsuited for leadership are

more likely to persist (Harris-Perry, 2011), as are biased, gendered criteria for evaluating candidates (Burrell, 2008; Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989; Smith et al., 2007). Ultimately, underrepresentation risks naturalizing women's exclusion from power, spreading the subtext that women's absence is acceptable or that women holding political power is unrealistic (Sanbonmatsu, 2015b).

Many scholars point to political ambition as the single most important factor in underrepresentation. According to this view, women are less politically ambitious than men, and this ambition gap rather than systemic inequities is responsible for the underrepresentation of women (Horowitz & Igielnik, 2020). On top of the expressive ambition represented by candidate emergence (the decision to declare candidacy), scholars stress the importance of the "nascent political ambition" gap that arises between girls and boys as a result of early political socialization (Fox & Lawless, 2005). Family, education and activities, information environment, self-perception, and encouragement all contribute to young men being more politically ambitious than young women (Lawless & Fox, 2013). Parents are less likely to socialize daughters to politics as a potential career. In the classes they take, the clubs they join, and the relationships they build, young women are also less likely to encounter political information, discussion, or involvement. Moreover, girls are less likely to consistently play competitive sports that develop the kind of strong competitive drives that can be channeled into politics (Lawless & Fox, 2013). As powerful agents of socialization, media play a role as well. Young men are more likely to consume media that expose them to political content (Lawless & Fox, 2013). Perhaps as a result of these disparities, young women are less likely to see themselves as qualified for office (Fox & Lawless, 2010).

Young men are also more likely to be encouraged by political, professional, and personal contacts to consider running for office (Lawless & Fox, 2013). In this context, political encouragement may be broadly conceptualized as an array of behaviors: providing support for political ambitions, boosting confidence in political self-efficacy, persuading someone to consider candidacy or keep going on the campaign trail, trying to stimulate the development of ambition or political consciousness, and so on. Young women have historically encountered political encouragement far more rarely, if at all (Lawless & Fox, 2013). Though there is limited evidence that circumstances are changing for the better (Dhima, 2020), women of color are more likely than White women to experience negative recruitment, with family, friends, and politicians sometimes serving as sources of *dis*couragement (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013). Understandably so—women of color in politics are more likely to face targeted abuse than their White counterparts, concerning friends and family who want to protect them from this depravity (Sobieraj, 2020; Thakur & Hankerson, 2022). Where men are generally encouraged to enter the political arena, women may be reminded of their existing gender-normed responsibilities (e.g., to family and home) and encouraged to keep out of a political fray perceived as better suited to men's toughness than women's nurturance (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013; Fox & Lawless, 2010). Recent research demonstrates that this gendered political socialization continues to shape girls' perceptions of politics as male-dominated, with girls *increasingly* viewing political leadership as a man's realm (Bos et al., 2021).

Interestingly, some scholars suggest that the same social and institutional equities that contribute to the political ambition gap cease to impact women once they become candidates and officeholders such that the ambition gap alone is primarily responsible for ongoing underrepresentation (Hayes & Lawless, 2016). Citing data that suggest women win at the same

rates as men when they run (Lawless, 2015) and an apparent lack of sexism in the press coverage sampled for analysis, this view posits that institutional barriers and resource disparities no longer constitute meaningful obstacles once ambition has been codified into a run (Hayes & Lawless, 2016). This argument is questionable. The rational choice paradigm historically submitted that ambition, as expressed in the decision to run, could be best understood as a response to advantageous political opportunity structures (Schlesinger, 1966). The operative disciplinary conceptualization of ambition thus invokes situational assessment as a premise of ambition formation. If a person's political ambition reflects the degree to which their surrounding circumstances strike them as conducive to their successful candidacy, societal inequities are inextricable from individual ambition formation. By this logic, the ambition gap itself constitutes evidence of larger inequities. Experiencing sexism and racism could lead even the most ambitious woman to the conclusion that running is not viable (e.g., Shames, 2014). Indeed, many well-qualified, politically ambitious women end up deciding not to run (Bernhard et al., 2021).

Proponents of the ambition-only view discount women's negative situational assessments as evidence of skewed perceptions or outdated assumptions rather than structural realities, maintaining that the inequities initially responsible for the gender gap in political ambition cease to materially impact women as candidates (Hayes & Lawless, 2016). Yet gender remains a central aspect of candidate self-presentation, campaign attacks, and voter decision-making (Holman & Kalmoe, 2021; McGregor et al., 2017). Moreover, research demonstrates that disparities across three areas have historically been the sources of gender-based inequity in political participation at the candidate level (Burns et al., 2001): resources (women have less money and time to devote to political pursuits), recruitment opportunities (women are less likely to be connected with political insiders or tapped for open positions), and psychological

orientations to politics (women are less likely to see politics as accessible and a realm in which they could be effective). Certainly, fewer resources and recruitment opportunities in tandem with lower political efficacy have negative consequences for political participation regardless of gender. More resources, more and better recruitment opportunities, and efficacy-oriented approaches to politics increase political participation for women and men alike. It is vital to note, however, that a lack of gender-based disparity in consequences (i.e., the fact that having more resources and opportunities affects women's and men's political participation in similar ways) is by no means an indication that inequity no longer exists. Rather, discrepancies in the *amount* and *extent* of resources, recruitment opportunities, and political efficacy paint a much truer picture of the ways in which gender constrains political participation (Burns et al., 2001).

Complex social and political structures present systemic barriers to women before they declare candidacy. Biases in media, political parties, and society exclude women or subject them to disproportionate levels of scrutiny and censure (Biroli, 2018; Dittmar, 2015b; Hawkesworth, 2003; Kuperberg, 2018). In countries around the world, regardless of number of women in office and other equality indices, sexist media coverage dampens the political ambitions of women such that the treatment of women politicians in the press makes other women not want to run, lest they one day face the same ugliness (Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2019). Most chilling, women in politics encounter increasing physical, sexual, psychological, and semiotic violence designed to undermine their right to inclusion in public life (Krook, 2020; Sobieraj, 2018, 2020). The threats can even come from within women's own parties (Hawkesworth, 2003; Krook, 2020; Lovenduski, 2005). Political parties have also acted as gatekeepers by throwing their support behind male primary candidates or failing to provide women candidates the official nominations needed to proceed beyond primaries into general elections (Krook, 2010; Pruysers & Blais,

2017; Tremblay, 2007). Internally, women considering candidacy weight more heavily than men the possibility of immense personal costs to their familial, social, and professional lives, as well as the financial costs of campaigning (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013). Socialized to be considerate and supportive of others where men are encouraged to be self-confident and ambitious (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013), women who would be strong candidates can find themselves constrained by family duties (Bernard et al., 2021). Breadwinning dampens women's political ambition more than men's, with mothers particularly affected (Bernhard et al., 2021). For many women, the potential benefits of running for office simply cannot outweigh the potential costs of candidacy (Shames, 2014). When the costs are that high, the rational decision is not to participate (Downs, 1957).

Encouragement alone cannot overcome these barriers despite the scholarly emphasis on it (Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2015; Cross & Young, 2013; Dittmar, 2015a; Fox & Lawless, 2004; Lawless & Fox, 2013). Being encouraged to run for office is certainly impactful for women (Bledsoe & Herring, 1990; Lawless & Fox, 2010; Moncrief et al., 2001). However, this encouragement is only effective in the context of personal relationship. Impersonal encouragement, even from the political elites whose encouragement can be particularly influential (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013), does not necessarily motivate women to run (Pruysers & Blais, 2018). In one practical demonstration of the ineffectiveness of encouragement alone, increasing the visibility of women in politics only encouraged girls to consider future political involvement through the mechanism of increased family discussion about politics (Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2006). With masculinity as the backdrop of the American political system (Schneider et al., 2016), the political ambition gap and the role of encouragement in the perpetuation of that gap are simply not separable from the gendered institutions within which

candidate recruitment efforts take place (Hawkesworth, 2003). Reducing the problem of underrepresentation to the idea that women are insufficiently ambitious is therefore less productive than interrogating the "gendered dynamics of candidate emergence," including the role of encouragement in that emergence (Piscopo & Kenny, 2020, p. 3).

After emergence, women candidates come up against entrenched perceptions of men as better suited to holding political office (Hawkesworth, 2003) and candidate evaluation criteria that reflect the White male dominance of the political realm (Dittmar, 2015b). Some scholars assert that candidates perceive gender bias that does not truly exist (Lawless & Fox, 2010), but more recent work finds that women candidates still face sexist discrimination in fundraising (James, 2019). Nor is nomination alone sufficient for moving democracies toward equal representation. Even in the presence of gender quotas, which can contribute to substantial representational gains, parties and constituents may still privilege men and experienced politicians (more likely to be men) and withhold resources from candidates (women) perceived as less likely to win (Janusz et al., 2022). Finally, though limited evidence has implied that elite support for women candidates may be increasing (Dhima, 2020), conventional measures of gender bias tend to dramatically *underreport* bias against female political leadership (Setzler, 2019). Gender bias may be even more of a barrier than the evidence suggests.

Regardless of where scholars fall on the spectrum between political ambition as the primary cause of underrepresentation and underrepresentation as rooted in socio-structural inequities, there is widespread agreement that improving candidate recruitment is essential to increasing women's representation. Scholars at the Center for American Women in Politics, a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, offer several points of intervention (Dittmar, 2015a; Sanbonmatsu, 2015a). For one, candidate recruitment organizations and

campaign trainings need to help women perceive electoral terrain as navigable rather than impassable. For another, deployment of targeted resources and strategic communication is key to building women's belief in the possibility of electoral success. Similarly, recruitment organizations must work to help women perceive running for and holding political office as worthwhile endeavors despite the significant costs of choosing this path for women in particular. Connecting individual perceptions to the broader societal picture, recruitment efforts should also seek to build women's perceptions that current gender dynamics do have the potential to change. Further, it is important that candidate recruitment organizations look to expand sites of opportunity for political engagement and pay strategic attention to how those opportunities vary by race, level of office, and context (Dittmar, 2015a).

In short, recruitment organizations are urged to offer encouragement in community alongside advocacy efforts that directly address the personal and structural challenges women face, incentivizing women to run in spite of those challenges (Dittmar, 2015a). The ever-evolving constellation of contemporary political technologies represents new possibilities for this work and political consciousness-raising more broadly (Nelson, 2018; Papacharissi, 2014). Theoretically, women can now explore and consider candidacy from the comfort of home without worrying about childcare, travel costs, negative feedback, and other obstacles that have previously posed limitations to women's political engagement (Bernhard et al., 2021; Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013; Van Duyn, 2018). Before delving into technology's potential to facilitate more equitable recruitment, I discuss how traditional recruitment has perpetuated inequities.

1.3 Underrepresentation and recruitment in historical context

Apart from blatant sexism and party favoritism, traditional approaches to candidate recruitment have privileged men over women because of their reliance on professional and

personal networks and fundraising ability. Due in part to men's historically greater access to high-power social positions and women's belated admittance into the political sphere, women are less likely to enjoy networks and financial resources conducive to candidate emergence, much less secure the attention and investment of established recruitment groups. While limiting for women in general, these hurdles are even more significant for women of color, as White people tend to be better integrated into partisan networks (Ocampo & Ray, 2020). When people of color do manage to overcome the myriad obstacles to candidate emergence, party elites still throw more support behind White candidates than non-White candidates (Ocampo & Ray, 2020). Disparities in network integration and support demonstrate how women's recruitment efforts have been hindered by the U.S.'s failure to follow other democracies, such as Germany, in drafting official legislation or voluntary policies targeted toward increasing representational equity—policies that have demonstrably improved women's representation and other forms of political participation (Hinojosa & Kittilson, 2020; Xydias, 2007). In the absence of governmental mandate, women's recruitment efforts have been decentralized and informal, with the result that these efforts can end up perpetuating inequality among women even as they seek to make women more equal with men (Kreitzer & Osborn, 2019).

Moreover, the ambition-first view of underrepresentation has spawned recruitment efforts operating from the supposition that ambition must precede involvement. This view sees ambition as something to be identified rather than cultivated. Besides delegitimizing women's experiences of institutional bias and circumscribing advocates' ability to address the structural barriers women face, ambition as the be-all-end-all of representation entails an advocacy logic in which recruitment organizations should focus their efforts on women with the highest levels of political ambition and the clearest visions for careers in public office. Many organizations require a

woman to have solidified issue positions and/or a specific political office in mind for which she is ready to or has already declare[d] candidacy. For example, out of more than 600 groups in the U.S. focused on recruiting women candidates, most are looking for a pro-choice Democrat or a pro-life Republican (Kreitzer & Osborn, 2019). Women without strong views on abortion or with political interests elsewhere are less appealing to traditional recruitment organizations and left out of advocacy spaces where they could potentially make valuable contributions. These organizations can further require that applicants demonstrate personal network strength and fundraising ability to be considered for support (e.g., Emily's List). When only women with definitive issue stances, crystallized ambition, and proof of performance are worth introducing to candidacy, women of color and working-class women can be excluded. Best served are wealthy White women, who are historically more likely to have the education, connections, and resources necessary to develop political ambition and do something about it.

Traditional recruitment logics also forsake women who could potentially be interested in politics or who care about underrepresentation but do not wish to run themselves. Situating candidacy as the only valuable action to be taken around underrepresentation suppresses other meaningful forms of political participation and disregards women who may care deeply about their communities but lack political ambition narrowly defined. Likewise, the number of women who have identified the office they want, are ready to run, and have already built networks and secured funding is far smaller than the number of women who see issues in their lives and communities that their current representatives are not addressing to their satisfaction, are curious about running for office, or care about the issue of underrepresentation. Traditional recruitment's positioning of political ambition as precedent for political engagement neglects women who could be competitive candidates but simply have not considered it yet.

Further, candidate recruitment has tended to focus on campaign training without providing financial support (Kreitzer & Osborn, 2019). In the same way that defining underrepresentation around political ambition privileges women who are well-connected and well-resourced, training women to run campaigns but not providing funding means that many organizations are better equipped to serve wealthy women, who are more likely to be White. To this day, few campaign trainings or organizations exist that are aimed specifically at supporting women candidates of color (Kreitzer & Osborn, 2019; Sanbonmatsu, 2015a). It is similarly difficult to meet the needs of prospective candidates at disparate spots on the socioeconomic spectrum. Most of the working women politicians of color who seem to stand out as evidence of women's recruitment organizations' success here, are not, in fact, exceptions. House Representatives Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Ilhan Omar (D-MN), and Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) ran successful campaigns with support from Justice Democrats, a partisan operation focused on recruiting working-class candidates of all genders. (One notable exception is Lauren Underwood [D-IL], who was trained and supported by women-oriented Vote Run Lead.)

The shortcomings of traditional recruitment make sense in historical context; identifying as a woman has been a definitive but not sufficient condition of women's political activism. Rather, other identities, such as racial identity and social class, tend to intersect with gender to create common experiences (and serve as binding agents) for women who hold the same combination of identities (Crenshaw, 1989, 2017).[3] Leaders like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton strategically exploited racial biases and abandoned women of color in their pursuit of suffrage for White women (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013). Yes, the Nineteenth Amendment made electoral politics more accessible to women and spurred women's (uneven) integration into

[3] Partisanship and single-issue advocacy have also served as primary sources of solidarity for women's groups and candidate recruitment organizations (McCammon & Banaszak, 2018).

the political establishment (McCammon & Banaszak, 2018; Welch, 2018), but this watershed legislation fell far short of realizing equitable enfranchisement for all women. Soon after the Amendment passed, newly enfranchised White women withdrew their support from Progressives who had joined the fight for woman suffrage in order to back Republicans committed to upholding racial segregation (Corder & Wolbrecht, 2018). Similarly, suffrage for working women was something of a separate endeavor, and men used class tensions to weaken women's political muscle (DuBois, 2012). The first and second waves of feminism were again rooted in Whiteness (Daniels, 2015). Even third-wave feminism, with its categorical commitment to diversity, has been criticized for excluding the voices and lived experiences of women of color (Ortega, 2006). Overall, women's activism in the U.S. has historically looked like "women doing politics as women but not united by womanhood" (McConnaughy, 2019).

Contemporary politics continue in this vein. While other marginalized groups tend to vote in a way that reflects the respective interests of their groups, womanhood is not a reliable predictor of women's political attitudes (Horowitz & Igielnik, 2020). Just one example: Exit polls from Edison Research revealed that 55 percent of White women voted for Donald Trump in the 2020 U.S. presidential election (compared to 9 percent of Black women) even as the hostile sexism characterizing his base drove other women away (Kohler, 2021). In most women, the group consciousness that motivates members of other marginalized groups is weak and difficult to mobilize (Rinehart, 2013). The vast majority of women's recruitment organizations have thus operated from a logic of action that foregrounds at least one other identity or issue beyond gender (Kreitzer & Osborn, 2019). Only recently have organizations departed from this mold, and they remain rare. I am aware of three major players. Ready to Run, launched in 2003, She Should Run, launched in 2011, and Vote Run Lead, launched in 2014, attempt to raise women's

group consciousness and motivate more women to run for office in the absence of the party, race, or class solidarities that have long undergirded women's activism. These organizations target different audiences, however, with She Should Run billing itself as a "lead-finding organization" focused on expanding the pool of women beginning to consider candidacy. Ready to Run and Vote Run Lead categorize themselves as "campaign training organizations" targeting women who already know they want to run or are actively running.[4]

Novel political technologies that exist apart from parties or issues seem, at first brush, to make an organizational logic that focuses on recruiting all women more viable. Yet CCRTs are still in their early years. Time will tell whether technology can help bind and organize women across party lines despite what history would suggest. As my data will show, this approach involves a degree of cognitive dissonance. It asks women to buy into the all-women organizing logic enough to participate even as any current or future campaign—nonpartisan offices included—would require that women develop individualized, often party-indicative issue stances, public identities, and political networks. The following section discusses four aspects of CCRTs that have the *potential* to reshape woman candidate recruitment, challenging the old logic that ambition must precede engagement, expanding the pool of potential candidates, and ameliorating some of the shortcomings of traditional recruitment. Chapters 3-5 unpack how this potential has played out for She Should Run.

1.4 Technological potentials for woman candidate recruitment

I define custom candidate recruitment technologies, or CCRTs, as digital tools developed for the express purpose of moving more women toward political leadership. CCRTs range from

[4] The fact that there are only three nonpartisan organizations in this space is perhaps indicative of the difficulty of organizing women solely around womanhood and convincing sponsors that doing so is an effective operating model.

campaign training resources and virtual leadership cohorts to innovative mechanisms for inviting women to run for office and private communities where users can find support and encouragement. Unlike general-utility social networking applications (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) sometimes used by candidate recruitment organizations, CCRTs involve a comprehensive suite of features and tools, and, in the case of She Should Run, a proprietary platform designed to tackle the problem of women's underrepresentation. She Should Run began as a project launched by Erin Loos Cutraro within Women's Campaign Fund, the first national women's PAC (Garland, 2020). In 2011, She Should Run became its own 501(c)3 nonprofit, "dedicated to dramatically increasing the number of women in public leadership by eliminating and overcoming barriers to success" (She Should Run, 2012). [5] "Designed to increase the awareness of the lack of women's participation in public life by providing educational tools, vital contacts, and access to groundbreaking research" without identifying with a political party or particular stances on political issues, the She Should Run platform broke new ground in

[5] She Should Run's 2011 tax return, the first year for which financial data are available, mentions one chair, one treasurer, one secretary, eight directors, one chief operating officer, zero employees, and Siobhan Bennett as president and CEO. Referred to today as She Should Run's Founder and CEO, Cutraro does not appear on She Should Run's tax returns until 2015, as "Erin Cutraro, Co-Founder and CEO." At the time of writing in April 2023, She Should Run fields a small team of 13 women, including Cutraro as CEO and Founder, Lissette Sanchez as Chief Operating and Impact Officer, Melissa Morris Ivone as Director of Digital Experience, Kaitlyn Newman as Director of Development, Julie Polumbo as Director of Operations and Human Resources, Erica Teti-Zilinskas as Director of Communication, Amanda DiIulis as Senior Program Manager, Sara Mwamlima as Development Manager, Shannon Sullivan as Digital Communications Manager, Sophia O'Neal as Program Associate, Katharine Kemp as Development Intern, Sharon Florez as Communications Intern, and Miriam Friedman as Program Intern. There has been significant staff turnover over the course of this dissertation. The organization is governed by an 11-person Board of Directors composed of "exceptional leaders from the business, political, non-profit, and public sectors, who bring essential expertise and skills to advancing She Should Run's mission," according to the website. As of April 2023, the Board includes Maggie Kavalaris, Elsa Limbach, Katia Beauchamp, Rachel Chamberlain, Cynthia Green Colin, Linda Frankenbach, Francisco Martin-Rayo, Rachel Murray, Jess Weiner, Alicin Williamson, and Wendy Mackenzie. (In 2011, Kavalaris was listed as Chair, Limbach as Secretary, and Mackenzie as a Director.) "Operating revenue is provided by many generous foundations, corporations, and individuals" according to the website. The 2022 impact report "highlights" whisky brand Johnnie Walker, skincare company Youth to the People, and philanthropic organization Crimsonbridge Foundation as corporate partners but notes this list is "not exhaustive." In 2020, the last year for which financial data are available, end-of-year net assets were $1,087,161, with contributions and grants totaling $1,228,610, up from $970,509 in 2019 (She Should Run, 2021). In its inaugural year, 2011, She Should Run reported net assets of $81,713 with contributions and grants totaling $543,874 (She Should Run, 2012).

candidate recruitment technologies (She Should Run, 2012). Nonpartisan organization Vote Run Lead followed suit in 2014, launching weekly webinars as part of political training programs for women that have expanded into in-person tours and a "virtual campaign team" (voterunlead.org). The COVID pandemic further enhanced She Should Run's focus on its digital offerings. The organization ceased in-person programming and shifted its "entire business model paradigm" online (She Should Run, 2021). [6] Today, more than 40,000 women have "explored the possibility of public office" through She Should Run (sheshouldrun.org). Vote Run Lead has also had thousands of women sign up for its mailing list or take advantage of its online content (it began as a political training program of The White House Project that trained more than 15,000 women from 2005-2012, according to voterunlead.org).

Beyond Vote Run Lead and She Should Run, there are approximately 30 other possible players in the digital women recruiting space. While focused on political engagement among the electorate rather than launching women into the candidacy pipeline, Supermajority is a major platform using technology (including text banking, webinars, digital trainings, online community, and more) to build a progressive women's voting bloc among its 4 million members (supermajority.com). Founded in 2017, Supermajority is newer than She Should Run but boasts far greater numbers, suggesting perhaps that issue alignment is key (see Chapter 4), and that Supermajority's technology is superior (see Chapters 4 and 5). Winning For Women, registered in 2019, is a "grassroots organization" targeting right-of-center women for voting and candidacy (winningforwomen.com). The extent of its online offerings is unclear, but 40,000 people follow the organization on Facebook, the same as She Should Run. Re:POWER is a "pro-Black

[6] In another major change, the She Should Run Community began as a Facebook group but shifted to the She Should Run platform in May 2020 to integrate the Community with She Should Run's other resources, adding 6,500 new members after that transition (She Should Run, 2021).

organization centering women of color and trans and gender expansive people of color" offering online organizing and leadership trainings (7394 people trained since 2019, according to repower.org). These are just a few examples, but a driving theme among organizations in this space is partisan identities or issue stances held in common, suggesting that She Should Run has a unique approach to CCRTs but perhaps faces greater constraints as a result.

In the various forms they take, CCRTs represent potential means of reconfiguring the relationship between early-stage recruitment efforts and the gendered institutions within which recruitment has traditionally taken place. While most candidates will still need to draw on the resources of their political parties and secure mainstream media coverage, the prerequisites for digital engagement could be less prohibitive than for traditional recruitment. CCRTs like the She Should Run platform also expand the spectrum of meaningful actions that can be taken around underrepresentation, welcoming women regardless of their level of political ambition or personal interest in candidacy. Admittedly, these tools introduce inequities in that women need internet and need to be technologically literate enough to find and use the tools. Beyond that, though, women do not have to demonstrate networking prowess or fundraising promise. Nor must they enjoy the money, time, and offline social support required to attend in-person campaign trainings, nor be in a place to make major decisions within the few hours or days of an in-person training. Women can take their time. They can explore what appeals to them. They can consider candidacy now, 10 years from now, or never.

1.4.1 Hybrid organizationally enabled connective action in the context of CCRTs

Put simply, collective action refers to multiple people working together to achieve a common goal. Disadvantaged groups have often turned to collective action as a way to improve their social positions, and collective action can be an effective means of tackling social

inequality (Gamson, 1992; Klandermans, 1997; Wright & Lubensky, 2007). However, as participating in collective action incurs personal cost, people prefer letting others do the work if they believe the desired action can occur without their involvement. For hundreds of years, scholars have wrestled with the fact that free riding and individual interests can sabotage joint action and override group interests (Hume, 1739). Original collective action theory held that the organization of public rewards for participants and public disincentives for non-participants was necessary to motivate people to participate (Olson, 1965). As initially conceived, collective action thus revolved around 1) the presence of formal organization and 2) the individual decision to participate no matter the cost of participation (Olson, 1965).

Contemporary collective action phenomena do not necessarily hinge upon these tenets. Movements like Occupy Wall Street (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013a), #hijackNYPD (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015), Black Lives Matter, #YesAllWomen, #MeToo (Jackson et al., 2020), and the Arab Spring (Steinert-Threlkeld, 2017) embody Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) concept of connective action. These movements gained enormous momentum without central loci of organization or support from advocacy groups with the formal resources and networks long thought necessary for large-scale collective action. Instead, regular people used social networking sites to structure the communication crucial to organized action. People publicized the cause, invited others to join, used online tools to organize in offline spaces, and eventually made history through the communication capabilities of platforms like Facebook and Twitter. From a participation cost perspective, actions like posting on Facebook or Twitter incur minimal financial and time costs. As most users curate their social media to surround themselves with others who hold similar views (Dubois & Blank, 2018; McPherson et al., 2001), the potential social cost of political participation can also be mitigated by the formation of like-minded

communities that encourage online political engagement (Hasell & Weeks, 2016). Some of these movements, like Occupy and the Arab Spring, were arguably not long-term successes (Ehrenberg, 2017; Khan et al., 2020), and political systems can prevent lasting change regardless of connective actors' technological capabilities (Ehrenberg, 2017). So, too, may a central organizing force be necessary to longevity. What is clear is that overall, technology has lowered the personal cost of certain forms of involvement in collective action, but the political context and organizational structuration within which collective action takes place often play a major role in its ultimate success.

While custom candidate recruitment technologies differ from the protest-based movements on which much of the connective action literature has focused, CCRTs share defining characteristics with these movements such that connective action logics may be applied to CCRTs as well. CCRTs involve 1) diverse individuals (women from different backgrounds) 2) addressing a widespread social problem (women's underrepresentation), 3) coordinating action through digital media (getting women to learn more about running for office, participating in online trainings and communities, reaching out to other women, etc.), and 4) relying heavily on inclusive discourses (e.g., She Should Run's "if you care, you're qualified") 5) to motivate people to particular political ends, in this case, running for office oneself or encouraging other women to run (see Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Beyond social media-based movements, nonprofit organizations are adapting to logics of connective action wherein individual engagement (digital engagement in particular) is driven by "empowered, personal choices" rather than "ideology or organizational affiliation" (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2012, p. 68). The She Should Run platform is an example of a nonprofit organization embracing digitally networked

participation to expand sites of citizen engagement in politics and create space for personally and politically meaningful action (Theocharis & Van Deth, 2018).

To be sure, technology's impacts on political communication contribute to a hyper-connected digital environment that bears little resemblance to the analog world in which collective action theory came to be. Scholars have continued to think about collective action cognizant that today's media landscape challenges historical dichotomies between public and private, formal and informal, and collective and individual (Bimber et al., 2012; Bimber et al., 2005). Somewhere between collective and connective action, hybrid organizationally enabled connective action tries to integrate the strengths of both (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013a). MoveOn is a notable example of this type of hybrid organization, combining more traditional collective action arms (a nonprofit-advocacy organizational core and an influential political action committee) with connective action logics, from comprehensive online operations and free membership to individualistic, user-centric involvement rationales and wide-ranging definitions of participation enabled by the multidirectional flow of action frames[7] between advocacy organizations and media users (Bimber et al., 2012; Copeland et al., 2016; Karpf, 2012). In the case of CCRTs, this can look like advocacy organizations exerting control over much of their communications, even structuring their resources within "sophisticated custom coordinating platforms" (such as She Should Run), but at the same time seeking to engage people within those platforms through the connective action tenets of symbolic inclusiveness (promoting content "in the form of easily personalized ideas") and technological openness, using digital connections to "share these inclusive themes" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 37). Governed by a traditional

[7] For the purposes of this dissertation, I define action frames as the various rhetorical framings of a) political issues and b) rationales for involvement in these issues that are put forward by organizations and/or users, communicated by organizations to users and by users to organizations (Copeland et al., 2016).

vertical organizational chart and board of directors but oriented around inclusive messaging and its user-centric Community, She Should Run falls within this category of hybrid organization-enabled connective action.

Using technology to challenge the old recruitment logic that ambition must be identified rather than cultivated, CCRTs have the theoretical potential to make institutional barriers a bit less prohibitive, attenuate the historical lack of inclusiveness around women's politicking, and provide the encouraging community essential to recruiting women candidates. The autonomy and alternative resources afforded by CCRTs may also expand why and how women engage with the cause of underrepresentation. Of course, as mentioned earlier, CCRTs can only be used by women who can find them. Chapter 5 looks at who those women tend to be and how the demographics of the women who find CCRTs (not to mention find them useful) complicate CCRTs' potential to increase inclusiveness. Even so, the technology itself could help move the needle toward more equitable recruitment. Just as specific technological features have played an integral role in recent developments in campaign communications, digital citizenship, political messaging, networked politics, political advocacy, and activism (Baldwin-Philippi, 2015; Karpf, 2012, 2018; Kreiss, 2012, 2016b; Kreiss et al., 2018; Kreiss & McGregor, 2018), certain affordances of CCRTs are especially important.

1.4.2 Imagined affordance

The concept of affordances emerged to describe what an environment "provides," "furnishes," or "offers" to creatures in that environment, emphasizing the relationship between humans and the spaces they inhabit (Gibson, 1979, p. 56). A review of 222 papers in communication and media submits that technological affordances may be defined as "perceived actual or imagined properties of social media, emerging through the relation of technological,

social, and contextual [factors] that enable and constrain specific uses of the platforms" (Ronzhyn et al., 2022 p. 17). Political communication scholars have particularly applied the concept to users' relationships with technologies and technological features, i.e., "what various platforms are actually capable of doing and [user] perceptions of what they enable, along with the actual practices that emerge as people interact with platforms" (Kreiss et al., 2018, p. 19). The theoretical lens of imagined affordance emphasizes that affordances "emerge between" users' perceptions, technological functionality, and designers' intentions (Nagy & Neff, 2015, p. 1). As the diversity of women's experiences will show, users' perceptions play a big role in determining whether and how a technological environment's action potentials are recognized (Boschker et al., 2002; Gibson, 1986; Hogan, 2009). Put differently, user expectations "become part of the users' perceptions of what actions are available to them" (Nagy & Neff, 2015, p. 5).[8] In hybrid spaces that mix collective and connective action logics, users' experiences of the technology are "no longer solely a function of the structure and strategy of the organization but also a function of their own" perceptions of the technology and choices about how to engage (Bimber et al., 2012, p. 72). Here, I speak to four affordances that hold theoretical promise even as they are revealed as terrains of struggle in the analysis to come.

Safe space. For political action to happen, marginalized groups need safe, alternative spaces to communicate and organize away from mainstream channels (Herbst, 1994; Van Duyn, 2018). Yet biased treatment, harassment, hostility, and threats of violence push back against women's loudening voice with the goal of weakening women as political actors and excluding

[8] Chapter 5 examines the affordances built into the She Should Run platform and the disconnects between She Should Run's imagined user (the prototypical user imagined by designers and organizers) and intended uses on the one hand and actual users and their expectations on the other (Fiore-Gartland & Neff, 2015), exploring how organizational goals and assumptions may have contributed to an imagined user that differs in important ways from many actual users, limiting the platform's utility.

them from public life (Dolan, 2018; Krook, 2020; Sobieraj, 2020). Online, gender-based harassment has become so endemic that experts see it as a growing threat to democratic society at large (Sobieraj, 2020). To deliver protection from harassment and hostility, digital safe spaces require "context-specific relational work" wherein organizations and users co-construct and maintain "material and symbolic boundaries" that keep the space safe (Clark-Parsons, 2018, p. 2125). CCRTs offer hubs of resources, engagement opportunities, and support designed to be safe from the hostility awaiting women who dare mix internet use and politics elsewhere. However, it is not enough that the space is designed to be safe. Women must also feel safe within it. When people feel safe, they are more likely to contribute their personal perspectives and energies to political movements (Herbst, 1994; Van Duyn, 2018) in ways that help maintain the boundaries of the safe space for others. These contributions are key to safe space beyond the mere absence of harassment. When people do not feel safe, they stay quiet and watch others participating in politics rather than participate themselves—or end up leaving political spaces altogether.

Online but away from general-purpose social media, CCRTs can be an avenue for women who feel safe there to explore the problem of underrepresentation and the possibility of candidacy without needing to worry about negative social repercussions. When women feel safe enough to share their own stories, CCRTs can help more women perceive running for office as doable and worth it (Dittmar, 2015a). Different CCRTs presumably have different means of maintaining safety; She Should Run's Community Guidelines explicitly bill the platform as "a safe, open environment" that is "welcoming of all women" because of its nonpartisan ethos. Women who join the Community are asked to "honor confidentiality" such that "what is said here, stays here." As interviews will show, however, the nonpartisan guidelines can have a

stifling rather than a safety effect, and women are aware that there is no mechanism to prevent other users from using their involvement against them or sharing their private platform communications more broadly. Nor do many women feel safe in a space where their only commonality with other users is being a woman with some degree of interest in running for office.

Accessibility. On one hand, inequities surrounding campaign trainings and public office likely affect *awareness* of CCRTs to begin with. An equal-opportunity playing field only helps those who know the field is there. Past this, however, CCRTs are freely available online to any woman with an internet connection, a massive shift from previous eras when women needed a certain level of education, a certain degree of economic security, a certain personal network, a certain partisan affiliation, or a certain racial identity to seriously consider candidacy and garner support. As discussed earlier, recruitment organizations that primarily operate face-to-face risk excluding women who are unable to justify the expense, travel to trainings, find childcare, or take time off work. Considering these costs, only women certain they want to run or already running are in a place to take advantage of traditional recruitment organizations' trainings and resources. Again, these women skew wealthy, educated, well-connected, and White. The far greater numbers of women early in or adjacent to the pre-candidacy pipeline—women perhaps considering a run in the future, wanting to learn more about politics, or looking to support equal representation efforts in another capacity—are excluded. Besides easier access, the virtuality of CCRTs means that expanding content to meet the needs of women from a variety of backgrounds at different stages of political interest and participation is relatively low-cost, which could help spur organizations to offer resources designed specifically for women holding marginalized social identities on the same platform as content for general audiences. Examining

how the affordance of accessibility is and is not realized is central to understanding CCRTs as contemporary loci of women's mobilization toward more equal representation.

Community. The group consciousness that spurs citizens holding the same partisan, racial or class identity to collective action around political issues affecting their in-group is less salient when it comes to women and gender-related issues (Cross & Young, 2013; Evans, 2000; Henderson-King & Stewart, 1994; Huddy et al., 2015; Miller et al., 1981). Creating a nonpartisan, all-inclusive women's recruitment initiative represents a departure from most historical and current forms of women's activism, where women usually hold certain issue stances and/or social identities in common (Liss et al., 2004). CCRTs' theoretical potential to bring women together across political boundary lines is sometimes realized in practice (see Chapters 4 and 5). One reason could be that CCRTs offer community-building features that speak directly to the outsized role played by encouraging environments in women's individual decisions to consider candidacy (Burns et al., 2001; Verba et al., 2003). In setting apart publicly accessible but protected alternative spaces with well-maintained boundaries (Foucault, 1984; Ljungberg, 2020), CCRTs may offer possibilities for narrative experience sharing, mutual learning, and political efficacy development in an always-available hub of encouragement from peers as well as leaders and public figures. If so, the community aspect of CCRTs could be crucial for cultivating political ambition and fomenting women's confidence in their electoral abilities and the tractability of current gender dynamics (Dittmar, 2015a). This could be especially true for women without strong partisan identities and women who are considering running for nonpartisan positions.

Multiway communication. With the exception of citizen activism, protests, and the like, much of political communication was historically treated as a unidirectional process (Katz,

1957). Political elites and journalists communicated political information to the masses, and the masses communicated back every so often at the ballot box. At the other end of the spectrum, social media and similar platforms support multiway communication in ways mass media cannot. She Should Run exists somewhere in the middle, communicating one-way through their Incubator programming and webinars without Q and As, but allowing for multiway communication in the Incubator-adjacent Community and webinars with Q and As and/or chat functionality. Giving women opportunities to communicate with each other, the organization, and current politicians departs from the traditional power dynamic of political communication and can help women become more active agents in their own political development (see Chapter 3). The protected-yet-accessible polyvocality facilitated by CCRTs may help shape how women think about politics in relation to themselves and what they consider to be meaningful political participation.

Multiway communication is also vital to evolving a more inclusive women's movement and achieving representation that reflects the public at the intersections of race and class, not just gender. Sharing knowledge grounded in experience among women and the organizations trying to mobilize them is important for successful person-oriented activism with the goal of eventual institutional change (Nelson, 2018). Society has, of course, long valued White male knowledge and experience the most. The result is an ongoing elision of voices with valuable insight into other ways of being. Certainly, campaign trainings geared toward women of color exist and do good work (Sanbonmatsu, 2015a). At the same time, dividing women along racial and economic lines from the outset of the candidate emergence process perpetuates the siloing of diverse knowledges and experiences that has historically weakened the women's movement. CCRTs could theoretically help women belonging to privileged social groups connect with and learn

from women holding marginalized identities. For example, identity contingencies associated with being working-class or a woman of color can make political activities like fundraising more difficult (see Chapter 3). Women who do not resemble sitting officeholders or fulfill normative political stereotypes may have worse access to networks and resources, and potential donors may respond to them differently (Sanbonmatsu, 2015b, 2015a). Narrative sharing across identity boundaries could be a precursor to increasing women's perceptions of gender identity as a source of solidarity.

In sum, women's political underrepresentation in the U.S. has been a problem for centuries, and a new category of technologies I refer to as custom candidate recruitment technologies has the potential to address this problem in unique ways. However, as future chapters will show, women's perceptions of CCRTs—and the quality of the technological infrastructure itself—play an integral role in whether and how the affordances theoretically provided by CCRTs are helpful to users (Nagy & Neff, 2015). Placing CCRTs on the spectrum of collective and connective action allows the project to consider how, in the case of She Should Run, these tools can involve multiple action logics that impact platform utility. Chapter 2 describes the methods used to examine this previously unstudied area of political technology and argues for the importance of She Should Run as an extended case study to guide future research. Chapters 3-5 explore this dissertation's motivating questions: 1) How is running for office discussed, engaged, and experienced in the context of CCRTs and the women who use them? 2) What can CCRTs reveal about technological action potentials around woman candidate recruitment? 3) Can CCRTs help make candidate recruitment more equitable?

Chapter 2 Toward Academic Study of CCRTs: Methods and Approach

Locating the alternative spaces wherein marginalized groups express themselves politically and engage with politics is essential to learning more about those groups (Herbst, 1994). One of the best ways to enter these alternative spaces is through case studies, which can enable scholars to shed light on lesser-known communities and the communication substructures that support them (Herbst, 1994; Van Duyn, 2018). In the same vein, deploying multiple methodologies can illuminate the inner workings of a semi-closed community in ways that large-scale quantitative analyses cannot (Lareau, 2021; Luker, 2008). Recognizing exposure as "the core precondition of good qualitative data" (Small & Calarco, 2022, p. 20), I used textual analysis to examine the public and private areas of the platform, including the five courses comprising the Incubator; conducted ethnographic participant observation of live virtual events held by She Should Run during the data collection period (February to November 2022); and conducted 50 in-depth interviews with users and volunteers. As women's "intensely personal experiences" with politics and CCRTs are nonetheless "embedded in a certain social and political framework" (Luker, 2008, p. 33), analyses combine grounded theory's micro-level focus on meaning-making and interpersonal/technological interactions (Glaser & Strauss, 2009) with the more macro interrogative lens of extended case methodology (Burawoy, 1998), making it possible to examine the data in terms of women's individual meaning-making and the surrounding political and technological context.

All three of the methods used involve the researcher as an instrument of data collection. Reflexivity was thus an important part of the iterative data collection and analysis process

(Knapik, 2006; Kreiss et al., 2020; Pezalla et al., 2012; Xu & Storr, 2015). I primarily used memos to question my own assumptions and perspectives as well as how certain aspects of my identity (White, female, chatty Midwesterner, etc.) may have come into play, for example, in helping me to earn interviewees' confidence and gain entree into this space (Cramer, 2015; Lareau, 2021). Considering strategies for managing potential user interaction and knowing I would need an account to access the private areas of She Should Run and attend events, I created a profile with my real photo and real information. I used this profile as one channel for recruiting women for interviews and was authentic about my reason for being in the Community. This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Michigan.

2.1 Textual analysis

Textual analysis included all webpages and materials within the public and membership-only areas of the She Should Run platform. "Public areas" refers to all materials of the platform viewable by any visitor regardless of account status, including explanatory and introductory pages, organizational status reports, quizzes purporting to tell women which role they play in the equal representation movement or which office they should pursue, and the Starter Kit (a set of resources designed to help women navigate "initial questions and concerns" around running for office), among others. "Membership-only areas" refers to the resources only available to users with a She Should Run account. Accessed from the global newsfeed of the She Should Run Community, these primarily include the Incubator (a set of five courses for women considering running for office), the extended Public Office Profile Suite (a set of resources containing information about eight different local and state offices), and posts in the Community. Textual analysis of all platform materials made it possible to attend to differences between external and internal areas of the platform and provided a detailed picture of the universe of content on the

platform with which users can interact. While a quantitative content analysis of materials from many CCRTs could be productive for tracking patterns across CCRTs' approaches to discussing underrepresentation and mobilizing women, this initial academic foray into CCRTs focused on one site to enable careful attention to the nuances of institutional communication and situate women's experiences with the platform, providing a more informed foundation for future research on a broader scale.

As institutional texts reveal the values and goals of the institution producing them (Baldwin-Philippi, 2015), these texts provide essential scaffolding for understanding women's experiences with the platform in rich context and probing tensions between organizational approaches and user expectations. I examined She Should Run's organizational brand and approach to the problem of underrepresentation, specifically its communicative practices around the barriers that can hinder women as well as how the organization seeks to motivate women. I considered the target user base and assumptions about users embedded in how She Should Run talks about underrepresentation and running for office and the resources the organization offers. I also explored platform governance, including employee regulation of user activity, user behavior guidelines—explicit actions encouraged by organizational texts and how specific audiences are addressed in relation to those requests—and the materiality of the platform as it guides users toward or requires certain actions. Screenshots were used to document every page of the platform, technical errors that impeded engagement with the platform, and influential aspects of certain features. Memos accompanied this initial data collection. I coded screenshots around emergent themes using MAXQDA's visual and textual coding tools and then generated thematic memos. After conducting in-depth interviews, I revisited the textual analysis data to refine themes and produce a further set of analytic memos.

2.2 Ethnographic participant observation

Two difficulties of centering a semi-closed community in qualitative research are ensuring 1) that the intrusion of the researcher into the community disrupts its dynamics as little as possible and does not damage members' perception of their community as a safe online space, and 2) that community members' expression, interactions, and participation remain as authentic as possible (Mendelson, 2007). Attending the live virtual events that occurred during the data collection period enabled me to unobtrusively observe participants' conversations and employee/facilitator communication. I attended seven events, including one Reddit-style AMA, three webinars, and three "courses" with participants learning together virtually over multiple sessions. During these events, my goal was to "describe and interpret the observable relationships between social practices and systems of meaning based upon firsthand experience and exploration" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, p. 134). I registered for each event with my personal She Should Run account and documented the event with screenshots and copious notes, focusing on participant interactions with each other, participant interactions with facilitators, facilitator communication, and when and how She Should Run team members made their presence felt or remained in the background.[9] These field notes provided the basis for analytic memos following each event. I uploaded all field notes and memos to MAXQDA for coding and analysis.

Conducting participant observation during these events was a productive choice, not least because these were the only opportunities to observe live interaction on the platform. Some interviewees were recruited from among event participants, and interviews revealed that these events were often impactful for women. Data from the events supplied important context for

[9] In alignment with organizational practice, I refer to She Should Run's staff here as team members rather than employees.

interviewees' experiences as well as insights into organizational communication choices and their implications. Moreover, She Should Run recently adapted the two live courses into self-paced learning modules within the Community and is promoting them heavily, hinting at the weight She Should Run places on these offerings and making it likely that more women will be exposed to this content, albeit minus the component of interaction with other users. In a nutshell, participant observation during live events enabled the project to gain insight into organizational communication practices and women's interactions with the platform in real time, providing a different vantage point than data gleaned from textual analysis of polished materials or considered responses to interview questions.

I supplemented textual analysis and ethnographic participant observation with an analytical lens inspired by the walkthrough method, "slowing down the mundane actions and interactions that form part of normal [platform] use in order to make them salient and therefore available for critical analysis" (Light et al., 2018, p. 882). Engaging with the She Should Run platform as a user might enabled examination of the technological structures and embedded assumptions of the platform (about who users are, what they use the platform for, etc.) and how those structures help guide user behavior and shape women's experiences of the platform (Light et al., 2018, p. 882). I asked how the design of the platform seemed to influence users toward certain actions and types of engagement (Zulli & Zulli, 2022) and how She Should Run seemed to expect users to "integrate the [platform] into their technology usage practice" (Light et al., 2018, p. 889). This lens worked well with the imagined affordance framework (Nagy & Neff, 2015) as it examined affordances "at multiple levels of scale" (Light et al., 2018, p. 886), from dropdown menus to desktop versus mobile functionality, and took into account how user perceptions of the platform impacted technological practices even as the platform's material

features “literally structure[d] what [could] be done with them” (Kreiss, Lawrence, & McGregor, 2018, p. 19).

I hoped to interview She Should Run team members for this dissertation, but it became clear over the months in which I attempted to contact them that this avenue of investigation would remain closed. Finally accepting this dead end as an inevitable risk of field research in an organizational context, I considered interviewing She Should Run’s Board of Directors instead. However, realizing that no members of the Board were involved in She Should Run’s day-to-day operations and none of them worked in technology- or politics-specific fields, I determined them to be unsuitable substitute participants considering my focus on the platform and women’s usage thereof. A revision of the project was proposed and approved wherein I narrowed the scope of interviews to She Should Run users only. As a result, the project cannot speak to She Should Run’s approach to content creation or technological development beyond what is revealed through textual analysis and ethnographic participant observation. In lieu of interviews with the organization, these methods were used to examine organizational communication and illuminate how She Should Run addresses underrepresentation and running for office and how the organization uses technology to try to motivate more women to run.

2.3 In-depth interviews

I recruited most participants by cold-emailing members of the She Should Run Community using the platform’s Member Directory or tracking down contact information for other women present in events I attended. A few participants were recruited via snowball sampling on the recommendation of other interviewees. I sent individualized emails to 115 women and reached out to an additional 30 via individualized direct message in the She Should Run Community to end up with a final set of 50 interviews and a response rate of 34.5 percent.

In accordance with Lareau (2021), I followed up with potential participants and postponers/cancellers a maximum of two times before moving on. The U.S. context is, of course, Western, democratic and industrialized, and it soon became clear that She Should Run users skew White, well-off, and well-educated, not to mention liberal, despite the organization's efforts to be nonpartisan. (These characteristics are reflected in the sample demographics; see Table 2.1 on the following page.) Within those bounds, I remained conscious of calls to make social science research less WEIRD - White, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (Henrich et al., 2010). I wanted to oversample for women of color, so I imposed a 50 percent quota that I filled by contacting women of color in Zoom events and searching She Should Run's Member Directory for profile pictures that appeared to depict women of color. Snowball sampling was also used in a few cases to recruit women holding the same racial identities. While rudimentary, these methods were necessary given the constraints of sampling and recruitment in this context and the fact that, as a White researcher, I could not see the membership lists of race-based affinity groups in the She Should Run Community. I had similarly hoped to have 50 percent right-of-center women, but this was revealed to be unrealistic considering the user population. To find Republican women, I used the Member Directory to search for profiles in the Community that used certain keywords (e.g., "GOP," "freedom," "patriot," "law and order," etc.) and contacted women whose contributions during virtual events concentrated on stereotypically Republican topics like crime or national defense. Snowball sampling was not useful here as no Republican women had connected with other Republican women in the Community. Again, these methods were rudimentary, but necessary to sample these women. If She Should Run had been willing to work with me and I had been granted access to user records (which include the demographic information women must input when they create an account), I would have

performed stratified random sampling across race and party as feasible. It is interesting to note that only 30 percent of the sample comprises She Should Run's target audience of women just considering running for office. 70 percent of the sample (and by extension, perhaps the majority of users on the platform) comprises women who are certain they want to run, are currently running, have previously run and won, have previously won and lost, or care about the problem of underrepresentation but have no interest in running for office. Subsequent chapters discuss the implications of this mismatch between She Should Run's target audience and the women actually using the platform.

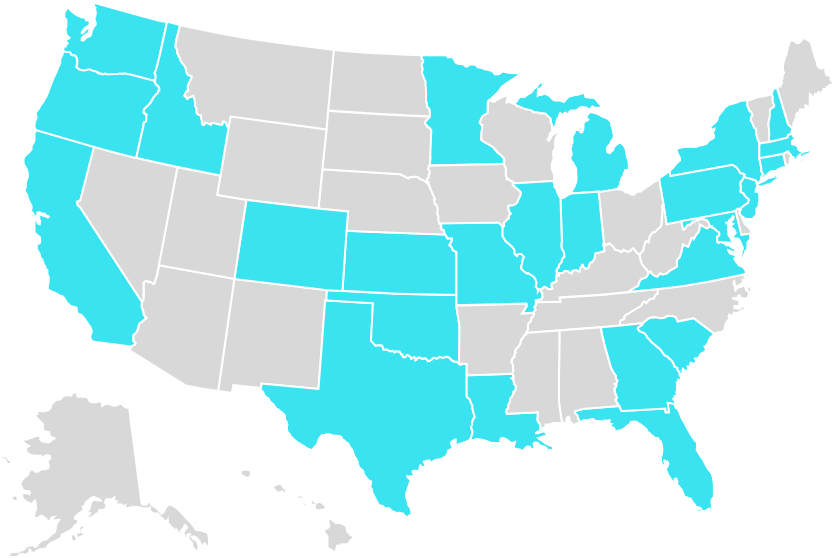
Table 2.1. Participant demographics.

	Raw Number	Percentage of Sample
Age		
24 and under	5	10
25-34	20	40
35-44	13	26
45-54	10	20
55 and older	2	4
Race		
American Indian or Alaska Native	3	6
Asian American	4	8
Black/African American	5	10
Hispanic/Latina	13	26
Middle Eastern/North African	1	2
White	25	50
Education		
Some college, no degree	7	14
Associate degree	3	6
Bachelor's degree	13	26
Master's degree	22	44
Doctorate or professional degree	5	10
Annual household income		
< $25,000	6	12
$25,000-49,999	5	10
$50,000-74,999	8	16
$75,000-99,999	3	6
$100,000-149,999	13	26
> $150,000	13	26
Prefer not to say	2	4

Political Party Affiliation		
Democrat	29	58
Democrat former Republican	2	4
Republican	6	12
Independent	8	16
Unaffiliated	4	8
Unaffiliated former Republican	1	2
Political Ideology		
Very conservative	3	6
Conservative	1	2
Somewhat conservative	2	4
Neither conservative nor liberal	5	10
Somewhat liberal	6	12
Liberal	16	32
Very liberal	15	30
Other – Progressive	1	2
Other – Abolitionist	1	2
Employment status		
Employed full time (40 hours)	29	58
Employed part time (up to 39 hours)	6	12
Self-employed	13	26
Student	3	6
Homemaker	2	4
Retired	1	2
Unemployed looking for work	1	2
Unemployed not looking for work	1	2
Children		
Yes	20	40
No	30	60
Marital status		
Single	20	40
Married or in a domestic partnership	26	52
Divorced	4	8
Candidacy status (at time of interview)		
No interest in running	5	10
Considering a future run	14	28
Certain of a future run	7	14
Currently running	9	18
Currently in office	5	10
Previously ran and did not win	10	20

Note: Demographic information was collected from interviewees via Qualtrics survey at the start of each interview. Some women selected more than one option for employment status. Women ran or were running for an array of local- and state-level offices including town trustee/city councilor, school board member, county assessor, and state representative, among others.

Figure 2.1. States represented by the sample.



Interviews took place from May to December 2022. As effective interviewing involves both obtaining information and forging a partnership with the respondent (Weiss, 1995), each interview began with several minutes of informal chatter to establish rapport, create a comfortable environment, and demonstrate interest in the respondent as a human being. I then confirmed permission to record; shared a bit about the research project, taking care to be as general as possible so as not to bias future responses; briefly overviewed what the interview would entail; explained how confidentiality and data anonymization would work; and re-confirmed verbal consent to participate in the research (see Appendix III). Payment of $40 was facilitated via the University of Michigan's Human Subjects Incentive Program (HSIP). Interviewees were then asked to take a short 1-2-minute demographic survey, providing their age, income level, race/ethnicity, partisanship, political leaning, level of education, employment status, and religious affiliation. Interviews lasted 60 minutes and were conducted via secure Zoom room. Considering the potentially sensitive nature of discussions about political involvement and women's experiences, all participants were granted confidentiality. To balance

this confidentiality with a desire for transparency, I do not mask my site, referring to She Should Run by name, but use pseudonyms for all participants and redact identifying details like states, cities, or organizations where leaving them in could compromise anonymity (Jerolmack & Murphy, 2019). I identify users of She Should Run by their pseudonym, age, race, and partisanship or political leaning. Due to privacy and identifiability concerns, I refer to volunteers only by their pseudonyms.

By the same token, I provide detailed quotes but have not made transcripts publicly available. One reason is that live interaction imbues participants' words with "a meaning and reasonableness that is not evident from the transcription of their words alone" (Cramer, 2015, p. 19); meaning is constructed in the interview encounter (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Another is that politics is, as mentioned above, a sensitive issue for many people, and the women interviewed here are no exception. Cramer (2015, p. 19) again articulates the concern: "Ethically, I would have a very difficult time inviting myself into conversations with people if I knew that not only would I be poring over their words in detail time and time again, but that an indeterminate number of other scholars would be doing so as well, in perpetuity." Rather, I try to communicate my methods of data collection and analysis as transparently as possible and, through the provision of rich detail and extensive quoting, give readers a solid basis from which to understand and evaluate my arguments (Cramer, 2015).

Depending on the participant's political history, the interview proper opened with a general question pertaining to her political interest or motivation to run (women who had previously run or currently held office were asked the latter). I began this way to shed light on how women come to be involved in politics and in recognition that the first question of an in-depth interview is a means to help create a comfortable environment and open as many avenues

as possible for follow-up probes. Where participants got off subject, I took the approach of "listening, briefly affirming, and then redirecting" as feasible (Lareau, 2021, p. 61). Likewise, guided by my research questions, I attempted to balance sticking to the interview protocol (Appendix IV) with remaining open to emergent directions of inquiry that occasionally necessitated novel probes. Difficult decisions were also made regarding when to spend more time on questions and when to move on, again guided by my research questions. Given that interviews were semi-structured and dialogic, the "interview protocol provided a place to start, not a definitive road map to follow" (Kreiss et al., 2020, p. 171). I aimed to foreground respondent comfort and help the conversation flow naturally, such that question sometimes varied (Kreiss et al., 2020; Lareau, 2021). Every woman was not asked every question in precisely the same way so that interviews could "unfold" according to women's experiences and broach unanticipated topics (Kreiss et al., 2020, p. 171). All interviews concluded with a chance for interviewees to add additional thoughts: *Is there anything else you think it is important for me to know that I haven't yet asked?*

Descriptive and analytic memos were written within 24 hours after the interview, noting memorable quotes or nonverbal behaviors. I then went through the recording of the interview and the Zoom-generated automatic transcript line by line. Memos and transcripts were uploaded to MAXQDA for organization and coding. Following Kreiss et al. (2020), I also wrote theoretical memos after interviews to identify motifs that inductively emerged from the data. Formal analysis of transcripts then involved "generating themes and sub-themes and attendant quotes for each" (Kreiss et al., 2020, p. 171). The priority throughout was to represent participants' meaning as accurately and richly as possible. Where participants are quoted directly, verbal stumbles such as "like," "um," "you know," "uh," and in some cases "so" have

occasionally been removed for readability. In other cases, where participant hesitation or stumbling provide insight into participant meaning-making or the difficulty of articulating the topic, these stumbles are left in.

Taken together, the methods of textual analysis, ethnographic participant observation, and in-depth interviews help provide a more well-rounded perspective on the She Should Run platform's technological potentials and women's experiences than would any single avenue of inquiry. Bringing multiple methods to bear in answering my research questions rather than applying different methodologies to different questions ensures that my arguments build on insights from an exhaustive understanding of platform materials. Further, these methods facilitate a "local point of view" on the meaning of phenomena within their broader political and technological context, making it possible to "challenge taken-for-granted assumptions" on the part of She Should Run and extant candidate recruitment research (Lareau, 2021, p. 1). Finally, the body of literature on custom candidate recruitment technologies was heretofore nonexistent. In combining methods uniquely suited to exploring novel technological terrain and refining conceptual models (Burawoy, 1998; Lareau, 2021; Lawrence et al., 2023), this approach represents useful progress toward studying CCRTs and contributes to contemporary conceptions of and academic discourses around underrepresentation and women's political mobilization.

Chapter 3 What We Talk About When We Talk About Running: Realism in Tension with the Encouragement Imperative

Chapter 3 speaks to the dissertation's first motivating question of how running for office is discussed, engaged, and experienced in the context of CCRTs and the women who use them. As Chapter 1 explained, scholars still wrestle with the question of why women are underrepresented. Some emphasize internal barriers, such as lack of ambition or not seeing oneself as a politician, to the exclusion of external barriers like lack of money or threats of violence (Lawless & Fox, 2013). Others focus on those external barriers, highlighting the structural factors that can prevent women from running and make running harder for women than men (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013). In the analyses that follow, I show how both types of barriers (but external barriers in particular) majorly shape women's consideration and experience of candidacy.

Women's firsthand accounts choreograph the chapter. I go barrier by barrier, bringing in textual analysis and participant observation data to illustrate how She Should Run addresses or elides the barriers women experienced. I begin by discussing lack of funds, the most common obstacle among the women I interviewed. I then speak to the importance of political connections, and how She Should Run helps connect women on one level but cannot ultimately replace the resources and "ins" of traditional party networks. Institutional sexism rounds out the discussion of external barriers as another major obstacle women faced to running and winning. The data demonstrate that sexism is still a stumbling block, despite claims that *perceptions* of sexism and a "gendered psyche" rather than structural sexism itself are most problematic for women today

(Lawless & Fox, 2010; Preece, 2016). That said, internal barriers do figure in the calculus of candidacy for many. The chapter next gives voice to interviewees who raised the issues of "mom guilt", which She Should Run does not address, and feeling unqualified or seeing politicians differently than they see themselves, topics She Should Run does explore in depth.

As in the scholarship, I find there is a tension in the platform materials between mentioning external barriers beyond She Should Run's control and emphasizing internal barriers, such as feeling unqualified, that She Should Run positions itself as well-equipped to address. The chapter also discusses how She Should Run tries to thread the needle of adequately addressing the challenges women face while convincing women that running is a good idea (Dittmar, 2015a). Analyses reveal that the organizational imperative to encourage women contributes to an uneven treatment of external barriers in contrast with a consistent focus on helping women overcome internal barriers. As a result, She Should Run seems most beneficial for women able to worry more about their internal states of mind than money, political connections, or institutional sexism, and less useful for women who are less well-off financially, less well-connected, and more prone to vile treatment in politics. These women tend to be women of color or from lower-income families or with less prestigious jobs—the same women who have traditionally been most excluded from politics. Thus, regarding my second and third motivating questions around technological action and equity prospects, She Should Run's focus on internal barriers risks compromising CCRTs' potential to usher in a more equitable era of woman candidate recruitment.

3.1 Lack of funds still looms large

Unsurprisingly (James, 2019), not having enough money was the most common barrier women discussed. Women overwhelmingly felt that She Should Run did not adequately address

lack of funding. Indeed, ethnographic participant observation revealed that live events tended to avoid the question of money almost entirely. Static content on the platform, i.e., coursework in the Incubator (She Should Run's set of five member-only online courses for women to complete as they consider running), seems geared toward helping women become more comfortable fundraising and think through expanding networks of possible donors. The Incubator also includes inspirational stories of women winning with little money. Yet content generally does not speak to money as a structural barrier. For example, within the Starter Kit, another static set of resources available publicly on the platform and mostly accessible without an account, item seven of seven is "26 Common Barriers to Running for Office." Only one of these barriers directly addresses money, chirping:

> If you don't have access to wealth for fundraising and serving in elected office, that's okay! Most local races don't require millions of dollars or even $20,000 to run for office. In fact, it can cost as little as $1,000 to run for a local position like city commissioner. Fundraising is a key part of running for office, but you shouldn't let that stop you from running. When you ask someone to contribute to your campaign, you're asking them to believe in your vision that you have for making your community a better place."

Helping change women's perception of fundraising to increase their confidence doing it is certainly beneficial. For many women with money to spare or relatively affluent networks, if fundraising is largely a mental obstacle, She Should Run's response could help allay fears that fundraising will be perceived as selfish or uncouth. It is also understandable that She Should Run tries to make the need for money seem less daunting considering its mission to encourage women to run. Yet this response ignores that women with poorer networks are in a different position than women with primarily middle- or upper-class connections. $1,000 may be a relatively small amount of money for people with higher incomes, but it is a lot of money for a

lot of people. Moreover, only women running in tiny districts and in certain states could run a successful campaign with so few funds (James, 2019; Martin & Rudulph, 2017). Women running for positions in larger districts, even at municipal or county levels, needed more than $1,000 to begin to garner some name recognition and challenge incumbents (see James, 2019). Kaya, a Democratic Indigenous woman in her late 30s working as a community fundraiser who had run and lost, bemoaned that, even in her small rural district:

> Money is the way everything operated. The politicians, around here at least, they're all usually White cis males, and they're usually attorneys, and they usually have already made the rounds as far as local philanthropy goes. …There was a certain role that they had worked themselves into being: someone that had access to money. If they didn't already have money themselves, they had access to it. Or they had access to resources."

Kaya makes clear that even if a local race does not technically "require millions of dollars," in She Should Run's words, going up against an incumbent with deep pockets means you can easily be out-campaigned—you cannot afford to print as many signs, produce as many ads, support as many volunteers, or hold as many events as your opponent. If an opponent decides to go on the attack, neither can you ensure your counter-messaging is equally prevalent. Relatedly, She Should Run's answer does not acknowledge that lack of name recognition is a major burden directly connected to money for women entering politics. Odessa, a White working-class woman in her early 40s running as a Democrat in a deep-red district against a man who had held the office for almost two decades, was painfully aware that most people in her network did not have $10 or $20 to spare, making money and name recognition substantial hurdles. "That's what I'm spending all my money on, just trying to get my name out there. …I don't have the pot from being in office for 16 years that my opponent has. I'm just literally

starting from scratch with, you know, nothing. ” She sighs. “Having to raise money and ask people for money and living in a rural district, people don’t have a lot of money. Just even asking someone for ten bucks, they’re like, ‘I don’t have it.’ I get it. I get not having ten bucks.” Odessa also made the point that, in addition to having less money and poorer networks, working-class women are less likely to work jobs that enable them to be flexible with campaign events. (Every woman I spoke with who was ready to run, running, or holding office talked about needing to be in a place with work where they had the flexibility to campaign and/or take a financial hit.) Odessa continued:

> In the beginning, [work was] a little more understanding. [They] have become less understanding along the way. Trying to balance my duties at work with having to do what I need to do for the campaign, that’s been a big barrier. I just can’t leave work all the time to go to campaign luncheons and events. I have to be at work. It’s just not set up that way [for people like me]. And a lot of people that decide to run are working people that have families, that have responsibilities where their money goes, and you can’t just drop everything.”

At the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum, Robin is a White moderate Democrat in her early 40s who owns her own business and is intensively involved in her community from PTAs to political advocacy organizations. Money and her job would not stand in the way nearly as much. Yet even for her, lack of name recognition felt prohibitive. “Good or bad, there's the name recognition. You know, when I told my husband, like, oh, there's a [state] senate seat opening in two years, he was like, ‘what? Like the state knows who you are? Give me a break.’ And you can't go knock on doors like you can in a small district.”[10] Kaya’s, Odessa’s, and

[10] Robin’s experience is also indicative of a surprisingly common thread among women, where husbands explicitly described as supportive came across as less than supportive during other anecdotes. I speak to this more in the following discussion of family-related barriers.

Robin's experiences suggest that the size of the monetary barrier in women's lives is far greater than the space devoted to that barrier on the She Should Run platform. CCRTs must better address money as an obstacle to maximize the technologies' potential to motivate women to run.

Even beyond the money needed to campaign successfully, money constitutes a barrier for women without wealth or other sources of income simply because so many elected positions pay so poorly. For Tiffany, an African American community organizer in her mid-30s who identifies as politically moderate, She Should Run did not address living expenses enough. "From what I know, there's not a lot of money in community organizing at all," she said. "So, figure out how to feed yourself…help people learn [that] aspect." In the "26 Common Barriers" resource in the Starter Kit, She Should Run does acknowledge, to some extent, the financial sacrifice that getting involved in politics can represent:

> "It's important to know that [politicians] at the local and state level, depending on what state you live in, don't make a lot of money. Asking questions like, "Does this pay? Will I need to quit my job? If I need to quit my job, how will I find supplementary income if the position doesn't pay a lot?" is a good starting point in deciding to run for office."

Again, the organizational imperative to motivate women to run while downplaying obstacles to running seems to be at play. She Should Run encourages women to ask questions, seemingly assuming women will arrive at answers that result in them running. Nowhere does the platform acknowledge that, for some women, money places running for office completely out of the realm of possibility. Volunteer Amy put it plainly:

> I'm interested in local- or state-level. Most [positions] don't pay more than $40,000 or $50,000 a year, if they pay anything at all. If this is a School Board position, that's not a full-time job, and that's fine. You do that while you continue to have a full-time job. But if I'm going to run for a state legislative position, that is a full-time job….But I have

> financial responsibilities. I am the insurance plan for my parents, because that's very often what happens with children of immigrants. I have to have a certain amount of money so that I can support them, and it's much harder to do that on a public servant's salary. I don't think that's something that She Should Run ever acknowledged."

Amy attributed She Should Run's inadequate addressment of financial barriers to its focus on women early in the pre-candidacy pipeline, which may provide internal justification for not offering more money-related resources. However, as Chapter 5 discusses, many women are already on the point of needing to fundraise when they find She Should Run, so they feel the absence of this content particularly keenly.[11] Amy's discussion of her responsibilities as a child of immigrants brings up additional issues I discuss in the upcoming section entitled "from intersectional identities to internal barriers only." Here, I highlight her take that a disclaimer that public positions pay poorly is not enough to address the barrier low salaries present for a lot of women. While She Should Run removes the time and travel costs associated with traditional recruitment resources and evinces a clear commitment to bringing women from "all walks of life" into the pre-candidacy pipeline, failing to speak to the exclusionary realities of politics precludes She Should Run from effectively addressing those realities and marginalizes the same less-wealthy women who have traditionally been left on the political sidelines.

This problem exists in tension with She Should Run's rhetorical and practical commitments to inclusion, which do make the platform itself more accessible. She Should Run being free was important to nearly all the women interviewed, even those who would have been able to pay. Hannah, a White moderate Republican in her early 40s who manages a chain of

[11]Despite relatively low overhead for digital recruitment organizations, those with 501(c)3 operating models (such as She Should Run) are not in a financial position to provide funding. There are also legal complications around nonprofit status and political endorsement. Lack of funding thus remains an issue for women without deep pockets or wealthy networks even if virtual offerings are theoretically more accessible than in-person trainings, making discussion of this barrier all the more important.

restaurants, was one of the few women who donated: “I signed up the first month with a recurring $50 donation. I definitely would have done it if I still had to pay, because I felt that I should pay for the data they were giving me because I had the financial means to do so. [But] I think it's great they're free. It's great that they're out there for everybody.” Like Hannah, many women said that She Should Run being free aligned “ideologically” with the “spirit” of getting more women into office and made it more likely that women would participate. For Milagros, a politically unaffiliated working-class Latina in her early 40s suffering from Bipolar I disorder and PTSD, She Should Run being free made her participation possible. “Right now, being on disability only, I don’t have a job. Free is as good as I can [do]. I can’t do any paid events. When I have money, I do plan to start maybe donating, but it’s just that, right now, money’s tight.” In this sense, She Should Run is increasing equity in the pre-candidacy space by making free political participation resources accessible to women who could not otherwise afford them. The platform may insufficiently address campaign finance and low political salaries, but its freeness removes an important barrier to recruitment resources.

3.2 Political networks

Political networks (connections with other people who are politically influential and/or members of the political establishment, with the ultimate political networks historically being political parties) are important aspects of a candidate’s ability to run and win (Burns et al., 2001; Kreiss, 2016a; Preece et al., 2016; Xydias, 2007). These political insiders can point potential candidates toward open seats and winnable races, tap people for appointed positions, and connect candidates with fundraising networks while increasing candidates’ name recognition among politically engaged voters likely to show up on election day. It is not clear whether using CCRTs can result in comparable relationships or recruitment opportunities. Despite She Should Run’s

nonpartisan approach and promise of online community for women regardless of their political standing, women's experiences revealed that political parties still play an irreplaceable role in connecting women with resources and making political offices accessible. I find that the nonpartisan ethos embraced on the platform fell apart on the campaign trail, where partisanship served as a heuristic for prospective voters and other training organizations to determine whether to support candidates.[12] Women consistently expressed that partisanship or lack thereof was limiting and that "good old boy" networks continue to privilege male candidates with political connections over women new to politics. Until the She Should Run Community is more active and can more productively connect women interested in politics with women already in politics, the platform is not a replacement for other political networks. I speak first to how the platform can help increase political exposure before detailing the network-related barriers women faced.

Programming that connected women around the country who were running or considering it with women already holding office was helpful for many interviewees, particularly those with little knowledge of the political landscape or who only felt able to reach out to local politicians. Even beyond She Should Run, women discussed the increasing use of Zoom as a beneficial side effect of Covid that enabled them to participate in politics more than they could in person. Volunteer Naomi was able to be "present" for City Council meetings because Zoom "made it tremendously more accessible. I would never be doing that in person. I just don't have the time and patience and babysitting money." Amber, a "somewhat liberal" Indigenous woman in her late 50s working in higher education administration and considering running, even "doubled down on Zooms" to be able to participate in meetings happening concurrently. She had expanded her political network to other states through attending Zoom meetings of political

[12] See Chapter 4 for more discussion of the disconnects between She Should Run's nonpartisan ethos and the process of becoming more politically involved, as well as the implications of nonpartisanship for the platform itself.

committees and advocacy organizations. Digital participation was most appreciated by rural women, who, in Kaya's words, need to be "logistics queens" to manage driving 25 minutes to a grocery store one way and 45 minutes to a town hall in the other direction.

She Should Run makes heavy use of Zoom to conduct webinars and "coffee chats," or question-and-answer sessions with current officeholders. Though technology is by no means unilaterally empowering for women (Hicks, 2017; Kaplan, 2009; Wajcman, 1991), the digital nature of She Should Run's resources provided real value for women in helping expand their political networks. By bringing women new to politics into the same spaces as women in positions of political power and letting the former ask questions of the latter, these events modified the traditional top-down flow of political communication and made tangible the theoretical affordance of multiway communication. In providing women new knowledge, multiway communication helps address the external barriers of lack of information and meaningful connections.[13] Fatima, a politically moderate Black doctoral student in her late 40s who was just beginning to think about running, said webinars with minority politicians helped overcome the structural barrier of lack of social capital:

> One thing I have learned is that it's not about social networking. It's about your social capital. And that is huge. And culturally, right, minorities do not have social capital. Plain, cutthroat, we don't have social capital. We have social networks, but we don't have social capital. It's very important for me, and I know the difference. And it's very important for me to expand my social capital. I'm huge on that right now. So, for the events portion of it, it's good for me, you know. I can continue expanding that social network or that social capital, and that's the part that I appreciate the most."

[13] These are benefits distinct from how seeing other women in politics can help overcome the internal barrier of not being able to visualize oneself in office, discussed in Chapter 3.5.

In this sense, She Should Run is taking advantage of the power of technology to make pre-candidate recruitment more reflective of the diverse women in the potential candidate pool. Notably, webinars are the only place on the platform where women who do not hold multiple marginalized identities are able to hear directly from women who do; all women are welcome to webinars with politicians. In the Community, however, users are directed to share identity-related experiences in closed race- and sexuality-based affinity groups rather than the main newsfeed, providing safer spaces for women with identities in common to communicate but minimizing opportunities for others to learn from them.[14] Virtual events also make available models of women's political leadership that are otherwise absent. Naomi articulated that "it's hard to have that ambition [to run] when we don't see what women's leadership looks like." Paige, a White Republican small business owner in her early 30s considering a future run, echoed that hearing how politicians came to their present positions teaches women about different paths to public leadership. Anne, a mestiza banker in her mid-30s running for Democratic office, appreciated receiving these insights in a setting that felt "almost like sitting in a coffee shop with someone":

> I think the biggest thing that helped me was the Zoom that they did with people all across the country, and they had a couple of facilitators. I don't remember what they titled it, but it was basically like, so you think you might want to run, and then it went through everything, and they opened it up for questions. [It was] better than it would have been if I had just watched a presenter with all of those things. There was a lot of back and forth, and it wasn't polished, like marketing material, you know? It wasn't a production. Really, it was a woman that was sitting there explaining her experience and experiences of other people just like

[14] The "Combatting Intersectional Barriers" course in the Incubator addresses barriers women face as a result of their race, sexuality, or ability, but constitutes static organizational communication rather than the kind of narrative-based consciousness-raising that could occur through personal sharing of stories by women in the Community (see Frederick, 2013).

> we are now. It was more real and more like, oh, we're just trying to encourage people to run for office."

In short, women new to politics like Fatima, Naomi, Paige, and Anne, without well-known names that open political doors and facilitate access to sitting politicians, were able to learn from current officeholders thanks to She Should Run. For Nicky, a White Democrat brewery owner in her mid-30s who ran and won, these events also provided valuable glimpses of life on the job:

> I really got so much out of their online networking hours with women who had been elected. I pretty much signed up for every single one and just absorbed what they had to say about social media, or how to deal with people who hate on you, or how to deal with the other side of the aisle…It was really helpful. I'd say I loved the Incubator, but I didn't do every piece of it. I probably spent way more time on the Zoom workshop-type things."

Nicky highlighted that the webinars with local politicians dovetailed with She Should Run's nonpartisan ethos and addressed experiences relevant to women across party lines:

> It was really great to listen to other women's perspectives of, well, a lot of the time we're damned if we do, damned if we don't. So, let's talk about how we work on that as women first and foremost, and then talk about it from a political perspective, of, what about people who disagree with you or don't like what you have to say? Let's get at the root of what their fear is. How can we still engage them at the table? I really appreciated that piece."

That said, established partisan networks still posed major obstacles for women across the political spectrum. Women talked about men being selected for succession and, within the Republican Party, lack of support for women.[15] Paige vented:

[15] While exploration of women's partisan ideologies and identities is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is interesting to note that, when pressed, Republican women's attributions of lack of support for women in the Republican Party ranged from "out of touch with the younger generation," "too focused on cramming our religion down other people's throats," to "more focused on traditional values," etc.

> In my party, it is very hard for women to even have a path to leadership. There's a lot of older men that get kind of handpicked. We just saw an article this past weekend about this man who got handpicked for a representative job. And my mom sent it to me, like, this should have been you. Because [he] was basically handpicked, and by Thursday he had a six-count indictment for stealing drugs and abusing the elderly. And his path to political leadership was so easy: The last person was like, I really want this guy, and campaigned on his behalf…[it's like] you need to be already politically in the arena."

Paige and the other Republican women interviewed all referred to the party as less than helpful and contrasted that with perceived support for women on the Democratic side. Paige groans: "In the other party of our nation, if you type in, like, 'woman who wants to run for office,' they have so many incubators just for that particular party. And they kind of help women rise to the occasion. Whereas you're on your own in my party." Lee, a very conservative White Republican in her mid-40s who was campaigning at the time and now holds office, echoed this frustration:

> Women don't have a strong voice. I was very fortunate that my current state representative does not marginalize women, but one of my opponents does. And you don't think that this still exists, but it does exist, and especially on the Republican side, I think, more than the Democrats' side. I hate to say that, but…there is very clearly still a good ol' boys' network in place."

Republican interviewees echoed evidence that Democrats better publicize a culture of support of women candidates (James, 2019); Democrats did not mention a lack of party support. The difference between the parties was especially distinct for women of color. Sonia, a Latina Democrat in her mid-40s who was running at the time and now holds office, spoke frankly: "You know which side is more welcoming. Think about which side would welcome you to the dinner table versus welcoming you to clean up their dishes." Extant research has asserted that "the Democratic Party and its network are friendlier to female candidates than are the Republican

Party and its network" (Pearson & McGhee, 2013, p. 440). Yet Democrat and Independent women also found themselves boxed out by male politicians selecting male successors.[16] Kelly, a White Democrat in her mid-40s, was dissuaded by someone she thought she could trust:

> I decided to talk to my city councilor, who is actually a career politician. In my mind, it was perfect to talk to this person; they know what they're doing. In retrospect, he talked me out of it without talking me out of it. He asked me questions that made me question whether or not I could do it. He was like, well, can you raise over $100,000 in three months? Do you know at least five people when you go to every coffee shop? Setting the bar unrealistically high. And I'm like, okay, I guess if these are things that I probably should do, then maybe now is not the right time. In retrospect, that makes me angry. Because the person who did end up running, he's buddies with our city councilor. I'm pretty sure he knew that that person was running before I talked to him. And that person is now the mayor."

These specific examples illustrate the general sense women had that they were outsiders trying to break into the political establishment. Some interviewees felt that men politicians were more likely than women to be exclusionary to women newcomers, but others stressed that it was not necessarily the case that women "career politicians" would not act in exclusionary ways. Rather, sitting politicians have historically been and still are majority male at all levels of government, and those men are more likely to be connected with other men than with women—men whom they then help into office. As Lee experienced, old boy networks, or informal

[16] Holistic analyses tell a slightly more complicated fundraising story, too (James, 2019). While Democrats are far more rhetorically supportive of women candidates and tend to be more financially supportive of women candidates as well, women of color have a harder time raising money than do White women even on the Democratic side (James, 2019). That said, across parties, Republican men are the least likely to donate to women candidates (James, 2019). In general, women Republican candidates have a harder time raising money than women Democratic candidates (Kitchens & Swers, 2016), reinforcing that this is more of a political networks issue than a purely monetary problem (which is why this endnote appears here rather than in the previous section). Some research suggests that the Republican Party is trying to do better by women candidates (O'Brien, 2018).

systems wherein men with similar backgrounds help each other advance professionally (see the Cambridge Dictionary definition), still shape political and business spaces around the world (Malik, 2023). She Should Run's discussion forums occasionally see women seeking advice about how to deal with difficult male-dominated political situations, and interviews show that women are encouraged by seeing other women on the platform. Yet the platform is far from being a substitute for established offline networks that favor male candidates. Anne, for example, regretted that there were "no actual recruitment opportunities" on the platform.

Beyond the good ol' boys' networks, women struggled with the need for complete partisan alignment to earn support from Party gatekeepers. This barrier is not unique to women, but women are more likely to have their credentials doubted in the first place, including their party loyalty (Dittmar, 2015b). (So, too, are women less likely to have political connections that could help offset lack of party support.) Party chairs particularly perceive candidates of color as facing inordinately "uphill battles" to convert voters that may not be worth the party's effort (Doherty et al., 2019, p. 1282). Even as a staunch White Republican, Lee felt her hands were tied: "You have the far left which wants to destroy me. You have the Far Right right now, which, if I don't agree with absolutely everything they say, they want to destroy you. I don't know if Covid may have contributed to it, but it's like we're feral children now, and we don't know how to debate anymore." She wanted to help campaign for a moderate Democrat in a neighboring district whom she liked and respected but was prohibited from doing so by advisors concerned about the optics. They warned it would ruin her image as a loyal Republican. Prevented from allying with women across the aisle but excluded by men within her own party, Lee's experiences suggest that Republican women must primarily network with each other and articulate a partisan-gender identity that distinguishes them from Democratic women and

Republican men alike—even as they perpetuate a party culture that inhibits women's political advancement (Wineinger, 2022).

On the other side of the aisle, Kelly lamented that "the Democratic committee in my city is the best place to go if you want to hold office, but it's also a deeply corrupt organization. I struggle with that, because it is a great resource for getting elected if you're affiliated with them." Anne was frustrated that "even friendly Democrats don't know me and don't know what I'm about, and it's very hard to reach them." She believed that if she had been more involved with her local party in the past, she would have a higher profile. For women who did not identify as strongly Democrat or strongly Republican, the partisan polarization of politics was ideologically difficult. Reba, a White retired veteran in her 50s and former (pre-2016) Republican who now feels she belongs to no party, resented that she had to pick one to get support even though she was running for a nonpartisan position:

> I identify as a Democrat right now, but that's mostly because you can't get anything done, you can't function unless you're on somebody's bandwagon. If you're not part of one of the major parties, you essentially have to figure out how to operate on your own, and you have to be, maybe, independently wealthy. You [wouldn't] have access to everything that you have access to if you're a member of the party."

For women like Hannah, who ran as a Republican but identified as politically moderate, She Should Run provided helpful resources to explore candidacy without needing to declare her party loyalty or worry about being perceived as the enemy, in stark contrast to her experiences with other recruitment organizations and on the campaign trail:

> The major thing I faced constantly was, of course, party alliance. It becomes everything you do. The first thing somebody says is, 'Which party?' And it just becomes all of who you are. …At some point, even my friends, my family would

> say, ‘Okay, but which party?’ That was the number-one difficulty. I think that's where She Should Run comes in uniquely and doesn't make you pick. As soon as I walked in the door, they didn't say, ‘Okay, which team are you on? Are you a good witch or a bad witch?’ That's how it felt all the time [campaigning]. And which one was good, which one was bad, changed with every door you opened.”

As Chapter 4 will show, most women appreciated She Should Run being nonpartisan (though whether appreciation translates to Community participation is another question entirely). At least regarding initial engagement, nonpartisanship seems to remove a barrier to entry for women without strong partisan identities.

On the other hand, parties remain “the key actors shaping women's representation in advanced parliamentary democracies” (O’Brien, 2018, p. 27; Ocampo & Ray, 2020). She Should Run fails to address party-related concerns apart from directing women to reach out to their local parties for more information. It is possible that the organization’s nonpartisan ethos makes them leery of speaking to partisanship in any capacity, even to topics that would apply across party lines. As a result, the current She Should Run Community cannot replace the political “ins” and advantages provided by offline, often party-based networks, and technological action potentials are not being realized when it comes to concrete recruitment opportunities. Several women suggested that She Should Run could partner with local and state party organizations (both Republican and Democrat, in keeping with nonpartisanship) to highlight open seats and aggregate contact information for interested women. Dani, a “very liberal” mestiza woman in her mid-30s working as a music manager and considering running for office one day, expressed frustration that recruitment resources were not more “consolidated,” making women have to “search them all out individually” in order to build up their political networks. Cross-promotion of party- and other organization-based woman candidate recruitment efforts on the She Should

Run platform could help make it a more valuable complement to offline networks, if not a full-fledged alternative.

3.3 Institutional sexism in a male-dominated realm

As discussed in Chapter 1, some researchers have suggested that women no longer face substantial gender-based barriers around running for office (Hayes & Lawless, 2016) and that sexism is primarily a problem of perception (Lawless & Fox, 2010; Preece, 2016). Most of the women I interviewed, however—from the far left to the far right—experienced sexism that complicated their consideration of running and/or shaped their experiences on the campaign trail. One way sexism manifested was via gender-based harassment. Reba, in her 50s, thought she was old enough to be safe. In reality, running for office has meant that she "live[s] with harassment, both in person and online. At least we can block them online. I've had males send me pictures of themselves hard. Males can be so disgusting and horrid." Melissa, a Latina Democrat in her mid-30s who was running for a nonpartisan position, had a man offer to hear her pitch and become a major donor—if she would just come to his house and perform sexual favors first. Pervasive feelings of physical unsafety presented a barrier to Kaya as well:

> That's a real big part of it: If you're politically active here, you are opening yourself to be physically harmed. Like, that's how bananas things have gotten. You're opening yourself to the threat of violence if you are openly gay, if you're openly Democrat, if you're openly x, y, and z, if you don't fit what the majority want you to look and say and do."

She went on to talk about being uncomfortably conscious of her body in interpersonal settings and how vulnerable her body was to other people's actions. She viewed this as a concern common to "any woman in politics" and thus found it "really odd" that she never saw "anything that talked about safety" on the platform. One of She Should Run's Starter Kit resources

provides ideas for shutting down sexism in conversation (discussed shortly), and a webinar instructs women in making online accounts private and blocking trolls (also discussed shortly). However, these seem to be the only places She Should Run speaks to gender-based harassment, never addressing the issue of physical safety. Failing to do so 1) widens the gap between She Should Run's treatment of candidacy and women's experience of it, relevant to the first motivating question of this dissertation,[17] and 2) disproportionately affects women of color and LGBTQIA+ women, who are more likely to face threats to their safety (Sobieraj, 2018, 2020), relevant to the third motivating question of this dissertation.[18]

Other women faced verbal abuse. Stephanie, a White homemaker in her mid-40s and another former (pre-2016) Republican trying to run as an Independent in a deep-red area, had a man abruptly start screaming at her as she was talking to him on his porch. When she raised her voice back and called him on his behavior, he responded that he was simply trying to see if she was "tough enough" to be in politics. In that situation, she felt safe enough to ask him if he would have done the same thing to a male candidate standing on his porch. (He sputtered. He had no reply.) In other cases, Stephanie spoke to the double-bind experienced by many interviewees, i.e., the difficulty of standing up for oneself while trying to be likeable. Her voice heats in exasperation:

> Somebody said some inappropriate stuff to me, and I had to play it off like everything was fine…and my husband read the text message exchange, and he was mad, and he's like, why wouldn't you tell me? Why would you let this guy say stuff to you? I'm like, what am I supposed to say? If I shoot him down, I become this cold-hearted bitch who can't take a joke."

[17] Question 1: How is running for office discussed, engaged, and experienced in the context of CCRTs and the women who use them?
[18] Question 3: Can CCRTs help make candidate recruitment more equitable?

Women also had their capacity for leadership questioned around traditionally female family caretaking responsibilities. Emma is a White Republican in her early 30s who was campaigning at the time and now holds office. Everyday sexism was "the hardest part of running," harming her mental and emotional health: "Definitely being young and being a mom of really young kids, I probably had questions asked of me that weren't asked of other people. Like, who's gonna watch your kids? Those types of things. And I'm like, this is so stupid. I can't do this. I can't take these questions and people treating me like this." For Emma and many others, these kinds of questions made campaigning more stressful than it would have been otherwise. Naomi was grateful her son was old enough to bring on the campaign trail to try and nullify the question of who was watching her child at that moment. For women with younger children, this was not an option.

She Should Run does make some attempts to address sexism-based barriers. One of the events I attended brought in an expert from the technology sector to talk to participants about staying safe on social media as they got more involved in politics. In billing this event, She Should Run acknowledged "negative experiences like attacks and harassment" that "have dissuaded many women from participating in this form of communication." Attendees peppered the chat with stories of online harassment and thanks to She Should Run for addressing this crucial issue. As a *Wired* article put it, "women deserve to run for office, do their jobs, and express their opinions without facing abusers aiming to detract from their prowess, expertise, or ability…this is one of social media's many hard problems, but it is one we must address to build a world that is more equitable, more representative, and more just" (Jankowicz, 2021).[19] Molly, a White Democrat in her early 40s working in philanthropic investment, saw the webinar as

[19] See also Jankowicz (2022).

evidence of She Should Run's relevance: "I know from talking to women that these fears of threats and violence are really keeping them out [of politics], and She Should Run, clearly, was hearing those same things, and so they designed something around that to help alleviate those fears."

Similarly, one of the PDF guides in She Should Run's Starter Kit (a set of seven resources hosted publicly on the platform and mostly accessible without an account) is entitled, "How to Call Out and Shut Down Sexism in Politics." Content includes how to respond to being called "emotional" or "crazy" and how to answer sexist questions on the campaign trail like, "who's watching your children?" The guide also offers suggested responses to complaints about women's voices being too high or shrill; how to push back against society's mental image of political leadership as male, White, wealthy, cis-gendered, and heterosexual; and how to address the double bind. In providing practical suggestions for dealing with sexism around running for office, this resource acknowledges sexism as a structural barrier women face. It just takes a deeper level of engagement to come across this content. One must navigate through dropdown menus to access the Starter Kit and then scroll down to find the guide. The Incubator coursework requires an account and Community navigation. Chapter 3.4 explores how the relative difficulty of finding resources oriented toward systemic barriers may be part of the reason many women felt that She Should Run did not address sexism sufficiently.[20]

While not overtly sexist in the same way as the remarks addressed in the guide or the harassment women experienced, gender-based differences in family roles also complicated women's ability to run. Apart from the hurdle of "mom guilt" experienced even with supportive

[20] A few women I interviewed had attended and appreciated the webinar on online harassment, though they expressed they did not learn much new information. Zero interviewees mentioned the Starter Kit or Incubator content dealing with sexism.

husbands, many women mentioned that they needed easy access to resources and would not have been able to leave their families for days at a time (e.g., to attend an in-person training). Esther is a Latina Democrat in her 30s who sees women inordinately taking on the burden of childcare:

> Women have specific barriers that men may not, starting with childcare or other home responsibilities. …The same is true for communities of color. In my community the women are caretakers, not only of their children but of their parents. And there's just so many barriers to accessibility. You can put on an amazing conference where you have the best speakers and the best resources, but then, ultimately, who is even able to attend? Online, I think it does alleviate some of that. With Vote Run Lead, I had to travel to the city. And it took, like, three days out of my week, and it was a conference, and it's so very tiring to me in person, particularly post-pandemic. And I had to find the funds from my university to fund my trip. If it doesn't cost people travel funds, you don't have to worry about that, and you can engage people from all over the country."

Esther confirms that She Should Run being online is an important part of what makes the platform more accessible for women with childcare responsibilities, not to mention the alleviated financial burden. Of the women I spoke to who had young children, only four were in families where the husband (all families with young children were heteronormative) took on the majority of child-rearing responsibilities. (Unsurprisingly, three of these four women were the only mothers I spoke to whose children did not make cameo appearances during the interviews. With most mothers, children popped on screen, or had questions, or needed something during interviews.) These women spoke at length about the importance of being able to rely on their partners for childcare and their gratitude for their partners' labor. For these few women, "mom guilt" was an internal barrier not compounded by their family setup. For most, the need to "rearrange how the family works" was a barrier because the women undertook the lion's share of family duties. Stephanie's husband persuaded her to quit her job as a teacher and stay home with

the kids "because it was cheaper than paying for childcare." She had to persuade *him* that she could take care of the kids and run for office. Lee never thought she would be able to run because her husband "is very high up in his career" and they homeschooled before sending the kids to public school. Amber could not even consider running until her children were grown. Fears about not having mom around to hold up the home life were prevalent even for more progressive couples.

Beyond childcare, there was a striking range of levels of support from spouses. Eve, a liberal Latina politician in her mid-30s, had a husband who gladly assumed primary caregiving responsibilities and attended council meetings to support her, even standing up to the mayor on a racist immigration bill despite his "crippling fear of public speaking." When Odessa told people she was going to run against a longtime incumbent, they asked her, "what is your husband gonna say?" To which she responded, "he's literally gonna say, 'okay.' And that's exactly what he said: 'okay.'" Throughout the campaign, he was "very hopeful and understanding" and a "big supporter." At the other end of the spectrum, women said their husbands were supportive, but their stories suggested otherwise. Robin's husband, as mentioned in Chapter 3.1, scoffed at the idea of her running. She described him as having always been her "biggest supporter," but over the course of the interview, it became clear that he often belittled the idea of her running. Despite Robin being a Boy Scout and Girl Scout leader, a volunteer on multiple campaigns, a volunteer for multiple nationwide advocacy organizations, a mom of two, and a successful business owner, her husband responded "give me a break" to Robin's dream of running. She continued, "If I want to be a state senator, is that something I can decide today and make happen in two years? Is that realistic, or am I just smoking something? According to my husband, it's not realistic. According to me, I'm like, I can do it!"

In “26 Common Barriers to Running for Office” in the Starter Kit, She Should Run’s response to the barrier of feeling like one does not have the right career background mentions needing “women who are stay at home moms” in office. The 26 barriers also include having a family, to which She Should Run responds that running for office is certainly “a balancing act” but that having a family should be a reason women run, not a reason they do not run. This answer goes on to talk about a parent’s unique perspective and the importance of including children in one’s campaign and getting family on board, without discussing *how* to do so. In the “Role Call Quiz,” She Should Run mentions “a mother who wants to ensure her city is safe for her and everyone’s children” as a potential candidate. Articles in the “Combatting Intersectional Barriers” Incubator course include a candidate talking about the guilt that “all working mothers feel” or the importance of a “husband willing to pick up the slack on everything I have to let go.” One webinar focuses on “creating space for public leadership in a busy life” but is not specifically about family obligations. Finally, the “Help Her Lead” program provides materials to help parents encourage political ambition in their daughters.

Nowhere does the platform delve more deeply into issues common to most women with families, and women noticed. Almost all the mothers I spoke to said they wished She Should Run addressed motherhood and family responsibilities more. In Emma’s words, “childcare isn’t a partisan issue. I think it’s a people issue. And women in politics aren’t the only ones that have that struggle. Just elevating that issue” would help mothers feel more seen. Likewise, women found She Should Run’s resources around sexism inadequate (if they found them at all). As with money- and party-related problems, She Should Run’s failure to effectively address sexism- and motherhood-related issues again widens the gap between She Should Run’s treatment of candidacy and women’s experience of it. Staying silent about the issues facing mothers

compromises She Should Run's potential to enfranchise one of the most marginalized groups in politics (Bernhard et al., 2021; McDonagh, 2009). In Chapter 5, I speak more to disconnects between what women need and what She Should Run provides.

3.4 From intersectional identities to internal barriers only

The "26 Common Barriers to Running for Office" resource (in the Starter Kit) begins with the acknowledgement that there are "a variety of societal and individual barriers that keep women from considering a run for office. Systemic racism and structural inequities faced by women of different backgrounds, socioeconomic status, sexual orientations, and religions mean there is seldom a one size fits all [sic] answer." However, the 26 barriers are primarily internal: not feeling qualified, not seeing oneself as a politician, fear of judgment, not knowing where to start, fear of public speaking, etc. Only one of the 26 deals directly with sexism and intersectionalities. Under "I don't want to be judged for who I am," She Should Run responds:

> Systemic sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, classism, and other forms of discrimination are real barriers women of multiple identities will face when running for office, but your unique experiences are exactly what makes your voice valuable to government. Women of all backgrounds are running and winning elected positions and there's plenty of organizations interested in supporting you! She Should Run works to show women of all walks of life that elected leadership *is* a possibility and our lesson on Combating Intersectional Barriers provides resources for women who cross multiple identities and want to be prepared and informed as they throw their hat in the ring. Additionally, here are six other organizations working to lift up underrepresented women."

The last sentence links to a brief article with blurbs about Higher Heights for America, aimed at helping Black women increase their political participation; the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies, promoting Asian Pacific Americans' involvement in politics;

Advance Native Political Leadership, geared toward increasing Native representation; Latinas Represent, which increases civic engagement among Latinas; Victory Institute, working to increase the number of LGBTQIA+ people in office; and the National Council on Independent Living, which helps people with disabilities run for office. In the member-only area of the platform, "Combatting Intersectional Barriers" is the first course in the Incubator and contains links to reports from advocacy organizations about barriers faced by marginalized identity groups as well as related articles from news outlets and worksheets from She Should Run. According to the platform, women taking this course can:

> …Utilize our Connecting Your WHY to Your Racial and Ethnic Identity worksheet and the Addressing Microaggressions and Overt Racist Actions As a Future Candidate worksheet to create frameworks for how you will respond to challenging situations along the campaign trail. We also encourage you to join an affinity group which is a dedicated, private space for women of various backgrounds to gather, share advice, network, mentor, and grow together."

A few recorded webinars accessible via the Community also touch on intersectional identity issues. In this sense, the virtuality of the platform lets She Should Run offer content targeting women at the intersections of gender and other marginalized social identities in the same space as material geared toward all women regardless of background. What these resources have in common is that they are mostly accessible only to dedicated members and not likely to be encountered by indifferent visitors. Even without an account, finding the Starter Kit and scrolling down to the sexism- and barrier-focused resources requires a bit of navigation and time. Accessing an event like the social media seminar requires enough familiarity with She Should Run to find out about the event and creation of an account with She Should Run to register. Accessing the Incubator requires creation of an account and visiting the Community and

navigating to the Incubator and then to the individual course. Most involved of all, joining an affinity group requires creation of an account, visiting the Community, browsing groups, and writing a short application to join the group.

Women could come away with very different pictures of She Should Run's approach to underrepresentation depending on their degree of involvement and which resources they happen to find. When one spends time digging into all the content, as I did for this research, it becomes clear that She Should Run is cognizant of structural barriers and trying to acknowledge them even if they do not *address* them per se. For example, the positioning of "Combatting Intersectional Barriers" as the first course in the Incubator (if not in the dropdown menu in the main header above the Community) may make it more likely to be clicked on by women wanting to go through every course and thus gives it the potential to shape how women process the material in other courses. However, many women attend an event here and there or look at a webpage or two and do not explore the Incubator or peruse even the external website to its fullest extent.[21] In most public areas of the platform, She Should Run presents underrepresentation solely as a likelihood issue. The home page states, "Women represent 51% of the US population. So why do they represent less than a third of the nation's elected leaders?" The question is not answered on this page, but a bolded heading on the About Us/What We Do page reads, "The Challenge We Face," directly followed by text stating that "women are less likely to run for public office and therefore are seriously underrepresented" (see Appendix V, Figure V.1). Why this might be the case is, again, not unpacked. Blog posts discuss "a lack of understanding of the specific duties and responsibilities of various roles in government" and "access to information

[21] Chapter 5 unpacks the related implications for women's ability to make full use of She Should Run's resources. This chapter focuses on how the fractured nature of involvement with the platform can shape women's perceptions of She Should Run's orientation to the problem of underrepresentation.

about offices available" as barriers. Other text suggests not knowing "where to start" prevents women from running. In short, most external content deals with things women can overcome through more education or training rather than structural obstacles.

From an organizational perspective, this variance is understandable. It perhaps feels like a safer bet to address persistent structural barriers only once women are more involved with the platform and thus able to be exposed to a greater supply of encouraging content to help offset "negative" discussion of external barriers. Women just checking things out who have not previously read about the state of women in politics or experienced structural obstacles for themselves could be more easily scared off by discussion of external barriers than women further along in their political leadership journeys who are (theoretically) committed enough to dig deep within the platform to explore all resources. As volunteer Margaret put it: "We're called She Should Run, and [talking about barriers] is like She Should *Not* Run." On the other hand, the lack of consistency around addressment of structural barriers could be part of the reason participants of color felt She Should Run did not speak to their experiences at the intersections of gender and race. Many still found the platform helpful in other ways but regretted that content did not seem to consider barriers unique to women of color. Volunteer Amy specified that "there certainly wasn't much discussion around, well, if you are a person of color, even if you are living in a diverse community, you're still going to be a minority candidate." Nor did She Should Run's resources suffice for Esther, who echoed Amy's sentiment and connected the lack of content for women of color with the lack of content addressing general sexism and the fact that different parts of the platform spoke about barriers differently:

> I think on the website they're very mindful about the challenges women face, but in the programs not necessarily. Especially compared to other organizations which are very upfront and outspoken about women having their expertise doubted by others,

> etcetera. To identify these things that all women face, to know it's out there and do it anyway."

Esther again makes the point that She Should Run's mission to motivate women may relegate discussion of structural barriers to more internal locations on the platform. Focusing on internal barriers may also seem like a good idea to a small nonprofit organization that feels ill-equipped and under-financed to deal with issues like under-funding, exclusionary party networks, and institutional sexism. However, Esther articulates the flaw in this thinking: Women know what they face, and these barriers exist regardless of whether CCRTs address them or not. The less women perceive recruitment organizations as addressing their personal experiences, the less those organizations increase women's political ambition (Morell, 2023). Failing to speak more to the needs and experiences of women of color in particular compromises CCRTs' potential to make candidate recruitment more equitable. Women of color are "far too often missing from ballots in White districts" (Shah et al., 2019, p. 429); their perspectives should not be missing from the candidate recruitment spaces crucial to increasing their representation (Sanbonmatsu, 2015a). The experiences of Latina women like Esther are particularly important considering the prevalence of Latinas on the platform (they make up 26 percent of interviewees) and the growing extent to which Latine people, "the soon-to-be largest ethnoracial group" in the U.S., "are poised to reshape the meaning of color and its relationship with many consequential [political] outcomes" (Ostfeld & Yadon, 2022, p. 1806). Unfortunately, the evolution of She Should Run's boilerplate over the past few years suggests a concerted effort to focus on internal rather than external barriers. In 2021, the boilerplate read:

> She Should Run is a national, nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to building a future of gender equality in elected office. We mobilize American women from all walks of life to fully acknowledge the systemic crisis of gender inequality and the unique role

> they play in addressing the challenges of the 21st century. Together, we cultivate this newfound awareness into political action."

By 2023, the boilerplate had been revised:

> She Should Run is a national, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) organization that increases the number of women considering a run for public office by helping them realize their potential. As the only lead-finders for the field of women's representation, the organization has a bold but necessary goal to inspire 250,000 women to take their first steps toward public leadership by 2030. She Should Run's programs are fueled by a vision to see historically underrepresented women play a leadership role in democracy through a movement that mobilizes women from all walks of life to awaken to the power of their leadership potential."

The 2021 boilerplate speaks to gender inequality as a "systemic crisis" and widespread acknowledgement of this crisis as She Should Run's primary goal. In 2023, the focus shifts from acknowledging systemic crisis to women "realiz[ing] their potential" and "awaken[ing] to the power of their leadership potential."

Where the "Combatting Intersectional Barriers" Incubator course may be a holdover from earlier years that emphasized gender inequality as a "systemic crisis," the events I analyzed aligned with She Should Run's revised focus on "awakening" women's potential. One striking example was the "Power in Purpose" series, which focused on helping women channel their values and personal experiences into thinking about how they could be effective in politics. She Should Run's biggest new offering in a while, conducted twice during the summer of 2022 and touted heavily across newsletters, blog posts, and social media, framed personal "experience" as "powerful" and something women needed to "unlock" for its potential to strengthen future campaigns. "Unlocking" women's "unique qualities and values" was expressly connected to "public leadership" and the benefit of women's leadership to democracy. This framing echoed

language in organizational blurbs and annual impact reports around "meeting women where they are" and urging women to see themselves as qualified.

Going further, the series handbook provided to participants stated that all women had the "potential" for political leadership if they could only gain "clarity" on their values and purpose. In line with She Should Run's emphasis on women as qualified, participants were assured that "they already have all it takes to lead in office." The handbook also highlighted She Should Run's updated mission statement, new in 2022, with branding as "the only lead-finders for the field of women's representation." The opening slide of the seminar reiterated this focus on women early in the pipeline but exchanged formal "lead-finding" language for a breezier take on the mission to cultivate women's political leadership, reading "She Should Run is a national, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) organization that increases the number of women considering a run for public office by helping them realize their potential." Interestingly, the seminar facilitator was a diversity consultant in higher education who had no clear overlap with politics or technology. Reading about her background in anti-racism work, which She Should Run shared with participants prior to the series, I expected some discussion of systemic barriers and the intersections of race with gender. However, part one of the series spoke only briefly to structural barriers even as women in the chat focused on them. (In part two, women were given two minutes to write barriers on a Google Jamboard titled "external barriers" and three minutes to add solutions to barriers posted by others.) By contrast, the series and workbook alike leaned heavily on Gay Hendricks' book The Big Leap (2009), couching women not running as an "upper limit problem."

As distilled in the seminar, the book explores limiting beliefs as an internal barrier to achievement (Hendricks, 2009). Hendricks coins the phrase "the upper limit problem" to discuss

how people only permit themselves to feel a certain level of happiness and ultimately sabotage themselves to prevent pursuing goals or achieving things that might bring them above this level (2009). In the facilitator's words, "the upper limit problem is things that keep us small and keep us operating from a place of fear." It was not clear whether using this book was the facilitator's choice or a She Should Run directive. However, given that a significant portion of the series handbook (designed and distributed by She Should Run) was devoted to exercises based on this book, the decision to use it may be taken as an indicator of She Should Run's approach. Copy advertising the series similarly expressed: "Women already have all the skills they need to make a difference. They just need to believe it."

At the same time, women contend with very real external barriers, from threats of violence and blatant sexism to lack of funds or political connections (James, 2019; Piscopo, 2019; Sobieraj, 2020; Wineinger, 2022).[22] The series facilitator opened with the assertion that women not "see[ing] themselves as politicians" is the biggest reason women do not run, but the chat revealed that fear for personal safety was women's biggest concern. Even as the facilitator kept to the upper limit script, participants in the chat kept discussing how "fear of retribution and social alienation" prevented them from running, how to enter politics was to invite "straight hate, why would anyone volunteer for this," and how "in our complete disaster of a society," running as a woman would mean "legit fear[ing] for [your] life." The chat resounded with agreement, from "oh gosh, good point," to "I have the same fears, to "it is INSANE that we

[22] The decision not to discuss these barriers (aside from the facilitator's early throwaway comment that "there are real structural things that keep us from identifying and reaching our true potential, but there are some barriers to reaching our potential that do reside within us") also illustrates my earlier point that She Should Run's treatment of obstacles is uneven: With an account and deeper involvement, the Incubator spotlights "Combatting Intersectional Barriers" as the first of five major pillars of considering a run (again, the five courses are "Combatting Intersectional Barriers," "Finding Pathways," "Fostering Communication," "Building Networks," and "Cultivating Leadership"). By contrast, Power in Purpose was some participants' first experience with She Should Run. Attending the series required only that women register via EventBrite, providing their name and email, without needing to visit the platform or join the Community.

have to think this way." Where original spiral of silence theory tied a tendency to remain quiet about one's political opinions to the belief that others did not share those opinions (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), women's fear derived not from holding specific opinions with which they worried others would disagree but from daring to express political opinions at all as women. The upper limit framework views fears as limiting internal beliefs (Hendricks, 2009), but these fears are astute situational assessments of the treatment of women in politics (Sobieraj, 2018, 2020). One woman spoke to "microaggressions against women of color," to which another replied, "this is huge." I was struck that neither the facilitator nor any of the She Should Run team members in attendance contributed to the chat, acknowledged women's concerns, or tried to redirect, missing an important opportunity to encourage women and make them feel seen (Morell, 2023). It is certainly true that women's perceptions of politics or personal lack of confidence can hinder them (Dittmar, 2015a; Lawless & Fox, 2010), and some women responded positively to series content. In the following section, I discuss the internal barriers interviewees faced in relation to She Should Run's focus on those barriers.[23]

3.5 Internal barriers

External barriers like money, political networks, and institutional sexism were cited much more prevalently among participants than barriers stemming from personal perceptions. That said, mothers faced significant "mom guilt." Women weighed heavily the possible negative impact of running on their families, even when their families were supportive. Odessa summed up: "My guilt has been the barrier, not my family themselves." Family-related guilt was compounded by sexist questions on the campaign trail. Emma's posture sinks as she addresses

[23] Chapter 5 delves into the assumptions about women that may be behind this focus and the implications of those assumptions for She Should Run's capacity to increase equity in woman candidate recruitment.

this. “One of my hardest things internally is feeling like I don't get this time with my kids. And I’m reminded of that every time someone asks me, ‘who's watching your kids?’ Or, you know, ‘where are you going to be when there's a soccer game?’” An article in the Incubator’s “Combatting Intersectional Barriers” course quotes a candidate talking about her “Mexican Catholic mom guilt about missing time with [her] children,” and, as mentioned in the previous section, a few places on the platform talk about involving children or making sure family is on board. Yet She Should Run largely does not address this concern apart from emphasizing the good that women could potentially do in office.

She Should Run was far more successful in helping the many women who spoke to feeling unconfident or unqualified build self-confidence and perceive themselves as more qualified. Volunteer Adriana emphasized: “The mission is to get more women in office. They literally put it on tote bags. But I think it expands a little bit more beyond that. It doesn’t matter what your background is, how qualified or unqualified you think you are. You belong here.” Adriana saw this messaging reflected in materials and leadership, and it resonated with users. Anne remembered the saying verbatim:

> They did a seminar that was like, here’s what you need to know before you run. That was very encouraging. One of their big things that I remember them saying multiple times throughout, was, **if you care, then you’re qualified**. Because in this job, your job is to represent the people. I don’t have to have a law degree or anything like that. At first, I didn’t know that. I thought you had to have a law degree. …I think She Should Run was what convinced me that I don’t really have to have any special qualifications for this, just being somebody that wants to represent the people and what they want, and that I care, is enough.”

Unlike She Should Run’s patchy addressment of external barriers, the theme of women being qualified is consistent throughout the platform and event programming. As with Anne’s

experience in the seminar, Amy's time in the Incubator was essential to "helping visualize that [she] could actually do this." The Starter Kit explains exactly what She Should Run means by "if you care, you're qualified":

> We have a saying at She Should Run: If you care, you're qualified. If you're asking yourself, who is going to fix my community? It's you [sic] with your unique story and experiences. You might think you need a certain degree, a legal background, tons of money, or that you have to be a political guru, but actually, the only "qualifications" you need to run for office are meeting the residency and age requirements. Confidence is a trait that can be built and projecting confidence helps build credibility and trust."

For Kayla, a Republican-turned-Democrat in her early 20s working abroad, running is a distant dream. Nevertheless, She Should Run's emphasis on women as qualified encourages her. She visits its Instagram whenever she "need[s] inspiration." After posting once to introduce herself in the introductions forum within the Community, Kayla also articulated that "reading other people's responses took it a step further with inspiration in the sense of like, ok, there's a community of women who are really inspired to change the representation in our government." Though she described the platform as "overwhelming" and had not "engaged with anyone on the platform personally," the stories she read when she first joined continued to inspire her. Kaya, too, expressed the importance of seeing other women in this space, even in the absence of direct personal connection:

> I think the thing that I most leaned on them for was combatting the feelings of anxiety, of imposter syndrome, and just hearing from other women, even if I wasn't engaging with them directly, even if it wasn't a conversation we were having…to hear from other women, especially in the discussion boards. And they were completely honest. That's the thing. They made it okay for you to say that you had anxiety. That you were battling anxiety. Or that you were a germaphobe.

> Or when it came to imposter syndrome, that you didn't finish your degree or that you had no college experience. Or that maybe you had just your high school. It was such a diverse group of folks that came from all walks of life. It was like all the armor was down. I just felt like that when I was reading, like they had no problem being their full authentic self. And that gives you permission to be your full, authentic self, too."

Kaya's time in the She Should Run Community helped build "affective solidarity" (Keller et al., 2018) with other women as she read and felt "emotional responses to shared oppressive experiences" (Clark-Parsons, 2018, p. 2129). As a space where some felt like "all the armor was down," She Should Run is unique online and at least partially realizes CCRTs' theoretical safe space potential; women usually feel they must be on guard on the internet (Hess, 2017; Sobieraj, 2018). For Kaya and others, She Should Run provided "a certain license to speak and act freely" (Kenney, 2001, p. 24). (Kaya did note that many of the discussions had not been active in a long time and that no one responded to her comments on different threads, which I will address in Chapter 4). Sydney, a Latina Democrat in her late 20s, was similarly encouraged by the other women in the virtual leadership cohort she had completed.[24] Even a few years on, she recalls:

> I felt pretty empowered. Honestly, I think it's great to be in a room of women looking to engage politically, regardless of affiliation or whatever societal expectations people may have of women in politics. [She Should Run] did a good job of making you feel like you could run for office. I think the empowerment aspect was really present."

Women's experiences highlight the importance of encouragement happening in community, where it feels personal and is tied to real people (Dittmar, 2015a; Pruysers & Blais, 2019). Their stories also show how, beyond combatting external barriers like lack of knowledge

[24] To the best of my knowledge, the last of these cohorts was offered in 2020, prior to this dissertation.

and networks, learning from politicians can help women picture political futures (Dittmar, 2015a). Not seeing themselves as politicians was far from being participants' biggest obstacle (despite She Should Run's assertion to the contrary during Power in Purpose[25]), but the incorporation of diverse voices enhanced the platform's value for women who felt excluded from politics. Of a "coffee chat" event, Fatima shared:

> I did not know that there was a BIPOC woman, Muslim woman in there. When I saw her picture, sitting there in that purple hijab surrounded by White-bodied persons, I said, my God, this sister. But I had no clue. And if I was not in that meeting space with the Councilwoman [I would have missed it]. She even talked about her own fight in the spaces that she had to weave in and out of and how she had to be authentically her. Those situations, they actually mean a lot."

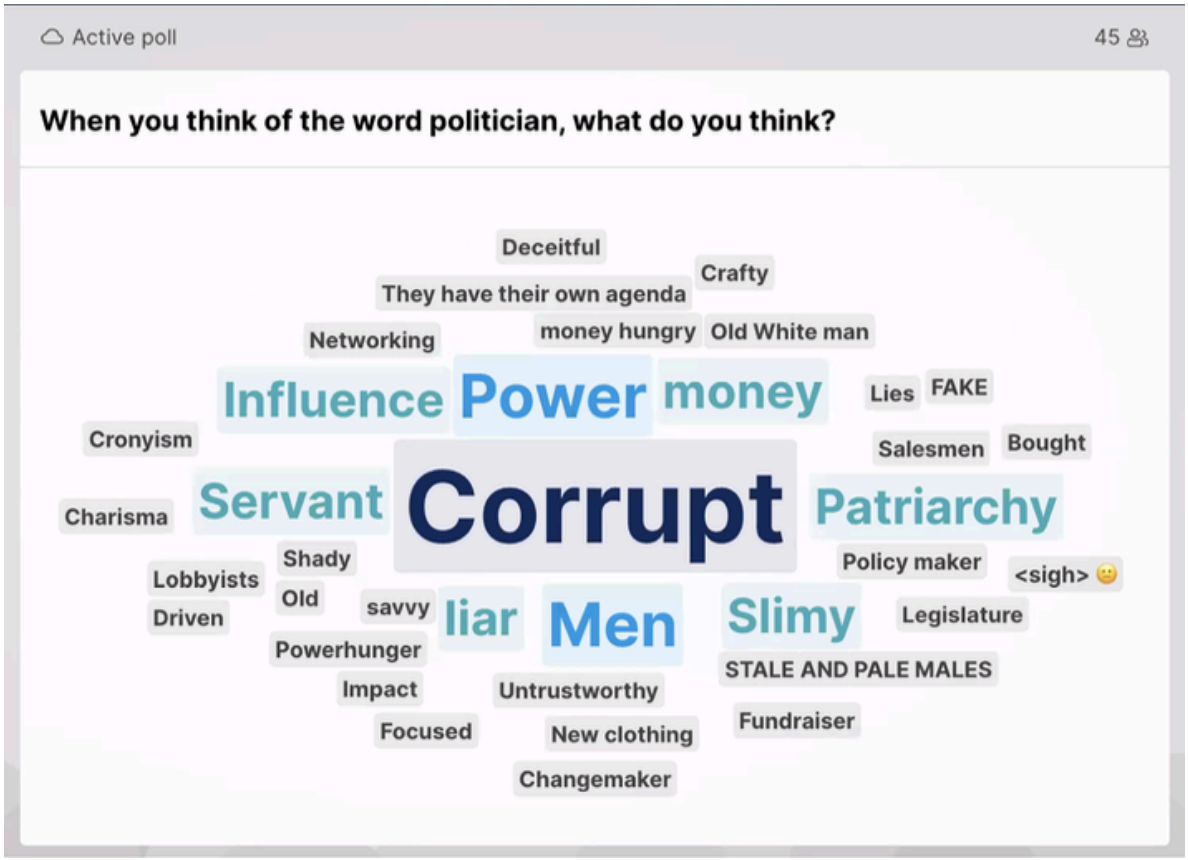
In short, "meeting" a politician who shared multiple marginalized identities with her encouraged Fatima to see herself in politics. By connecting diverse users with diverse officeholders, the affordance of multiway communication could increase equity in recruitment. Because encouragement from sitting officeholders can be particularly effective (Broockman, 2014), women may be more likely to perceive electoral success as possible (Dittmar, 2015a) and running for office as a rational choice (Shames, 2014) when encouragement comes from politicians who share women's identity contingencies (Pruysers & Blais, 2019; Sanbonmatsu, 2015b, 2015a; Shames, 2017). Similarly, my findings suggest that multiway communication has the potential to help decrease social identity threat, increase perceived social belonging, and affirm the perspectives of diverse women, all of which are important to making women feel

[25] No information about the data behind this assertion was ever provided. A March 2023 report suggests the data may have come from a survey of 419 women She Should Run commissioned in the spring of 2022. No further information about sample selection or representativeness is available. The next slide in the series displayed a bar graph entitled "other barriers," including "money," "support," "network," "qualifications," "time," "interest in politics," "confidence," and "drive about a specific topic." It is impossible to determine how many women were asked, what they were asked, or when, how, and by whom this research was conducted.

comfortable in a space and maximizing their achievement potential (Cook et al., 2011; Shnabel et al., 2013). Virtual connections with sitting politicians could help women chart their courses toward political leadership.

Yet negative views of politics and politicians remain widespread. During Power in Purpose, women were asked to type words they associated with politicians into a Slido poll. Figure 3.1 reveals that the word "corrupt" was by far women's strongest association with the word "politician," followed closely by "power" and "men." In third place came "influence," "servant," "money," "patriarchy," "liar," and "slimy." Women's conversations in the chat elaborated that they perceived politics as a space dominated by, in one woman's words, "stale and pale males," a phrase that resonated with other participants.

Figure 3.1. "Politician" word association.



The seminar then shifted to a "values clarification" activity that tasked women with identifying their most important personal values to help them "recognize where to spend most of [their] attention and what to prioritize." Women selected their 10 top values from a list of 77 ranging from achievement to wisdom, then narrowed down to five, then three. The workbook probed: "What impacted your top three choices? What experiences most impact your value choices? What would you want your community and potential voters to know about your values?" Women in the chat spoke to values like "integrity and justice" and "wisdom and innovation." Figure 3.2 shows that integrity was most common, followed by community, and then diversity, democracy, and meaningful work.

Figure 3.2. Women's top values.

The first woman to make it back to the chat from Slido wrote, “We can’t lose sight of these as we try to enter a political space – ESPECIALLY as we just discussed how corrupt it can be!” When this message appeared, the facilitator chuckled nervously, clearing her throat before admitting, “That’s the point of this.” And then, jokingly, “Were you looking at my notes?” However, nothing more was said to help women synthesize the disparate exercises. The seminar moved forward to touch on a 2014 Harvard Business Review definition of leadership and statistics on women not applying for jobs unless they feel they are 100 percent qualified, as opposed to men, who apply at 60 percent. In the chat, participants stayed on the subject of values, articulating the massive gap between women’s self-concepts and their perceptions of politicians. “I think it’s telling,” one said, “that we don’t want to be seen as similar to how we see politicians…This is a completely different list than how we see current politicians.” This woman voiced a unique take on the internal barrier at the crux of the series (women not being able to visualize themselves in politics). Yet her comment did not merit even the brief acknowledgement the facilitator gave the comment about not “los[ing] sight” of values. This comment’s implication that fear of being seen negatively by others was a reason not to run could also have been used as a learning opportunity in line with the upper limit framework. It was surprising that neither the facilitator nor She Should Run team members clearly connected the dots for women between perceptions of politicians and women’s own values. Participants in the chat did engage with this comment even as the facilitator ignored it. One emphasized the gap between politics and personal values, contrasting how current politics “IS NOT WORKING at all” with the need for “something radically different.” Another asked an insightful question: “Don’t you think those in elected office started out closer to this spectrum? I’m sure they had (or still think) they have values too, even if most of us don’t agree.” To which a woman replied they

probably did, but that they get "sucked in or sucked under." Again, the chat revealed participants' thinking in response to the seminar theme, and again it went unacknowledged by the facilitator or She Should Run. In failing to engage with women here, She Should Run missed an important opportunity to "meet women where they are" and discuss candidacy on women's own terms.

In sum, She Should Run's efforts to maintain a unilaterally encouraging tone that motivates women may hinder its ability to address the barriers of greatest concern to women. A woman attending any She Should Run programming or visiting any part of the platform would get a clear sense of She Should Run's emphasis on helping women perceive themselves as more qualified, but which event a woman attended or which content she consumed could lead to quite different perceptions of She Should Run's approach to structural barriers. To be sure, some women find She Should Run encouraging and inspirational. Connecting women with sitting politicians offers real benefit to women's networks and political self-concepts. Yet the prevalence of external barriers discussed in interviews and the opposite emphasis on internal barriers in She Should Run's programming make the platform less effective than it could be for women of color and working-class women who do not see their concerns adequately addressed. This disparity compromises She Should Run's potential to increase equity in the candidate recruitment space. More broadly, disconnects between how running for office is discussed and engaged within CCRTs and how women themselves experience running hamper CCRTs' ability to productively expand technological action potentials around woman candidate recruitment.

Chapter 4 Negotiating Divergent Logics: Collective Action in Tension with Connective Action

Where She Should Run provides highly structured coursework, quizzes, and events in the rest of the platform, the analyses that follow reveal how the Community depends on connective action logics undergirded by organic, user-driven behavior that is difficult to motivate within collective action contexts where an organization has otherwise been directing behavior (Bimber, 2017). In this chapter, I find that a further difficulty of this approach to the Community stems from She Should Run's nonpartisan ethos, which impedes women's ability to individualize their involvement (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011, 2013a). Not least, removing opportunities for party- or issue-based connection requires women to connect based on womanhood alone, which most women found insufficient for motivating participation. Women have traditionally not been activated just by the shared identity of "woman" (Henderson-King & Stewart, 1994; McConnaughy, 2013), and, in some cases, partisan women distrust opposing-party women *more* than opposing-party men (Klar, 2018). CCRTs do not appear to be changing that reality. She Should Run's heavy reliance on volunteers to try and drive Community participation also complicates connective action logics and can leave the space feeling inauthentic. Finally, I find that technological infrastructure is crucial to user buy-in and connective action. Technological shortcomings of the platform hinder the growth of She Should Run's Community even as they reflect valuable intentions to combine online learning and social networking.

4.1 Freedom to personalize in tension with nonpartisan guidelines

Connective action causes are generally built up on social media platforms (such as #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter or the Arab Spring on Facebook). She Should Run is trying to build a social media platform on a cause. This presents several challenges. For one, people are already using social media; they do not usually join just to participate in a movement. In this case, however, women must make an account with She Should Run, an act representing some level of causal and organizational buy-in, before they can join the Community and post or see others' posts.[26] Further, the social media platforms that come to mind when one thinks of social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) are widely known, and, while political in a more abstract sense (Gillespie, 2010), not built around a circumscribed user base or a single category of political content. For She Should Run, the user base is limited to women who are already interested in the cause of political underrepresentation in some way *and* manage to find She Should Run.[27]

So, too, does the coexistence of two disparate types of action environments potentially complicate participation. The action environment created and communicated by She Should Run's other resources and events, through which most women come to She Should Run, is highly structured and organizationally brokered. Women may then join the Community expecting a similar brokering. Instead, the Community seems intended to be sustained by individual users posting organically. The sparsity of user posts and predominance of employee and volunteer posts reveal that users are largely unresponsive to this logic, perhaps in part because expectations of guidance around participation go unmet. Indeed, She Should Run's decision to increase engagement via organization-approved volunteer posts (discussed in Chapter

[26] This also involves a tension between She Should Run's imagined audience of women just beginning to consider running and the actual users of the platform, discussed in the following chapter.
[27] This again involves a tension between imagined and actual users.

4.3) epitomizes organizationally prompted action logics. It results in global and group newsfeeds filled primarily with posts that clearly are not coming from regular users. While understandable, this approach to increasing engagement reinforces user expectations of organizationally brokered action instead of encouraging users to post individually. Group leader Audrey regretted that "stuff isn't member-driven. [We don't] give the actual members a chance to do it."

Moreover, rather than welcoming users to contribute content freely and bring boundless personalized action frames to bear, posts in the Community are limited to nonpartisan content. Women are being asked to personalize contentious politics (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013a) without actually being contentious. Unfortunately for She Should Run, one of the most important pieces of connective action is the personalization of action frames, or ways of talking about political issues and rationales for involvement in these issues (Copeland et al., 2016). The logics of individual involvement must be open to "flexible association with causes, ideas, and political organizations" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 5). On one level, She Should Run seems to recognize the importance of flexibility. The "Building a Better Community" email course looks at civic engagement broadly, from government to "schools, nonprofits, business, faith-based organizations, and beyond." The "Role Call" quiz, which emphasizes that "you don't have to be a woman running for office to join the fight for equal representation," "expand[s] the conversation to discuss all the various ways everyone can step in and get involved with women's representation." These "various ways" include as a candidate, a champion (who helps motivate candidates), a connector (who helps build candidates' networks), an influencer (who helps "society understand the importance" of representation), an insider (who has extensive political experience), or an investor (who donates to and fundraises for candidates). These roles can certainly help women who do not want to run see their way toward other avenues of supporting

equal representation.[28] However, the roles are still action frames created by the organization rather than users. Even the long list of ways to engage provided to "Building a Better Community" participants to determine their "civic engagement score" ultimately represents She Should Run's construal of civic engagement as a precursor to running.

Similarly, the Community's nonpartisan ethos asks users to buy into womanhood writ large as the overarching action frame and then stick to compatible sub-frames if they post, without invoking party- or issue-based content. Trying to build a connective action Community within these strictures is incongruent with the rest of the resources' focus on helping women specify their motivations for running and connect their personal values to political issues. The process of becoming more ready to run necessarily involves political specification of the kind women are encouraged *not* to bring to the Community. Sydney, who did the Incubator but was never active in the Community, sighs and sums up: "It's very limiting to women with strong political views." She Should Run seems to understand that women are likely to be partisan without understanding the extent of cognitive dissonance within the different parts of the platform and its implications for engagement. The first guideline for Community users emphasizes that "She Should Run is 100% nonpartisan" but that "we understand our Community is not. We expect that our participants will treat each other with respect and dignity regardless of partisan affiliation." Under FAQs in the volunteer group leader guide, She Should Run includes the question, "What if someone posts that they want to run against someone of a certain political party because they believe they are not helping their community or because they want to turn their state blue/red?" She Should Run writes:

[28] Chapter 5 further explores how the current incarnations of these tools may help or hinder women's political advancement.

> This is okay! As more and more women consider a run for office, many women will be inspired to run because their current elected officials' values don't line up with theirs or because they want to see their state's policies become more in line with policies they believe in. In these situations, it's important to affirm how the person feels and steer the conversation towards how they can take action. Sample response could look like this: 'Thanks for sharing what fires you up about getting involved and why you're considering a run for office! Many women run for office because they feel like their current elected officials' values don't line up with theirs. If you haven't already, I recommend checking out our Values Clarification worksheet in the She Should Run Incubator! Narrowing down what is most important to you will help you be authentic in communicating your vision for running for office.'"

This response is surprising. First, it is generic and seems designed to conclude the conversation rather than facilitate further discussion, two characteristics contrary to the aims of trying to increase Community engagement. Second, regarding party, this response makes clear—to volunteer group leaders—that it *would* be acceptable for women to talk specifically about their partisan affiliation or the personal beliefs that motivate them to run. For users, however, the extent of personalization permitted is unclear, and women feel like they should not speak to party or personal beliefs. Again, this injunction is functionally incompatible with the ability to personalize that lies at the core of connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011, 2013a; Bimber, 2017; Linabary et al., 2020). The fact that She Should Run's "100% nonpartisan" Community Guidelines could easily be read as *prohibiting* partisan discussions may be one of the reasons the community struggles so mightily to increase engagement. The Incubator, webinars, and resources on one hand, in comparison with the Community on the other, reveal that nonpartisanship works to initiate engagement but not to sustain engagement. For example, She Should Run being nonpartisan helps Emma feel comfortable recommending the platform to

women who approach her about getting involved in politics, even when she is unsure of their political views. She herself, however, only attends webinars occasionally and does not use the Community. Nor does she know whether the women to whom she has recommended She Should Run use the Community. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Hannah, who identifies as a moderate Republican, loved that she did not have to pick a party to use the platform:

> On the Fourth of July, there was some dancing on the city lawn…it's a day to leave politics behind, come together and just have some fun. There was a group of [people] over there dancing, and they said, come dance with us, I had so much fun just getting up and dancing. They didn't ask what party I was in. That's kind of the way I see She Should Run. As that group that's going from person to person saying, hey, get out here and play with us. Dance with us. It's going to be fun. That's just exactly how I see them."

Hannah felt overwhelmingly positively about She Should Run. Yet her feelings of warm welcome came from initial interactions with the organization and her experience with the Incubator—not from the Community. She had posted only once in the Community and received a few helpful comments, but that was the extent of her Community engagement. She did not connect with other women via the platform. Hannah's experience reinforces that poor engagement does not necessarily stem from lack of user buy-in to the idea of being nonpartisan or She Should Run assuming women can set aside partisanship when they cannot. Women overwhelmingly do appreciate She Should Run's nonpartisan approach ideologically and at the point of entry. This is especially true for women like Hannah with weaker party affiliations or more mixed views, or women eyeing nonpartisan offices for future runs. Rather, the problem is that She Should Run's nonpartisan ethos may decrease women's comfort posting in the Community. The same does not seem true for live events, where women have event attendance in common, conversations revolve around event content rather than organic user contributions, and

chats disappear as soon as the Zoom ends. Paige, another Republican who found She Should Run encouraging, discussed this difference with live events:

> It's one of the only communities ever that you can throw something in a chat and it's very supportive. When you're getting used to being a future politician, anytime you put anything on other social media platforms, you know someone's always gonna just roast you and be so cruel, like they usually are. But that is not an experience I had at all [with] She Should Run. I could just say things [like], I don't know what I'm doing. And the people are not unsupportive. They are very encouraging, which is nice… people see a topic, and they respond appropriately, which is so nice, so interesting, that [it's] a safe space, for a political organization."

Paige felt safe surrounded by "all just women trying to learn the ropes, people learning, trying to grow together. I see it as a platform that is there to help you grow." Again, this perception derived primarily from Paige's experiences with the educational resources and the live events rather than the Community itself.[29] Like Hannah, she had posted once in the Community and received a few helpful comments, but that was it.

Calls to discuss one's thoughts or realizations via a post in the Community are peppered throughout the Incubator. Yet for a woman unsure what she is allowed to say, these calls are difficult to answer. Course material often asks women to tap into personal values or issue stances that reveal partisan leanings. Feeling unable to personalize involvement with the Community beyond logistical thoughts (e.g., how do I hire a campaign manager) or experiences of sexism (e.g., outfit criticisms) limits the possible range of individually sourced action frames women can contribute and hinders women from establishing the deeply personal involvement that gives a

[29] As discussed in Chapter 3, Kaya also described She Should Run as a safe space. Her perception was based on old posts in discussion forums, which are, once again, separate from the Community proper. No one had responded to Kaya's own comments, however, rendering She Should Run more of a static resource than a dynamic community for her.

movement momentum (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013a; Bimber, 2017; Boler et al., 2014). In short, nonpartisanship may be an initial draw, but there is no evidence that it facilitates Community engagement. Being nonpartisan perhaps helps She Should Run bring more women to the platform initially and motivate engagement with other resources, but it does not motivate engagement in the Community even among women who love the nonpartisan ethos.[30]

4.2 Womanhood as identity

As discussed in Chapter 1, women's identity as women is generally less salient to them than other social identities (Goss, 2012; Rinehart, 2013). She Should Run hopes women will set these other identities aside. Unfortunately, "the importance of gender to one's conception of self" is actively "conditioned by other sources of social identity" with which women identify more strongly, such as race or partisanship (Bittner & Goodyear-Grant, 2017, p. 563). She Should Run may be suffocating connective action by installing "womanhood" as the overarching action frame. Group leader Amy had not visited the platform in over five months at the time of the interview and attributed her absence to the impossibility of thinking of herself as a woman first:

> When I think about my identity, 'woman' sure is somewhere on that list. But it's not one of the first five I think about, right? It's just so huge. It's literally half the population. Like, what are the policy areas that significantly affect women? Obviously, there are a ton, but there's way more division within the needs of women. So, I don't think of myself as, my main political bent is around women's rights. I certainly think about gender equity when I'm thinking about political areas, but it's just too broad of an identity group to really be, for me, a political

[30] Regarding programming, there was not a clear partisan divide between women who liked the content and women who did not. The clearest partisan throughline applied to both parties, such that women who were more partisan felt less safe in the Community. As discussed in the previous chapter, Democratic women of color did express a desire for programming that more explicitly spoke to their experiences at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities but not to a desire for programming that took a more progressive stance on political *issues*, per se. (The sample did not contain any Republican women of color.)

> home. It's like a first step, but not enough. …It didn't really feel like [being a woman] was the strongest identity that I have to form a community."

Valerie, a White Republican-turned-Independent corporate consultant in her late 30s, lauded She Should Run's nonpartisan ethos but echoed the limits of this approach for community-building, especially in today's political climate:

> I appreciate them being nonpartisan, because I still think women in office is really the most important thing. …But then, also, when women's rights are under attack, it's like, we gotta choose a side. And [She Should Run] actually does; I think they sent an email which made me go, okay, they are at least on the right side of this issue [Roe v. Wade overturning]. But yeah, I think that they have to be very mild in that sense. How do you rally people when you only have one core idea, we need more women in office? I feel like they need more than that."

Amy and Valerie reveal that needing more women in office is a start but does not suffice as the Community's sole organizing logic. Where nonpartisanship prevents women from speaking freely, it restricts women's involvement with the platform. Further, as She Should Run works to deepen women's political engagement and "move women forward on their political leadership journeys," women's more salient identities and issue stances increasingly strain against this restriction. For Emma, who was running at the time and now holds office, experiences on the campaign trail reinforced that "being a woman" was more of a jumping-off point than a basis for true community:

> It's hard, because I think [they] want to stay nonpartisan, and I think women feel connected in the beginning. …But then it's like, okay, coming to these issues. At the end of the day, issues are what divide us. I think they do a good job of marketing to a vast group of people, but I'm just thinking in a community aspect, how can you make it more personal?…Being a woman is kind of our only common thread. And She Should Run [wants] to be that common thread, of these

> are women that all believe in the same thing, in seeing women get elected. So, how can you take it from that, allowing that to be a common thread to [actual] communities?"

Emma reiterates the distinction between nonpartisanship as an initial draw and the need for deeper commonalities beyond "being a woman" to sustain Community engagement, thirding Amy's and Valerie's perceptions that womanhood is not an identity "personal" enough to build a community around. The lack of common feeling attached to the identity "woman" was especially evident among women on the far left and far right. While even these very liberal and very conservative women articulated an ideological appreciation of She Should Run's nonpartisan approach, some felt unsafe knowing that women with polar opposite political views could see anything they wrote. On the far left, Amy concluded that "being nonpartisan is part of the aspect that held people back from being more open" in her virtual cohort. "The discussions with[in] She Should Run didn't feel as safe, because from introductions we could tell that there are people in this room on very different ends of the spectrum politically. If you're, like, crafting your personal narrative, it doesn't really feel like a safe place to do that." Ultra-Republican Lee felt that materials leaned left and that the Community was composed of mostly Democrats. "There's some keywords that they would use, and I'm not saying that these words are wrong. But this is a trigger [for] the left. 'Inclusion,' 'diversity'…you could see that they were clearly Democrats." She felt she didn't really "fit in:"

> Another conservative woman said, Lee, be careful with that organization, because there could be people follow[ing] us. We have people that follow us. They're trying to entrap us. So, I got concerned since I saw it was left-leaning, and though I would love to partner with those left-leaning sisters, I could have potentially been entrapped, and [being affiliated with] this left organization could damage my campaign. Just like if I donated to Bernie Sanders or something, that would be

> front-page news in my district. It would be very similar if I attached myself to [She Should Run], so I had to be careful with that."

Despite her professed hope "to partner with those left-leaning sisters," Lee was afraid of people finding out she was affiliated with an organization that seemed Democratic and was not confident enough in the womanhood she held in common with other users to post anything in the Community, worried that it would come back to bite her. Angelica, another "very conservative" White Republican in her late 30s, posted several times in the She Should Run Community offering her help as a campaign consultant or recommending services she used during her two unsuccessful runs for office. The only response she received was from She Should Run team members, whom she felt were "comfortable with [her] being there" and "did a good job staying nonpartisan," "though you can still kind of tell" from other materials that they are mostly Democrats.[31] When it came to other users, however, Angelica was conscious of being in the minority and reticent as a result: "I didn't really fit in. It felt like there weren't many women in my party that I can connect with here, [that] there weren't really a lot of women in my party. … I've never really gotten into policy and issues there. I just mostly talked about running, so I'm always staying neutral."

While it could be argued that Community deadness is in part related to conservative women feeling restricted by the liberal undertone of the platform rather than its nonpartisan ethos, Angelica clarified that the materials' leftward lean did not discourage her or make her feel unwelcome. It was the sense that she did not know if there were other conservatives in the Community that prevented her from posting more often or more personally. Further,

[31] There are many examples, including the "keywords" Lee mentions above. Another example of clear "liberal coding" is the implicit biases assessments included as part of the "Building a Better Community" series coursework, which use language that is currently anathema to many in the Republican Party.

nonpartisanship works within organizationally sourced aspects of the platform like the Incubator and webinars. It only falls down in the Community. If people curate their social media to surround themselves with like-minded others and those like-minded networks facilitate engagement (McPherson et al., 2001), feeling surrounded by women with opposite views may make the Community stagnant—especially when the common identity of womanhood can *decrease* trust among cross-partisan women, such that women distrust opposing-party women even more than opposing-party men (Klar, 2018). As yet, engaging with She Should Run does not seem to forge relational ties between women or facilitate the creation and maintenance of a shared identity as women (Parks, 2010; Wellman, 2001, 2005; Willson, 2006). The platform has the technical capacity to bring diverse women into one space, but womanhood is an insufficient binding agent where other identities are not also held in common. Women here continue to "do politics as women but not united by womanhood" (McConnaughey, 2019). The very guidelines meant to make She Should Run more flexible and *accommodating* to women of all political stripes end up *restricting* women's ability to communicate with other users and engage sustainably in the Community.

Leaving the Incubator and webinars open to all without partisan filtering but organizing the Community differently could perhaps keep the nonpartisan aspects of the platform that attract users while giving women safer-feeling spaces to communicate with more homophilous networks (McPherson et al., 2001). Women could opt in to one of four possible Communities, with the options of Democrat, Republican, Independent, or nonpartisan. Instead of burying Community guidelines about confidentiality under a discussion thread under a discussion forum under a dropdown menu, women could be presented with a screen reminding them of She Should Run's goals and that by joining (and "checking the box below" or some such) they are agreeing

to keep conversations confidential. While not perfect, this approach could help structure the Community more in alignment with connective action logics and reinforce the technical and discursive boundaries essential to maintaining digital safe spaces (Clark-Parsons, 2018). In one sense, more organization-based action frames are present initially if women opt into different Communities by partisanship and are reminded of confidentiality requirements. At the same time, women's experiences make clear that action frames around running for office are grounded more deeply in party and issues than in gender identity. Removing the restrictions imposed by She Should Run's nonpartisan ethos could free women to personalize their involvement with the Community and increase engagement, helping She Should Run more effectively realize CCRTs' potential to expand women's political networks and provide encouragement.

Taken together, my findings highlight the power of user perceptions. Because "imagined affordances emerge between users' perceptions, attitudes, and expectations; between the materiality and functionality of technologies; and between the intentions and perceptions of designers," (Nagy & Neff, 2015, p. 5), She Should Run's intention to create a safe Community for all women and the material existence of this digital space are complicated by women's beliefs about what is permitted within nonpartisan bounds and the reality that womanhood is too weak an identity to work as the Community's backbone. It might technically be allowable to make party- or issue-specific comments (per the group leader guide), but women's perception that they cannot speak about those things becomes an aspect of the technology itself that "encode[s] possibilities for action"—in this case, limiting action (Nagy & Neff, 2015, p. 5). The latter part of this chapter speaks more to the "materiality and functionality" of the platform and related implications for connective action. First, I explore how the organizational imperative to increase engagement plays out in this nonpartisan Community.

4.3 Who bears the burden of motivating action?

There is some organizational recognition that the Community, as the volunteer leader guide puts it, "doesn't have a ton of engagement." Instead of paid team members, however, volunteer group leaders are being asked to do the heavy lifting of community building: Urging volunteers not to "get discouraged" when no one responds to their posts, the guide clarifies that "a big reason why you [volunteers] were brought on was to help build up engagement." One of the tensions of a community-building strategy founded on volunteer posts involves attempting to spur connective action through the collective action approach of organization-sponsored calls to engage in specific ways (Bimber, 2017). Leaning on volunteers to post also places high labor demands on women who are not organizational stakeholders to the degree that paid team members are. Volunteers are women with full lives outside of She Should Run who rarely have the capacity to post regularly, much less moderate (e.g., keep up with conversations and reply to all posts and comments).[32] Perhaps because of the deferral of community-building work to volunteers, She Should Run team members likewise tend not to comment to continue discussions on the rare occasions when they post *and* a user responds (even more seldom).

Nonprofits operate with slim margins, and growing an online Community takes a lot of work and time. Be that as it may, She Should Run's rhetorical emphasis on the Community is not paired with the organizational labor necessary for the Community to flourish. This incongruence negatively impacts women's experiences. Kayla posted once to introduce herself when a volunteer tagged her, but as no one responded, she did not return. Even in the "Building a Better

[32] She Should Run's heavy reliance on volunteers to build the Community may also reveal a disconnect between who volunteers are and who She Should Run perceives them to be. The organization perhaps believes them to be so dedicated that they can prioritize posting often in the Community despite the lack of reward for these efforts, the ongoing lack of Community engagement, and the many other obligations and responsibilities they hold beyond She Should Run.

Community" course, for which a private group in the Community was created and where, to my knowledge, there were no volunteers, only paid staff, some users introduced themselves in a private message thread set up for course participants. No one responded to these introductions. Future communications came from employees, related to completing coursework. Out of 202 participants over the course of four weeks, only six women total ever commented on employees' posts, which primarily consisted of discussion prompts and reflection questions. Only one user ever posted on her own and met with one lonesome "like" from an employee. No employees ever commented on women's comments to acknowledge their input or engage them further. She Should Run urges volunteers [and interns] to post but does not seem to place importance on keeping conversations going or following up with women.

The 10 volunteers I interviewed were all firm believers in the importance of She Should Run and committed to the cause of women's representation. Yet at the time of writing, only Amy had been active in the Community within the last week. The next most recently active leader, Beth, was last active eight weeks ago. Eri was last active four months ago. Riley, Adriana, Kristen, Margaret, and Addy were last active five months ago, Audrey seven months ago. For Naomi, it had been over a year since her last Community activity. It became clear that most volunteers saw posting in the She Should Run Community as a time-consuming task with little return on investment. Posting fell by the wayside with everything else going on in their lives. Riley felt guilty:

> It's hard for me to find time to put a lot of effort into She Should Run right now. I could definitely do better about bringing concerns or bringing solutions [to lack of engagement] to the table, which is why I don't want to blame [She Should Run] at all, because I'm not doing my part either, about helping and being the solution. There's an expectation that we grow our groups. There's an expectation that we're posting regularly with them, and there's an expectation that we're participating in

> She Should Run events. I'll be honest. I've done very bad at probably all three of those, just because I've been busy."

Riley highlights that there are clear "expectations" and a clear "part" for volunteers to play in remedying the lack of Community engagement. Many volunteers used language like "doing my part" or "playing my part" to refer to posting in the Community; She Should Run has successfully communicated to volunteers that the responsibility for growing the Community rests with them. Volunteer Kristen spoke to the weight of these expectations:

> It's been challenging to get people to engage, because what I've noticed is that people sign up and create an account, and sometimes they do it because they want to get access to the resources, and then they drop off. And so, it's really hard to connect on a continuing basis and see this type of community in other ways. …Within [my] group I've really struggled with just getting it off the ground and going. I'm talking about, crickets. And you feel demotivated. Like, okay, I know we're supposed to have a posting schedule, but nobody cares. … I think that She Should Run has really, I don't know if they've recognized this, but has really struggled to kind of keep momentum going."

Kristen raises several important points. One, her take on the problem of disengagement hints at the disconnect between the collective action logics of involvement that characterize webinars, the Incubator, and all other platform resources apart from the Community in contrast with the Community itself, which is structured like Facebook and designed to rely on organic user activity rather than organizationally delineated courses of action. Similarly, the structured nature of She Should Run's other offerings could engender expectations of greater organizational guidance around Community engagement that leave women directionless and idle in its absence. Second, Kristen suggests She Should Run's provision of a "posting schedule" is not that helpful because women (including herself) do not stick to it. She also articulated a suspicion common

among volunteers that She Should Run does not "recognize" the extent of the engagement problem or understand that the level of effort required to fix it is beyond volunteers' capacity. Kristen expressed the frustration of being asked for so much as only a volunteer stakeholder:

> It's a job that we're not paid to do. I'm like, you know, if you're a volunteer, why don't [they] just send us a couple of stickers? Like, [they] don't have to pay for anything other than shipping. But this does something, instead of [saying], 'Well, you need to be doing this.' I'm like, all right. I'm not getting paid and I'm volunteering. I'm like, just meet me on a sticker. Just a little something where it's like, you recognize I am a volunteer. Because the time commitment. I'm like, I got a job. I'm trying my best, and nobody's responding."

A few volunteers had received merchandise as a token of appreciation, but others, like Kristen, had not. More to the point, every volunteer spoke to the time commitment. The burden grew as She Should Run's demands increased. Eri traced this evolution:

> At the start it was loose, like we were expected to post, [then] we were expected to moderate toward the end of my first year. In this role, the expectations became more solidified. We were expected to, X number of times per week, try and tag as many people as you can. Try to get engagement, right, tag people, so that it directly shows up [in their newsfeed]. I wouldn't say that necessarily worked better, but it did provide some consistency, at least as a moderator, for your posting. Because it is a volunteer role on top of everyone pretty much doing, you know, their entire other lives. So, that provided some structure, but it could also be stressful at times. Because you're supposed to post so much, and for me, being a mother and having two boys in elementary school, some of those summer months, I was like, this is really, really tough. I'm just trying to keep my house from spiraling into chaos. I can't think of a creative post right now or a target motivational post."

Though the "structure" of She Should Run's expectations could be helpful, Eri emphasized that the "volunteer role" felt like an additional burden "on top of" her other obligations. Her prevailing feeling about being a volunteer was that it was "definitely an uphill slog." In other words, for Kristen and Eri, the benefits of participating did not outweigh the costs (Downs, 1957; Shames, 2014). Eri also speaks to the difficulty of generating suitably "creative" or "motivational" content up to the standards set forward in the volunteer guide. As discussed in Chapter 2, I was unable to speak with the organization directly, but She Should Run's call for volunteer leaders included requirements that volunteers "post at least 3x a week on designated days in the group, following the themes provided by She Should Run" and "support fellow volunteers by commenting on their posts" (in addition to sending monthly invites to new Community Members). Per the guide, "monthly themes are guideposts that Group Leaders should utilize when creating content and posting in the She Should Run Community. Each monthly theme is a She Should Run value."[33] For example,

> Imagine the Possibilities. Posts for this theme should focus on the world women can build by running for office and serving their communities. Examples of community posts can include: Asking them what behaviors they want to see from their elected leaders and how they want to show up. Asking them if they could wave a magic wand, what would their community/country/ the world look like? Asking them if they could do something without worrying about fears or cost, what would it be? Asking them to share a time they pushed for a new idea at work or in their community and what that felt like. Sharing examples of times you thought outside the box and encouraging them to share theirs. Sharing examples of firsts who blazed the trail and imagined the possibilities for themselves and their communities. Asking them when they felt like an underdog or and [sic] outsider and how that connects to why they want

[33] According to the website, the six values include imagine the possibilities, challenge the status quo, make an impact, build inclusive community, honor diverse voices, and cultivate a culture of learning and curiosity.

> to serve. Asking them what issues do they already advocate for and how would they like to develop their knowledge on those issues. Encouraging them to set a goal for making connections in the SSR Community."

The guide also provides "questions and conversation starters" that are not necessarily theme-related, such as asking women about what they are doing on the weekend or what they are reading, but ultimately places the burden on volunteers to "test, test, test, and get creative" to determine what kinds of posts drive the most engagement. A volunteer call urged women to "evaluate the success of topics and conversations and monitor the growth of the group" while soliciting feedback from members and providing feedback to She Should Run. Beth echoed that the Community was "a work in progress…kind of trial-and-error of how can we get this better? We don't know yet."[34]

Volunteer experiences and the group leader guide reveal She Should Run's belief that posting more and tagging users will lead to organization-prompted and socially prompted behavior (Bimber, 2017)—women responding to posts from She Should Run employees and volunteers, respectively—with the ultimate goal of self-directed behavior (women posting and responding to other users' posts unprompted). Addy reiterated that "the goal was just to grow their online Community. When you see us posting, it's really to generate other responses and ensure that other people that aren't volunteers know that She Should Run is there. Just like making sure everyone knows that we're active, and people are engaging in conversation with each other." Theoretically, this approach makes sense: Socially prompted and self-directed behavior fuel connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013b; Chen, 2020; Suk et al., 2021). Practically, however, this approach assumes that women are visiting the Community, browsing

[34] Chapter 5 discusses the content of these prompts and the embedded assumptions about users. The current chapter remains focused on the logics involved.

the newsfeed, and simply not seeing anything that grabs their attention enough to motivate likes, comments, or posts of their own. It does not question the organizational and Community characteristics or platform participation logics potentially hindering engagement. Nor does it consider where the current technological infrastructure of the platform supports or stifles engagement. On an organizational leadership level, the volunteers mentioned high staff turnover over the past two years (to my knowledge, three full-time team members have left, and several different interns have gone through) and were no longer sure who was running the volunteer program or what was going on with the organization. This upheaval had never been addressed with the volunteers. "Nobody said anything when the staffers left," Kristen shared. "They just disappeared. …I don't know what happened, but nobody's watching over us right now." Kristen had been the one to reach out to one of the new hires when she realized the old program manager was gone. Naomi also felt that She Should Run "hasn't figured out how to get enough people involved and wondered "if, maybe, leadership changes played into it." In hybrid organizationally enabled connective action communities, lack of leadership certainly risks stunting engagement (Bimber, 2017).

As did members in Chapter 4.2, volunteers attributed community-building struggles to the fragility of womanhood as a uniting identity. "I heard this from other groups; it's not unique to my group," said Eri. "It's hard to get people. You'll send out a message, and, like, crickets. You're like, is anyone out there?…Especially if you're connected by the desire to see women in office or to run for office yourself but you're not geographically [connected], you may not be politically similar. There's too many differences to build that trust, to be able to share." Relatedly, nonpartisanship and remaining "neutral" made it harder to motivate engagement. Adriana saw She Should Run's nonpartisan ethos as "noble" but noted it was not conducive to

"keeping people engaged." In her group, if people were "being more partisan or being more comfortable sharing their viewpoints, it wasn't an automatic shutdown." If a post was particularly "inflammatory," then she "would typically follow up with them in a direct message and just kind of share with them, hey, this is supposed to be a safe space for all." Adriana pushed against the constraints of nonpartisanship as she was able. In an ideal world, the "personalization of participation invite[s] citizens into shared environments where they create important content and establish interpersonal relationships both on and offline" within the context of organizationally defined messages and action potentials (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 85). In the case of She Should Run, messaging is often personal and inviting enough to cross the first hurdle of bringing women into a shared environment. However, the environment itself does not support user content creation or facilitate interpersonal relationships (Anne and Paige had each interacted with one other user, but interviewees overwhelmingly had not built relationships).

She Should Run is trying to improve. Adriana "felt very comforted as a volunteer that She Should Run listened so much" to her feedback and "held out hope" that participation would increase. She wanted the organization to make "great strides" in the future though "they [hadn't] done anything about it yet." Margaret similarly felt that She Should Run "really listens to our comments and feedback" about engagement, which helped her feel like "a stakeholder in it." Still, current "trial-and-error" attempts to increase engagement remain restricted to types and frequencies of volunteer posts rather than broader considerations. She Should Run's assumption that more posts from volunteers will drive user engagement limits the organization's ability to improve its platform. True, collective action-based approaches to the problem of participation "typically lead to organizational solutions" oriented around organizational leadership and organizational resources to incentivize individuals to participate (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p.

196). Relying heavily on volunteer posts to drive engagement is an organizational solution in the sense that it is a centralized approach to increasing engagement. At the same time, it draws on human "resources" removed from the inner circle of organizational leadership and provides little incentive to these organizational "resources" beyond their personal commitment (and often, guilt). She Should Run's combination of different action environments, its nonpartisan ethos, the weakness of womanhood as a uniting identity, and its reliance on volunteers to build the Community could all play a role in Community disengagement. Until She Should Run grapples with the community-building challenges these factors present, the platform will fall short of realizing CCRTs' potential to serve women. Finally, poor technology undercuts She Should Run's connective action aims. Chapter 5 takes up the challenge of the platform's technological interface as it pertains to unmet user expectations. Here, I discuss how technological issues hinder engagement even for women willing to overlook them.

4.4 Technological infrastructure

Connective action relies on the technological capabilities of the platforms where it happens (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013a; Chen, 2020). She Should Run was built on the valuable idea to combine education and community (meant to mimic other online learning platforms and Facebook, respectively), but the platform suffers from labyrinthine design and technological glitchiness that may have been acceptable 10 years ago but are jarring today. Yet She Should Run makes clear that the Community and the Community-based Incubator are at the heart of its work. (Among many examples, donor emails ask for funds to "provide a consistent, supportive Community for women to explore their leadership potential," and the homepage of the platform casts She Should Run as "a space with strong and empowered women who serve as excellent thought partners.") All the member-only resources on the platform, including recorded webinars,

are also accessed via the Community. How and whether the Community materially works is thus a question of utmost importance. As I will show, there is a perplexing disconnect between She Should Run's positioning of the Community as one of its core value propositions and the functionality of that offering.

On some level, She Should Run's decision not to improve the platform suggests an assumption that women will not mind the technological issues too much and use the platform regardless. Chapter 5 unpacks this assumption. Quite apart from tensions between imagined and actual users, however, this chapter concerns how technological snags make engagement more difficult for women who are committed to the Community despite these issues. As discussed in the previous section, She Should Run's approach to increasing Community engagement appears to rely on increasing the regularity and volume of volunteer posts. The poor usability of the platform, even for volunteers who are more familiar with the platform than other users thanks to their training, is therefore damaging. It makes volunteers' work more cumbersome and presents technological impediments to building community. Volunteer Margaret shared some examples:

> We had to send out emails to all the new people, every new member, and it was a little bit difficult to get the form letter formatted. There were a few issues with that, and it was just, like, trying to figure out the most efficient way to do that. And just when you're posting an article, sometimes the article loads incorrectly, or if you're tagging people, it's very difficult to get the technology to recognize the username. Like it would normally autofill or [I try to] correct it if something's wrong. But it was very slow."

In Margaret's experience, the templates provided to volunteers did not always work, the multimedia posting functionality was glitchy, and "tagging people" was a slow and effortful process. This last was especially frustrating as the group leader guide instructs volunteers to "tag, tag, tag" women in posts to try and get users to "respond to [posts composed of] questions or

conversation starters." Directions in the group leader guide reveal tagging to be a laborious enterprise at the best of times. Volunteers first need to visit the Member Directory for the entire Community or the member list for their group. They then need to find each username "by selecting an individual and going to their profile." Once on a user's profile page, volunteers can see "details listed, including 'nick-name' [sic]." Volunteers then need to repeat this process 5-6 times for each post (the guide instructs that "tagging 5-6 folks hits a sweet spot"), making note of each username and including those in their posts—at which point the technology often times out or fails to recognize the names. If She Should Run's community-building strategy rests on the shoulders of volunteers posting, the technological infrastructure of the platform ought to make this activity as painless as possible.

Further, She Should Run's tagging approach speaks to its self-concept as a social networking site. Volunteers pointed out that She Should Run's instructions felt similar to typical LinkedIn behavior (and also that tagging did not necessarily work better than posting without tagging). The volunteer guide's instructions and volunteers' perceptions suggest that She Should Run sees itself as a professional networking platform most closely analogous to LinkedIn among major social media platforms. Institutional text on the public pages of the platform refers to joining the Community as a "first step toward public leadership" and a place to "connect with other women exploring their leadership potential." It makes sense that She Should Run would observe what works on LinkedIn and try to emulate it. However, LinkedIn is a sleek, modern platform with an app and the engagement-boosting characteristics app users enjoy, such as the ability to check one's newsfeed while stopped at a traffic light or waiting for water to boil. Within the confines of its rickety interface, She Should Run is trying to imitate the

communicative practices that facilitate engagement on LinkedIn without the necessary technological infrastructure to support that engagement.

Women contrasted the ease of sharing articles, links, and images on LinkedIn and other social media with the difficulty of doing so in the She Should Run Community. While the option to post these things is technically there, the upload process often crashes or ends up posting gibberish. Margaret spoke to the difficulty of uploading articles; Paige thought the platform was "Facebook-looking" with "a lot of little Facebook icons," which made her "wish to have more pictures, like, more visual images." Honorina, a Democratic Latina field organizer in her early 20s, also felt the lack of photos. The inability to post easily made it difficult to interact:

> I wish we could [interact] easier, that it was more interactive, like, making it easier to upload pictures. I feel like it's really weird or really hard to just, like, reach out to someone. But nowadays, a picture breaks that wall between people. If I could upload a picture and them like it, or I see them posting and I like it. Instead of, like, a lot of people just [don't] use She Should Run because they don't know what to write, so I feel like we're missing a lot of the connections. Maybe if they made it a little bit more interactive where we could really get to know each other more. It's cool that you can add your LinkedIn and stuff on there [to your profile page]. But I just wish it was more interactive, so we can get the conversation going more."

Honorina still "really loved" She Should Run and told the women she worked with that they should join. She had posted on a discussion board about a problem she was having in the field and received a helpful response from another user. Yet even for her, a self-professed "poster" with few reserves about sharing personal content (and someone who was not immediately turned off by the interface), issues with the technology decreased the interactiveness of the platform. She checked LinkedIn and Instagram first thing in the morning, but She Should Run had not

made it into that rotation. Honorina's experience highlights that the "material constraints" imposed by social media impact dynamics of participation (Milan, 2015, p. 887) such that maximum ease of use and easy integration into users' daily technological repertoire are indispensable to connective action mobilization. The social media platforms on which movements maintain momentum are most often accessed via full-featured apps that integrate natively with iOS or Android, making it easy to upload media of all kinds. They are accessible via desktop computer, but they live primarily in people's pockets.

She Should Run, on the other hand, offers only a browser-based platform that is not fully functional when accessed via mobile browsers. As a result, it requires women to set aside time outside of their technology routines. Volunteer Margaret remarked that: "It doesn't work that well on my phone. I don't think I'd do it on my phone. Even though I'm older, and I have a laptop, and I'm more used to being on my laptop, the interface is not something that I could do on my phone, which I think is the difficulty: I have to, like, take out my computer and do it completely separately from other things." Again, despite Margaret being willing to put up with the technological glitchiness to volunteer, the lack of a mobile platform made it more difficult to engage.

Trying to build a social media community in today's technological environment without an app or even a fully functional mobile site is an exercise in frustration if not utter futility. She Should Run's platform *can* be accessed via mobile web browser, but, as Margaret hinted, the bare-bones mobile site by no means compares to a well-designed app native to mobile operating systems. The need for better accessibility speaks pointedly to the crux of imagined affordance, namely, that women not accessing the mobile site or finding it unnavigable renders the technical existence of the mobile site moot (Nagy & Neff, 2015). Failing to provide a viable mobile option

also limits She Should Run's ability to reach women on the go and women without access to desktop computers, compromising CCRTs' potential to increase equity in candidate recruitment. Neither can She Should Run take advantage of the push notifications that help social media apps encourage engagement. As Addy said, volunteers were asked to post so that "everyone knows we're active" and sees that "people are engaging."

However, these perceptions only matter at the point that a woman is visiting the Community and looking at her newsfeed. Because the She Should Run platform is browser-based and does not have a dedicated notifications interface, the only way to find out about Community activity is via email. As drops in the bucket for professional women with full inboxes, emails from She Should Run were often missed or went unread. For Colby, a Democratic White public policy specialist in her late 20s, the fact that "sometimes the emails go into spam, or you don't see them" made it difficult to engage in the Community. Naomi lamented that she "had high hopes for [the Community], but it was not so active when [she] needed it" and the emails were too easy to ignore. Ever since, she said, "I get the emails and I don't even look." Margaret blamed the email-based notification system for new members' lack of engagement with welcome messages:

> We send out messages to all the new members, and it's like, here are resources, and this is my name, and if you need anything, you can reach out to me. We don't normally get a lot of responses to the email. It's through, it's not to your email. It's to your She Should Run email account, so I can totally understand that. I mean, I don't check mine that often except to send [welcome emails]. So, if they, I think people do read them or are aware of them, but I don't think that they are responding. Which is fine, because I don't respond to random emails either, especially ones that aren't even to my [regular] email."

Margaret reveals how even when a woman receives a direct message in the She Should Run Community, that message shows up only as an email notification sent to the email address with which the woman signed up for a She Should Run account. Email notifications are easy to miss or ignore, especially as replying requires leaving email to enter the She Should Run platform. In attempts to utilize direct messaging for interview recruitment, I experienced similar frustrations with the antique email system. On the few occasions that a woman saw my direct message to her in the She Should Run Community and responded, I received an email saying that I had received a message and could see that message in the body of the email. However, these emails were funneled by GMail into the "social" tab rather than my primary inbox. Volunteer Eri directly connected lack of Community engagement to the email-based notification system: "I think they're still struggling with how to get people active in that space. You will get emails or some email notification if you're tagged in something, right? But you're not necessarily gonna get a lot of notifications about what's out there." Paige's experience in the "Building a Better Community course" suggests Eri is correct. Paige liked the content of the course but not the email-based, desktop-based structure:

> The four-week group. I just get the emails about it, and I would participate so much more in She Should Run if I saw it more. Like, I would forget about it and see it at, like, midnight. I wish it had maybe some type of social media-y aspect that I'm on anyway and would see, because I think I've been late to half our classes or maybe all of them…It's email, too, which is, it's hard for us to see, you know. So, an app for something like this would actually be great. There are a lot of young women that would fit the demographic and probably just download [it] on their phone and probably take more classes."

Paige's suspicion that women would "probably take more classes" with an app is supported by research: Accessing content via mobile as opposed to desktop can help people be more motivated

to continue learning (Sung & Mayer, 2013). In failing to offer attractive mobile options, She Should Run ignores how "handheld" media could increase women's "willingness to continue to engage" (Sung & Mayer, 2013, p. 639).

In addition, She Should Run's liminality in the space between a full-featured app and a traditional website may uniquely hinder engagement.[35] It was difficult for women to adjust to a platform accessed via desktop-based website rather than the mobile apps women have come to expect from social media. With in-person-only offerings, the obstacles involved in participation are anticipated (money, time, travel). With a digital platform, the technology user of today is accustomed to ultimate accessibility and ease of use. Thus, even for a woman theoretically accepting of desktop-only access, the platform is burdensome to integrate into her technological life. A mobile app was not perceived as "another platform" in the same way, likely because women are already on their phones all the time. Were She Should Run an app, no change in routine would be necessary to accommodate its use. By contrast, many women did not have a regular reason to sit down at their computer, and doing so was associated with "work headspace" rather than socializing. Logging into She Should Run thus represented changing their technology habits as well as entering "work mode," rather than a fun or social media practice easily integrated into women's existing technological usage patterns.

Within the confines of the current platform, the issues raised by Paige and others around email notifications occur when notifications are being sent. Oddly, unlike other social media platforms, where notifications are automatically on or users are obtrusively prompted to enable all notifications, the She Should Run platform has notifications turned off by default (except for

[35] Women experienced She Should Run as a delineated digital space, referring to it as a platform and not a website unprompted. I was careful to refer to She Should Run only as "She Should Run," not terming it a "site" or a "platform," so as not to influence the way women talked about the technology.

notifications for direct messages). Kaya, who had just wrapped up an unsuccessful run, participated in discussions at one point but never returned:

> There were a couple discussions that I put my comments into. I don't think people commented on them. At least, if they commented on them, I didn't get a notification if they were commented on. That's one thing that I thought: I wish they would integrate better with smartphones. If we did get a comment, if there was a discussion you were part of, I wish they would put something that would notify you. Because you have to log in and go and make your best effort to go check your notifications on there."

Beyond the burdensomeness of going to another platform, Kaya noted that the default "off" setting for notifications short-circuited her engagement. Curiously, the group leader guide confirms both that the platform has the capability to ensure all members are automatically notified when someone posts and that She Should Run understands this to be important: The guide "recommend[s] keeping everyone on this setting to encourage them to check out the group." Why She Should Run would apply this participation incentive within groups but not to other areas of the Community is unclear; perhaps they fear annoying users. Figuring out how to turn notifications on involves a singularly unintuitive series of actions. One must log in to the She Should Run Community, navigate to the "Connect" dropdown menu," select "Discussion Forums" from that dropdown, select "Welcome to She Should Run!", the fifth of five forums on that page, and then click the discussion entitled "How to Use Forums." Only within that post are users urged in bold, underlined text: "**DONT [sic] FORGET to check the "Notify me of replies via email" box.**" The post continues, "This will allow you to be notified instantly when someone responds to your discussion so you can easily continue your conversation." Fundamentally, She Should Run decided to leave notifications off unless women turn them on and to bury the instructions for changing this setting. These decisions defy the hybrid organizationally enabled

connective action imperative to make individual participation as easy as possible. Even the basic Community instructions require navigating to the "Get Started" dropdown menu, selecting "How to Use the Community" from that menu, and then watching a five-minute introduction video.

In short, dealing with the She Should Run platform involves encountering technological glitches and dubious design decisions for volunteers and users alike. The link to log in to the community from the She Should Run website was sometimes broken for a week at a time during the months of data collection, displaying She Should Run's 404 error page ("this page, much like equality in the U.S. Government, unfortunately does not exist") or loading the entire Community into the space of the menu bar at the top of She Should Run's external website. If I were a user and not a researcher determined to get in, I would not have taken the time to figure out how to access the Community. I would simply have left the site. Even when login worked correctly, the platform was ungodly slow. I tried accessing the Community on at least ten different strengths and types of internet connections to see if there would be any improvement in load time, but loading took five to seven seconds no matter how, where, or when I logged in. This is a serious problem considering that 40 percent of visitors will leave a webpage that takes longer than three seconds to load (Anderson, 2023). Unsurprisingly, when the newsfeed did load, the latest posts would generally be weeks old with no engagement except for the occasional "like" from a She Should Run team member. Posts were also more likely to be from She Should Run team members or volunteers than from regular users.

Technological glitches likewise compounded the disadvantages of email-based notifications. For one, bugs in the platform caused emails to be sent repeatedly. In the "Building a Better Community" email course,[36] a direct message thread was set up for course participants.

[36] At the time of writing, "Building a Better Community" is now being offered as a self-paced online learning course without the Community component. Similarly, Power in Purpose is being offered as an audio course to be taken on

Messages sent there from users introducing themselves or She Should Run team members leading the course were thus accompanied by automatic email notifications. Regrettably, messages would often duplicate, sending new notification emails three to seven times each. Both my regular email inbox and the message thread within the platform soon felt spammed with these repetitive responses. For another example, as Eri mentioned earlier, email notifications apart from direct messages are only sent when a user is tagged in a post. The only users that receive actual tagging instructions are volunteers, but there is an @ symbol in the lower righthand corner of the "create a post" pop-up box when one clicks into the "share what's on your mind" field at the top of the Community newsfeed/homepage. However, this feature does not seem to work on the user side. Typing an @ followed by a username, even if the user somehow knew others' usernames to be able to tag them, does not pull up a list of users matching the typed characters or provide any indication that the entered tag was successful. In other words, the predictive auto-fill technology volunteers use does not appear on the user side. If one selects a user to visit their profile page and find the username needed to tag them, the platform times out and the profile never loads, making it impossible for users to tag people.

Further, despite the sparsity of posts, the technology is unfriendly to scrolling. A seconds-long wait for the first few most recent posts to load and another seconds-long wait for the next oldest posts to load make scrolling unappealing. Nor is it possible to use hashtags. Were hashtags available, they could be a useful way of organizing posts and seeing what women are saying on a topic. Instead, She Should Run has created a set of "discussion forums" such that users are meant to have specific discussions on those forums rather than in the Community newsfeed. Yet the literature makes clear that scrolling and hashtags are architecture integral to connective action

---

one's own time without bringing women together in a webinar. This may improve accessibility but is not, perhaps, conducive to improving the activity level of She Should Run's Community.

movements on social media platforms, because they let users keep abreast of the conversation, browse others' action frames for getting involved, and be inspired to add their own (e.g., Jackson et al., 2020).

Beyond the default "off" notifications setting in the forums discussed earlier in this chapter, the absence of a forum(s) dedicated to Incubator content seems odd. The Incubator coursework is interspersed with suggestions to share one's thoughts or activity results with the Community. Yet there is no dedicated space within the Community for Incubator-related conversation, despite the Incubator being one of She Should Run's core offerings. She Should Run may hope to drive Community activity in the main global newsfeed by not confining Incubator-related conversations to one space. By that logic, however, the use of the other forums to organize conversations is likewise a hindrance to newsfeed activity. Moreover, forums are several steps removed from the main community page, requiring clicks through dropdown menus. Forums also bury important information (e.g., how to use the site) under discussions and sub-threads. Even for the Building a Better Community course, participants were directed to a private Community group set up for course takers and told to access this group under "the discussion forums in the Community." However, this group was never visible under Forums or listed as one of the discussion threads. It could only be accessed by going to one's profile page, clicking "Groups", and then clicking on the course group. (Email notifications, technological glitches, and the difficulty of navigating to the course group could well have contributed to the "disappointing" lack of "conversation," "engagement," and "interactivity" mentioned by course participants.) In addition, the forums represent She Should Run's categorization of possible topics and might limit women's ability to personalize their own action frames. This could happen if a woman does not see a space for her question or is not sure in which of the existing discussion

forums she should be posting. Finally, channeling women with specific questions or interests into forums may mean that women more inclined to be active in the Community are being active somewhere other than the main newsfeed, which can feel like a digital graveyard.

Logging in takes one straight to the newsfeed, from which one can access the Incubator and other resources via dropdown menus. Clicking "Home" in the top sticky menu takes one back to the global newsfeed. Routing traffic in this way when posting is so sparse ensures that users' overall impression of the Community is "dead," and for those being more polite, "a bit dead." Robin, a White moderate Democrat in her early 40s considering a run, was disappointed by the Community in general and her state group specifically: "Nothing's active on it. So, I don't know how that helps me at all." In focusing volunteer resources so heavily within affinity groups oriented around marginalized identities, She Should Run has inadvertently created a space where most women do not see activity on their newsfeeds and/or in their state groups (if they join the groups for their states; some states do not even have groups). Several women, like Robin, suggested that "you need moderators and stuff to prompt those kinds of conversations." Given that volunteers *are* trying to prompt conversations in their groups but hearing "crickets" when they post, volunteer posts are clearly not the sole solution to driving participation.

In sum, the poor technological infrastructure of the platform negatively impacts engagement. Hybrid organizationally enabled connective action heavily relies on organizational support and resources to mobilize people (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Bimber, 2017), but deficient guidance and subpar technology make it harder than it should be to participate in She Should Run.[37] As a result, women remain largely unmoved to comply with the participation

[37] It is not clear why the platform is so glitchy. Source code reveals it is built on BuddyBoss Web (based on WordPress). Designed for online learning and social networking, BuddyBoss Web is used by thousands of organizations. Many have platforms that look more modern and operate more smoothly than She Should Run. At the very least, the use of BuddyBoss reinforces that She Should Run sees its two key offerings as the Incubator and the

requests of She Should Run as the mobilizing organization. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss how She Should Run's execrable interface turns some women away entirely, potentially affecting not just engagement on the platform but women's consideration of candidacy if they leave the platform and lose interest or do not find better alternatives. Even within the platform, routing users through the Community despite the lack of Community engagement can be discouraging and leave women questioning the platform's value. Ultimately, She Should Run's decision to operate with substandard technology limits CCRTs' potential to engage women. The platform is more likely to be used by women with enough commitment and time to navigate a poorly designed platform. It is less likely to be used by women just beginning to consider candidacy or women who are busy managing jobs and families, thereby missing both She Should Run's target audience and an important opportunity to increase equity by expanding the pool of potential candidates.

Community and suggests that it does not have in-house technological maintenance. Importantly, BuddyBoss offers apps built with React Native, an app-development framework used by Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, and more. It should be feasible for She Should Run to build an iOS and Android app with a minimum of fuss and easy synchronization across desktop and app. Admittedly, the "done for you" option is expensive: $1,999 up front and $2,148/year. She Should Run's current budget—defined by an operating model that consists of keeping resources free, soliciting small-dollar donations from users, and a handful of corporate sponsorships—may preclude app development and upkeep. That said, my data leave no doubt that reworking the budget to support an app would be worthwhile.

Chapter 5 "Meeting Women Where They Are": The Imagined User in Tension with Actual Users

Building on previous chapters' discussions of barriers and action logics, this chapter explores gaps between She Should Run's imagined user and actual users.[38] She Should Run wants to "meet women where they are," but I find that many users are further along the political pipeline than She Should Run's target audience, which negatively impacts platform utility and user engagement. The chapter also addresses how action potentials put forward by She Should Run can serve some women well while failing to meet other women's needs, with major consequences for She Should Run's contribution to a more equitable era of candidate recruitment. Next, I explore branding as an area of struggle for She Should Run, suggesting that its tendency toward accessibility rather than dignity lessens the platform's appeal (and its value). The chapter concludes with the gulf between She Should Run's assumptions about women's technological expectations and what women themselves desire from the platform.

5.1 Where women are on the road to political leadership

Throughout its materials, She Should Run takes great pains to clarify that they exist for women who are in the "first steps of their leadership journey" and "just considering" a run for office. As "lead-finders for the field of women's representation" (wording new to the 2023

[38] In user design, an imagined user is a hypothetical representation of the end user of a product or service. Analogous to the media studies concept of the imagined audience, or the "mental conceptualization of the people with whom one is communicating" (Litt, 2012, p. 330), imagined users or user personas are models of users created by designers to inform design decisions and help designers capture the essence of users' needs, desires, and expectations (Nielsen, 2019). While the imagined user is a valuable tool, it relies on designers' and organizations' *ideas* about users and does not guarantee a final product that is appealing and valuable to a wide range of real users.

boilerplate), the organization aims to "meet women where they are" to expand the potential candidate pool and move women toward running for office. She Should Run alone occupies this important space in the pre-candidacy pipeline, rather than targeting women who are decided on running or already running and offering campaign trainings like most other organizations. As a result, She Should Run faces some unique problems.[39] First, why and how women get involved with the platform is difficult to square with the focus on women new to politics. A handful of participants, already working in political spaces, heard about She Should Run directly from another woman. Some got involved because they had previously followed She Should Run on social media. The rest found the organization through a Google search like "moms running for office," "help for women candidates," or "how do you run for office." The three primary means by which women discover She Should Run are thus specific to women who are already interested enough in politics and/or aware enough of organizations in the space to be working in politics, following She Should Run on social media, or ready to run or currently running. None of these groups is She Should Run's target audience. While any CCRTs could be hard to find if one is not already working in politics, following advocacy organizations on social media, or sure enough about running to Google something like "support for women running," the issue is exacerbated for She Should Run because of their focus on women very early in the pre-candidacy pipeline.

[39] In the spring of 2022, She Should Run announced via GlobeNewswire a new partnership with an organization called ReflectUS. The partnership was supposed to give women who had "self-declared" as likely to run an "optional connection point for additional resources and training" (She Should Run, 2022). It suggests that She Should Run realized there were many women who had joined but were already past the pre-candidacy pipeline and seemingly beyond She Should Run's resources. On the other hand, the title of the article made clear that She Should Run saw this partnership as "emphasizing the starting line of women's political participation." By She Should Run's own characterization of the candidacy pipeline and their place in the pre-candidacy space, the partnership would help women well beyond the "starting line," women not considering but already planning to run. Unfortunately, ReflectUS was defunct by the fall of 2022.

As a result, many women felt that they found She Should Run "too late in the game." Of 50 interviewees, only 16 were in the "consideration" phase. The other 34 were sure they wanted to run, in the midst of running, or had run previously. Because most women did not Google for help until they had already decided to run—and then had to manage the demands of campaigning on top of their regular lives—they did not have the time to go through all of She Should Run's resources. Lee, who was running at the time, succinctly articulated this target audience problem: "I wish I would have seen it a while ago and have been training for a couple years to prepare me for this. But I guess you never know that you're going to run." As an exception, Nicky, who had run and won the previous year, realized she was going to want to run a couple of years in advance and thus felt able to take full advantage of She Should Run. Nicky was also unique in that she knew she wanted to run and was already beyond She Should Run's target audience when she joined but still found the resources helpful. The difficulty for She Should Run is that, as Lee says, most women do not know they are going to run until they decide to run. At that point, women are looking for more campaign-related resources, but She Should Run's search engine optimization ensures that the organization is on the first page of results for women conducting internet searches related to running (in Odessa's words, "Googling for organizations that would help women [running]"). Relatedly, for women further along in their political leadership journeys, "coming in with more knowledge and experience than others," content like the Power in Purpose series can feel too elementary. Robin explained:

> I think that somebody who's never canvassed or campaigned or hosted a meet-and-greet might look at the site and go, oh, okay, I'm learning so much, versus someone else who's entrenched just a little bit more.[40] I need more. There's other

[40] Robin was describing campaign-related activities she was familiar with to make the point that she felt more politically experienced than she perceived She Should Run's target user to be. However, She Should Run does not actually provide training around canvassing, campaigning, hosting meet-and-greets, or other "nuts and bolts" aspects of running for office. In trying to carve out its niche in the pre-candidacy pipeline, She Should Run may be doing a

> questions I need to be asking. There's a lot of questions (around money and family) that need to be answered so that someone can make an educated decision. That's my experience. Now that I've done all of this, now I have more questions, and it's things that you wouldn't think of if you weren't looking closely. Like the PACs and the fundraising and the time commitments and the stipend and all of those things."

Robin highlighted that even women who are all technically in the pre-candidacy pipeline are at different stages of political development. Focusing on entry-level internal work may limit She Should Run's utility for women who are still in the consideration phase of candidacy but have more advanced orientations to politics.

Targeting women in the pre-candidacy pipeline certainly fills an important gap in candidate recruitment and is essential for expanding the pool of potential candidates. However, the realities of trying to keep that target narrow have some challenging implications for community-building in addition to the programming complications discussed previously. For one, some women in She Should Run's target audience who were just considering candidacy felt they were not advanced *enough* for the organization. Colby found the platform "very intimidating" and perceived that She Should Run, while not emphasizing traditional qualifications, was still aimed at women with a certain set of civic experiences. Her feeling of overwhelm led Colby to conclude that:

> Maybe I'm meant to be in the background. …Saying here's all the things that I need if this is something I'm really interested in, kind of made me not interested, which sounds bad. That's not really what they're hoping for. It really just put a lot of fear in my heart, which isn't a bad thing. I think it just means to take more time to figure out

disservice to users by focusing on considering running for office in a more psychological sense and not providing women with concrete tools to campaign more successfully.

> what I want to do. I don't know if I'm exactly like the star people they're looking for."

Colby's experience highlights the difficulty of targeting women in her position, to sensitize them to the idea of running while presenting a realistic picture of what women face (especially as many users are already running and looking for material that addresses their experiences) and moving them forward. As a result of her sense of misplacement, Colby was not active in the Community and did not feel that She Should Run was "for" her, despite her being, on paper, exactly whom She Should Run is for. She Should Run seems to alienate both the inexperienced, like Colby, and the experienced, like Robin.

In fact, beyond Robin's sense of being too advanced for the platform, She Should Run explicitly communicated to more politically experienced users that they were not the target demographic. Emma, a White Republican in her early 30s who was campaigning at the time and has since won her race, came to She Should Run after reaching a boiling point with being treated differently because she was "young and a mom" and constantly facing questions like, "who's watching your kids?" She "just needed to find other women" who were going through the same thing. However, when Emma posted that she launched her campaign and was looking for a community of women, a She Should Run team member commented publicly that the Community was for women considering running and not for candidates or current officeholders. "I couldn't just dive in and be there. It was hard, because I'm like, 'I'm running.' And they're like, 'Well, no one here is running.' That was kind of a barrier for me in the She Should Run Community." The employee's comment had also suggested she provide inspiration and wisdom to other women less far along in their political journeys. Emma's brow wrinkles. "I'm like, okay. You're igniting all these women. They don't know what they're doing. That's how I felt, too. I'm like, I don't know what I'm doing. Who can help *me*?" Feeling unwelcome as she was and unable to provide

the guidance that seemed expected if she were to stay, Emma never came back to the Community. At the time of the interview, it had been over two years since Emma accessed the platform. She still attends the occasional webinar, registering through email and attending on Zoom without ever visiting the platform itself. Webinars, she explains, seem to have become more inclusive since she joined in early 2020. They now address topics relevant to women campaigning, not just women considering running:

> Even in a state[-level] position, you're doing everything. You're wearing the fundraising hat. You're wearing the digital marketer hat. You're doing the mail, you're door-knocking. You're the volunteer grassroots coordinator. You're doing all those things. You're not going to be good at wearing every hat. They have helped me in trying to wear those hats better."

Emma reveals that She Should Run provides some content that is, in fact, helpful even for women already sure they want to run or currently running (though Robin might disagree). Even volunteers, ostensibly the women most familiar with She Should Run's approach and mission apart from employees, seemed to see She Should Run as having the most value for women already running. The platform is free, but if it had cost money, Riley, for example, would not have been willing to pay as a woman only considering running. She would, however, pay for the platform "if [she] was running for office, if [she] was set on it." Other women echoed this willingness to pay if they were running or sure of running, suggesting that women also see She Should Run as having the most value for women in those positions despite She Should Run's organizational emphasis on women merely considering candidacy.

In actuality, Caroline, a Democratic White public health professional in her late 20s who explored She Should Run when she ran for City Council, felt she "didn't get a ton of help" from She Should Run and attributed that to the deadness of the Community, where she never

connected with other users despite posting multiple times. She thought She Should Run would be more "beneficial" for "people that are more prominent community members, people who kind of [already] know other people."[41] She did note that—if other users replied—the Community could be helpful for women just "putting out feelers" to see what other women thought about them running and what other women were doing. The platform was "good for encouraging others" but she "didn't get the benefit from it" when it came to "connecting with community" or "practicality or applicability." Ultimately, if "affordances are simultaneously waiting in an environment and simultaneously waiting to be recognized" (Nagy & Neff, 2015, p. 3), the lack of clarity among users and volunteers about who She Should Run is for complicates both the affordances provided and the affordances recognized, trammeling the platform's technological action potentials.

Moreover, trying to keep the Community strictly for women in the consideration phase by publicly commenting that the platform is not "for" more advanced users immediately shuts down women who, in the act of posting, are already more active than most of the other users on the platform. Considering that She Should Run continues to position the Community as its primary offering and unique value proposition, supporting every woman who posts anything related to running would be more conducive to user engagement. A woman campaigning or sure of the future office she wants perhaps feels more confident to post or more desirous of immediate community than a woman just beginning to think about one day running for office. To silence some of the few women willing to post because they do not fit the pre-candidacy focus might make sense in a vacuum with only She Should Run's mission statement in mind. Practically, it makes the Community a less welcoming place and obstructs women's involvement.

[41] Caroline's experience supports Chapter 4's finding that She Should Run is not a replacement for offline networks.

Emma's comment about "igniting" women but not bringing them further also points toward a community-building limitation of She Should Run's vision. She Should Run makes clear that they do not provide campaign trainings and that their resources are firmly targeted toward women in the "consideration" phase of the pre-candidacy pipeline. Yet if the goal is to move women from consideration to candidate emergence, then every woman on the platform will reach a point where She Should Run is no longer "for" her, sooner rather than later if the resources are effective. By failing to carve out spaces for women at different places along their political leadership pathways, She Should Run is putting an end date on its own utility and cutting off avenues of sustained user engagement. Welcoming women who are running or have previously run—rather than relegating them to webinars—could increase the Community's value by expanding users' political networks to include more advanced women. Women just considering running consistently mentioned wanting to hear more from women who had already run. Jada, a Black Democrat in her late 20s, connected She Should Run's exclusive focus on women considering running with a related hole in the Community: Women who used She Should Run at one point and then successfully ran for office might feel unable to actively "give back" to the Community with posts about what worked for them or by mentoring other women through the platform. Kim, a White Democrat in her late 30s, echoed, "you need human beings who have done this stuff before, and that's hard to find." She Should Run's exclusion of more advanced women makes it even harder.

5.2 Action potentials in tension with what women need

While She Should Run's "Role Call" Quiz, which points takers toward roles like "investor" and "connector" in addition to candidate, has been around for years, recent organizational communications suggest that She Should Run is further emphasizing ways to

participate in the movement for equal representation beyond running for office. For example, the 2022 impact report highlighted the role of "encouragers," people who encourage women to run, expressing that "if we want to bring more women into the political process, we need to activate beyond the women we aim to see lead." Part 2 of the Power in Purpose series opened with She Should Run's CEO, Erin Loos Cutraro, reminding participants that, as was She Should Run in general, the series was "not meant to give you the ins and outs of running for office" but "to center you in a journey, that we know is a journey, in that getting close and clear to how your unique perspective can help your community." Going one step further, she made sure to say, "maybe that's in running for office and maybe it's not. And we want to help you get there in thinking about what your role could be." Despite the inclusivity of these remarks for women not wanting to run themselves, Cutraro's rhetorical casting of She Should Run as an arena for developing women's perspectives on civic leadership prior to running may restrict She Should Run's value as a recruitment tool for women who are certain they would like to run, are already running, or have run in the past. Programming targeted exclusively toward increasing women's political self-efficacy tries to make an entire meal out of what is only one important ingredient in candidate emergence (Preece, 2016). As interviews show, many women come to She Should Run's table already equipped with high political self-efficacy.

Continuing She Should Run's emphasis on expanding involvement, April 2023 saw the homepage change for the first time in years, to the header "women are underrepresented at all levels of government" followed by the subheading, "If we want to see a different future, we need more hands on deck. But how can everyone be a part of the solution?" The hot pink action button below used to read "Join the Community," but now reads "Encourage Her," taking visitors to the "Encourage Her to Run" page housed under the "Support the Movement" dropdown menu under

"Take Action" on the site's sticky header menu (see Appendix V, Figure V.2). From a visitor's first encounter with the platform, the focus is now on bringing all people into the movement for more equal representation. The four-week course entitled "Building a Better Community" reflected this broad emphasis on civic engagement rather than running for office specifically. Esther, a Democratic Latina in her late 30s working in education policy, is interested in being a candidate in the future. Yet it was the Building a Better Community course's focus on other avenues of public leadership that was the most helpful for her. "The thing that I've done with She Should Run, for me, that was very important, is this spirit of people that want to do something for their community. And so, that was the thing that I really like most about them." Smiling, she adds, "I remember coming out [of that course] and having conversations with my parents and my husband of, like, there are good people out there that want to do really good things…it did help a little bit with that motivation. I was like, yes! This is energizing. Let me do this." The course's focus on civic engagement beyond running for office could also help more women feel like the content is "for" them instead of for women less far or further along in their political leadership journeys.

As someone with the financial and professional security to think idealistically about running for office, Esther also appreciated She Should Run's approach to political leadership:

> It's interesting because the other organizations I have been involved with just started off at a higher level…I haven't seen this at other organizations. [She Should Run] is like, let's start thinking, what are your values? And I didn't realize until I started doing the work with She Should Run, because for me public service in general has been such an important part of my life in the past that I never really sat down and thought about these things. And so, it was an opening to say, oh, yeah, maybe this would even give me a better path in the community. And so that was extremely, extremely useful, kind of sitting back and reflecting."

She Should Run's focus on values and internal thought work resonated with Esther. Again, Esther is a successful professional who recently ascended to an executive role and now feels she has the financial resources and support system in her professional life to allow her to "indulge" in running. As a White municipal officeholder in her mid-30s, Nicky also found She Should Run very helpful for articulating her "why". Like Esther, she was in a position (financially stable, self-employed, longstanding community connections, support from family and friends, running for office in a couple of years) to take full advantage of resources designed less to address barriers than to help women refine their visions and chart their paths toward political leadership. Esther's and Nicky's circumstances enabled them to benefit from these resources uninhibited by external barriers that could make this approach feel quixotic and unhelpful.

She Should Run's targeting of women early in the pre-candidacy pipeline may provide a level of organizational justification for not addressing external barriers. Yet women in less privileged circumstances wanting to consider candidacy likely benefit less from programming that fails to address structural barriers, such that this programming could perpetuate inequities rather than make candidate recruitment more inclusive for the most severely underrepresented subsets of women (women of color and working-class women). Amy surmised:

> Maybe it's because of the phase that their Incubator is trying to address, just getting people to think about running and to really consider that they themselves could run. I don't think that [the Incubator] was appreciative of the fact that people are at different starting points in terms of even their feasibility of making a low-paying public service job work."

As Amy underlined, just because women are early in the consideration of candidacy does not mean that all are equally able to consider candidacy apart from discussion of the external barriers they face. Indeed, despite concerted efforts to recruit women from different demographics, my

sample is largely White, wealthy, and highly educated, suggesting that the platform's user base skews White, wealthy, and highly educated. Beyond being a reflection of who finds the platform (namely, which women are in a position to be involved enough in politics to hear about She Should Run from someone, following She Should Run on social media, or at a point where they Google something like "help for women running for office"), this is probably also a reflection of which women find the content beneficial enough to warrant an investment of time and membership. These are women in a place to be able to think about "power in purpose," not women without the professional or financial latitude to dream of political office when external barriers loom too large. To illustrate, the Power in Purpose series focused almost exclusively on internal work for women just starting out on the road to possible political leadership. After the "values clarification" activity discussed in Chapter 3.5, each participant was asked to sketch out her "life story" by decade and connect these "pivotal moments" to how she could "make an impact" by bridging "[her] values and [her] story."[42] This work is, again, most useful for a subset of women who only need more discussion of personal values to motivate them to run as opposed to serious assistance overcoming structural barriers. Tori, a White Democrat in her mid-20s working in politics, expressed how exclusionary that content can be for women in less privileged positions:

> We're talking a lot about power and purpose, but I was having a hard time not being like, okay, but what about the money? What about, how do you actually do that? I was really hung up on the logistics. And I think that a lot of average

[42] One of the few responses in the chat was exceedingly positive, reading, "This is a really poignant exercise. Tearing up over here about my personal path and all of the inflection points that have brought me here. Have never written them out like this before." The name of the user seemed familiar to me, so I checked and confirmed that this was a She Should Run employee posting in the chat as if she were a regular attendee. I recognized her name from immersion in the field, but it would not have been obvious to other participants that she was an employee and not a fellow participant, especially since it was some women's first interaction with She Should Run. She Should Run's (and other CCRTs staff's) decisions about when and when not to interject in programming would be an interesting point of exploration for future research.

> women are. I think about my mom. My mom is only high school-educated. She was on food stamps. She was a single mom for a long time. She works full-time now for an insurance company, and to convince her, you can sit here and talk to her about her purpose and her story, but to really sell her on getting more engaged, you can't just not talk about logistics. You have to have some sort of at least *pointing* in the right direction. Maybe this webinar series isn't the place to talk about that. But at the end of each one, saying, now we can direct you here if you're interested in learning about financial resources and how you might be able to do that. How can you get involved as just a campaign manager? How do you affiliate with your local parties? How do you get involved in those kinds of things?"

Tori echoes Amy's point that external barriers are prohibitive even for women early in the pre-candidacy pipeline, not just women certain of a run or already running. Lack of money, for example, makes it impossible to dream without constantly also considering the financial realities involved in a run and holding office. Tori emphasized that the existence of the Combatting Intersectional Barriers course in the Incubator was not enough, given that women must explore in-depth on the platform and in the Community before they can find it:

> I understand that that's not what this webinar was about. But it's sort of a missed opportunity, anytime you are hosting those sorts of events, [not to] do it as though this is the audience's first time ever engaging with you, and this is your only chance to snag them in. As someone who it was my first time, I was like, but when are we going to talk about the real stuff? I can talk about my feelings all day, but how does this work, you know? That was something that I think could have been done better."

Tori's reaction to the seminar puts a fine point on the fact that even free charity resources benefit people unequally (Cucchiara, 2013). Despite the best of intentions, focusing on topics that are more resonant with women who face fewer external barriers can perpetuate existing social

inequities, such that approaches meant to empower everyone can end up further excluding marginalized groups (Cucchiara, 2013). Even the landing page for the Incubator, where the "Combatting Intersectional Barriers" course is housed, seems to communicate that women primarily face barriers that can be overcome with a perspective shift. This page declares, "Where you used to see barriers to running, we aim for you to see opportunities to run and serve." The assumption seems to be that women considering a run are all in a place to think idealistically about their values and life experiences and just need some assistance connecting those with reasons for running; little need be said about structural barriers. Late disability activist Stella Young articulated the shortcomings of this view in her 2014 Ted Talk: "No amount of smiling at a flight of stairs has ever made it turn into a ramp. No amount of standing in the middle of a bookshelf and radiating a positive attitude is going to turn all those books into Braille." Even some financially well-off women were disappointed by She Should Run's approach. Robin, for instance, was frustrated by the platform's vibe of "yeah, you should run, and this can be great, and it's all hunky dory."

In a nutshell, for She Should Run and other CCRTs, "meeting women where they are" is complicated by assumptions about what programming will move women forward. In a report released in March 2023, She Should Run stated that a focus on barriers is less helpful[43] than emphasizing the things that motivate women to run, perhaps signaling an organizational shift over the past months that was revealed in the programming analyzed for this dissertation. Yet women are aware of the issues they care about and what [would] motivate[s] them to run. For some, focusing on refining and communicating those motivations is enough. Mostly, though,

[43] This statement is perhaps based on the Bixa research conducted in 2022, discussed elsewhere in this dissertation.

external barriers mean women do not feel free to dream about the possibilities of political leadership. CCRTs must address external barriers to be relevant and effective for these women.

5.3 Branding: Aspiration in tension with accessibility

She Should Run's branding reveals additional assumptions about the women using the platform. Inclusivity and accessibility are thematic throughlines, suggesting that She Should Run sees its users as likely to be intimidated by running for office and in need of content that makes candidacy seem more fun. I describe some of the platform's dominant text and imagery and then explore how its branding misses the mark for many women. I find that despite appreciating She Should Run's desire to help candidacy come across as accessible, women felt the platform's overall tone was not serious enough for such an important issue as underrepresentation.

For two years, She Should Run's homepage (see Appendix V, Figure V.3) greeted users with a header image of a smiling woman wearing a hijab who appears to be in her 30s, accompanied by large text stating, "Women lead in crisis. Now let's get them in office." Smaller text beneath continued, "In order to reach equal representation in our lifetime, we need to build a Community of women who are curious about the possibilities of public leadership." The last item in the header was a hot pink button with white capital letters urging visitors to "JOIN THE COMMUNITY." First, the use of a photograph of a young woman with brown skin grinning broadly and wearing a hijab (as opposed to a White woman or the featureless, nondescript digital illustrations favored in She Should Run's webinars) signals that She Should Run imagines their target user to be relatively young and that the organization is actively seeking to encourage women of color and women from minority religions to join, notable considering that current officeholders are both Whiter and more Christian than the U.S. population at large (Diamant, 2023; Schaeffer, 2023). Multiple interviewees expressed that the use of a Muslim woman in the

header image seemed like liberal signaling despite She Should Run's nonpartisan ethos, perhaps because 71 percent of Republicans see Islam as "incompatible with U.S. values," whatever that means (Bekiempis, 2018). The headline also conveys She Should Run's view of personal experience as a powerful qualifier for public office ("leading in crisis"), a thread running throughout public-facing pages and registration-only webinars. Further, while the platform offers a slew of resources for women considering running, the subheader and eye-catching action button show how the Community is positioned as She Should Run's primary focus.

Imagery on the "Join the Community" page (see Appendix V, Figure V.4) again speaks to She Should Run's desire to signal inclusiveness. The header depicts two young (20s or 30s) White women, one of whom is in a wheelchair. Here the headline reads, "Explore Your Curiosity Around a Run for Office," clarifying that She Should Run's target user is a woman who has not run for office and is not yet sure she wants to rather than a woman who is determined to run or currently campaigning. The subheader informs users that, "The She Should Run Community provides you with a starting place to help you discover what your unique path to public leadership could look like." This language reinforces She Should Run's casting of leadership as a journey and of joining the Community as a step toward leadership. It also emphasizes women's paths as "unique," hinting that women's backgrounds need not mirror the standard resume of a politician to successfully run for office. The final component of the header is a hot pink action button reading, "GET STARTED NOW." Below the header, without scrolling, one can see the smiling face of a young Black woman alongside the text, "If you care, you're qualified." As with the header, this image points toward She Should Run's desire to signal inclusiveness. The text dovetails with the idea of a "unique path to public leadership" for every woman and hits home one of She Should Run's core messages—that women's experiences and values, or the things

they care about, are more important qualifications for holding office than a particular educational or political background. With the design choice to size the header small enough to reveal the next pane of content on the page, even the most cursory visitor could come away with knowledge of She Should Run's target audience and core approach.

In the same vein, from external materials available on the site to anyone regardless of membership status to suggested posts for group leaders within the Community, platform content speaks to assumptions about users' age and what type of content users desire. A dominant theme in women's experience was the feeling that She Should Run, in trying to be highly accessible to all women, felt less "serious" than is suited to the problem of women's underrepresentation. It is easy to understand how an organization determined to motivate more women to run could find it difficult to balance an accessible tone with portraying candidacy as aspirational and desirable, conveying a gravitas appropriate to the importance of the decision to run. Considering women as consumers and not just users of its platform could help She Should Run better strike this balance. As a political brand, She Should Run needs to "satisfy [these] empowered consumer citizens who want the political brand not only to do things for them, but also to act as a vehicle for achieving desirable outcomes for themselves" (Smith & French, 2009, p. 219). Namely, as this chapter will discuss, it is incumbent upon She Should Run to communicate about running in ways that feel more sophisticated and meaningful for women and to improve the technological interface of the platform so that the resources it offers women—the "things" She Should Run "can do for them"—are more legible to women (Smith & French, 2009, p. 219).

Molly, a White Democrat in her early 40s, estimated She Should Run's target audience to be women "28 and above, probably, through about 45." Like several of the women I spoke with, she questioned whether women above this age range would feel "comfortable" in "that online

community-type place" and thought She Should Run's branding was probably more engaging for young women. Tiffany, a "moderate" Black community organizer in her early 30s, similarly felt that "the color scheme and the visuals on the landing page target younger women ages 17-50 to join." Though most of the women I interviewed fell within this age range—suggesting based on sampling probability that most She Should Run users fall within this range—the branding concerns women raised were not unique to any demographic. Women questioned the branding regardless of their age, even if they appreciated the resources. Stephanie, a White woman in her 40s who was running at the time, shifted uncomfortably when asked what she would improve. While she liked the Community idea, she admitted: "The front of their website looks, I don't want to say unprofessional, but I'm not sure I would see value in it."

One of the front-end materials contributing to Stephanie's perception of unprofessionalism and brought up by many other women was the "Role Call" quiz available externally on the site to all visitors. She Should Run introduces the quiz with the text, "What role do you play in the fight for gender equality? At She Should Run we spend our days talking to women about the importance of their voices in public office. We're expanding the conversation to discuss all the various ways everyone can step in and get involved with women's underrepresentation. Take this short quiz to reveal the best ways for you to get involved." The hot pink button to access the quiz reads in white capital letters, "LET'S FIND OUT MY ROLE." While a lack of organizational access means it was not possible to ascertain how the quiz algorithm uses answers to assign roles or to inquire what She Should Run perceives the purpose of each question to be, the questions themselves are valuable for what they suggest about how She Should Run imagines its users.

Questions 1 and 2 are demographic, with Question 1 asking takers to select the region of the U.S. in which they live. This question appears to be nothing more than a means of gathering user data; it has no obvious relevance to the role one would play in the movement toward equal representation. Question 2 asks for the taker's gender, with options including man, woman, gender nonconforming, and prefer not to say. Again, it is difficult to imagine what purpose this question serves beyond giving She Should Run information about who is visiting the site or perhaps ensuring that anyone who selects "man" is told his ideal role is something other than "candidate." Moving into the more substantive questions, Question 3 asks which of six options "sounds most like you." Answer choices seem to map onto She Should Run's set of roles (candidate, champion, connector, insider, investor, and influencer, respectively) but are simplistic and not mutually exclusive, ranging from "I enjoy learning new things and taking on new challenges" to "I am supportive. I enjoy helping others succeed;" "I enjoy continuing to grow my network of colleagues, friends, and acquaintances;" "I am familiar with politics and have served in a formal capacity, or ran for office in the past; "I feel a sense of duty to dedicate my time, talents, and resources toward making a difference;" and "I am curious about the opportunity to learn more about women's representation and help where I can." It is unclear how the algorithm (and the organization that developed it) determines, for example, that a woman who primarily "enjoy[s] learning new things" is more or less well-suited to holding office than a woman who primarily "feel[s] a sense of duty."

Question 4 asks about the taker's "favorite place to get your news" (with options including "local newspaper/local news channel," "conversations with friends," "national news channels," "I check various sources and double-check them against my personal contacts and information," "podcasts," and "social media"). This seems to be another demographic question

without any bearing on what role someone plays in the movement for equal representation, though perhaps the algorithm funnels women who select the "personal contacts" option into the "connector" role. Question 5 then asks, "what kind of friend are you?" with options including "I'm reliable. You can count on me to drive you to the airport and water your plants while you're on vacation;" "I'm there for whatever my friends need. I listen to venting sessions, bring meals, and celebrate big moments;" "I have amazing friends, and I love to share the news of great things happening in their lives;" "I love to give advice and help push people toward their goals. I help my friends be their best selves;" "my love language is giving, and I am happiest when I find ways to spread joy through generosity;" and "I like introducing my friends to new music, tech, tv shows, and social platforms. I like to share and learn about ideas." Again, these options do not seem mutually exclusive, but they do seem more related (albeit shallowly) to She Should Run's roles (perhaps candidate, champion, connector, insider, investor, and influencer, respectively).

Questions 6 and 7 are furthest afield, asking takers to identify which of six celebrity quotes they find most inspiring and *which Beyonce they are* when thinking about women's representation (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2). Question 8 states, "you just read an infuriating article about sexism in politics. What do you do next?" Takers select from "Google ways to help," "look at pictures and videos of cute animals," "vent to friends," "recruit women to run for office," "contribute to a cause or candidate that inspires me," or "distract myself by scrolling through social media." Question 9 asks, "what is your strongest motivator?" Takers choose between "change," "relationships (family, friends, significant others)", "competition," "power," "money," or "knowledge." Again, it is not clear how the options for these questions map onto She Should Run's roles. Question 10 asks, "what is your power color?" Options include red, yellow, blue, black, green, or orange. It goes without saying that one's "power color" has little

obvious bearing on one's path to political leadership. Finally, Question 11 asks takers to pick the fictional character they are most like from a list including Leslie Knope (Parks and Recreation), Beth Pearson (This Is Us), Elle Woods (Legally Blonde), Olivia Pope (Scandal), Eleanor Young (Crazy Rich Asians), or Hermione Granger (Harry Potter). Takers must enter their first and last name, email, and zip code to see their results.

Figure 5.1. Question 6 of 11 in the "Role Call" quiz.

Figure 5.2. Question 7 of 11 in the "Role Call" quiz.

A few women, like Audrey and Kayla, found She Should Run's branding "inspirational" and "inviting," but most agreed with Stephanie, quoted earlier, and Valerie, a branding expert in her mid-30s who felt that platform content was not well-matched with the seriousness of the cause of representation. Valerie explained:

> The quizzes and stuff that She Should Run has, it just feels young and underdeveloped, you know? I feel like it's political empowerment for women done in a childlike way, just the whole ethos of it. I know that's not their intention, but I think that's how it comes across. And it's like, you need serious women to solve these very serious [political] issues. I think that's why it took me a long time

> to actually do something. I hate to say anything bad, because I know it's a nonprofit, like, everyone's doing the best they can. It appears to be run by a lot of really young people. And for me, I just kind of require a level of professionalism. Even the happy hour I went to, we spent half our time on questions like, who's your favorite female role model? Just things that, this is not moving the needle. And then, honestly, I haven't attended anything since that happy hour...it's just a little disappointing."

Valerie concluded, "She Should Run, it's not aspirational. I worked with Kate Spade for years, and that's why it's so successful: they're aspirational but still approachable...When I say childlike, I feel like that's honestly the opposite of aspirational. So, that is absolutely an element that's missing." Admittedly, Valerie added, much of branding comes down to exclusivity (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2014), and she "[didn't] know that exclusivity would make sense on this topic" even as she felt that She Should Run did not "deliver to [women's] expectations." Valerie's experience highlights the tension between being approachable and feeling "childlike" or unserious. In the absence of organizational interviews, it is impossible to determine what She Should Run believes to be the value of these materials. I hazard a guess that She Should Run, in striving so hard for approachability, has ended up erring on the side of silliness. The lack of professionalism in some programming also suggests that She Should Run sees its users as women nominally interested in the idea of running who could be drawn in by gimmicks and small-talk conversation topics. Yet most of the women who make it to the platform are politically informed and serious about getting involved in some way, not to mention those who come to the platform certain they want to run or already running. These women are busy; they are not kicking candidacy around as something fun to explore in their free time. They come to

She Should Run caring about their communities and clear-eyed about the political problems they see around them, needing the platform to provide a tangible value-add that is worth their time.

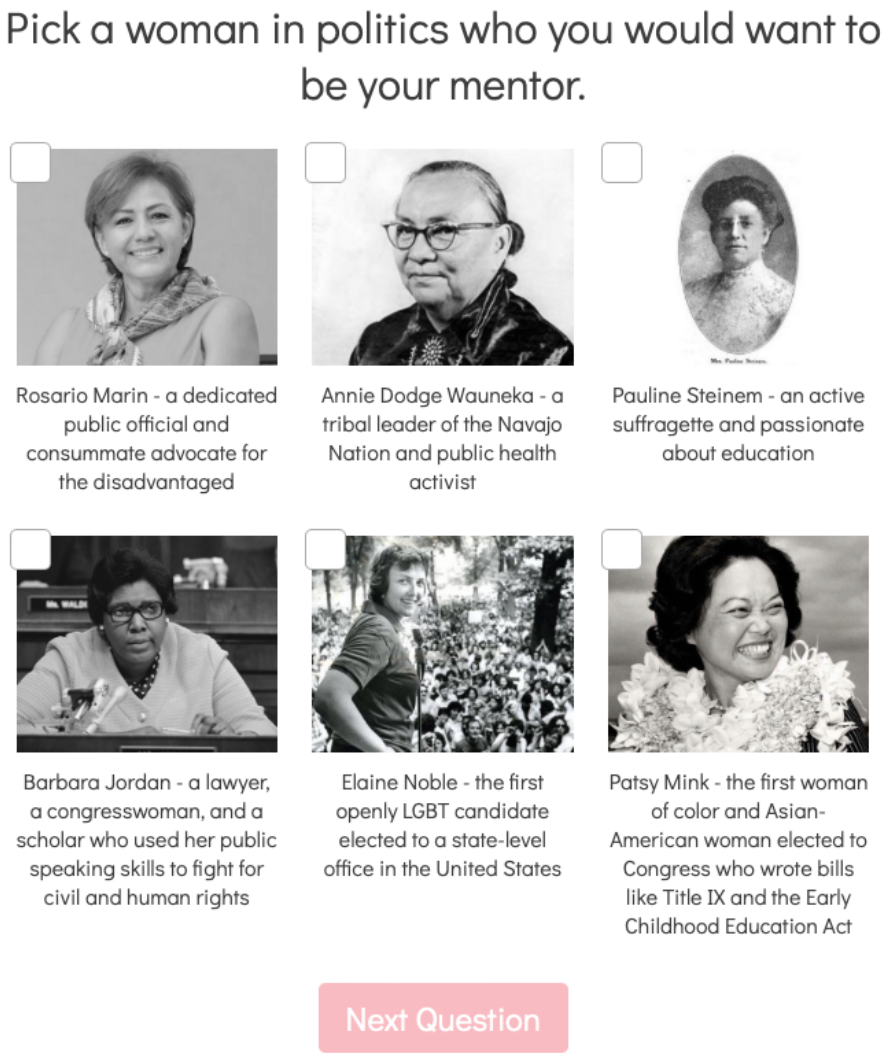
Truly, She Should Run's quizzes embody some of the most poignant disconnects between how the organization sees its users and who users truly are. Beyond the "Role Call" quiz, the "Which Public Office Should You Run For" quiz bills itself as a tool to "match" women's "personality and interests" to "the potential office that's right" for them. The opening page of the quiz asks, "have you ever been curious about what public office you'd be a great fit for?" Opening text continues with,

> While there are over 500,000 elected offices across the United States, many Americans are only aware of the national level offices: President, U.S. Senator, and U.S. Representative. Most of the offices in America are at the local level. Take this short, fun quiz to match your personality and interests to the potential office that's right for you. We'll also give you some simple next steps you could take to pursue the office you match with."

Question 1 is immediately relevant to the question of which level of office a woman might consider, asking, "where do you want to see the most change happen right now?" Options include "in my town/neighborhood/city," "in our schools," "in my state," and "across the country." Question 2 asks takers to select up to three issues they are "passionate about" from a list including "public services like libraries, pools, transportation, and safety," "local zoning and budget issues (ex: affordable housing development)", "environmental issues (ex: clean parks and water)"; "voting rights/civil liberties," "criminal justice," "healthcare," "technology," "education," "funding for the arts," "immigration," and "disability services." While these issues are addressed at all levels of government, it is possible to see, for example, how "local zoning and budget issues" would direct one to municipal offices. With Question 3, however, the quiz

veers into dubious territory. Takers are asked to “pick a woman in politics who you would want to be your mentor” (see Figure 5.3). Of these six women, few, if any, are likely to be known to most takers, making the short biographies provided with each photo the deciding factor. It is, again, unclear how the selection of a mentor determines which office a woman should pursue.

Figure 5.3. Question 3 of 10 in the "Which Public Office Should You Run For?" quiz.



Question 4 is more relevant, asking takers, “which situation sounds most ideal to you?” Situations include “I want to be in charge, leading meetings and making tough decisions;” “I want to research and write laws that will impact my community”; “I want to work together with

other lawmakers across my state to create change"; "I want to make decisions that will impact the education of children in my community;" and "I want to represent my community in Washington, D.C. passing laws that affect the entire country." However, Question 5 reverts to silliness with, "pick a movie franchise to star in," offering the options of the Avengers, Star Wars, Oceans 8, High School Musical, or Lord of the Rings. This is another question that has no bearing on which office a woman should run for. It is a remarkable organizational decision to waste one of only 10 question slots when the quiz is directly related to the mission to motivate women by helping them determine which office would be best for them.

Question 6 returns to the point, asking, "how much time do you want to spend as an elected official?" Options include, "I would do this in addition to my full-time job," "I would do this part-time, 20-30 hours a week," or "I would want it to be my full-time job." This question is relevant to women's desired time commitment but makes no reference to the monetary barriers highlighted in Chapter 3. Certain offices that pay poorly are simply not options for women without the resources to take the financial hit of campaigning and the pay cut of public office. With Question 7, the quiz loses focus again, asking "how would your friends describe you?" with a choice of six traits that all seem important for any political office or professional role. These include "inspiring and willing to make tough decisions," "collaborative and always advocating for the causes you care about," "great at organizing and able to juggle a variety of personal and work projects," "an active listener who knows how to prioritize what matters most," or "a hustler who successfully uses their influence to get the results they want." Question 8 continues in this vein, asking takers to "pick your favorite quote about success and overcoming failures" from quotes by Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Maya Angelou, Arianna Huffington, Dolly Parton, or Reshma Saujani. It is, once again, unclear how these quotes reveal anything about

which office a woman should pursue. Question 9 asks, "how would you describe your work style?" The three options include, "I'm an independent worker and I'm happiest when I'm working solo;" "I like collaborating with others, getting those around me involved in my passions and projects;" and "I like to be in charge and build a team that I can oversee." Finally, Question 10 queries, "what campaign slogan speaks to you?" Options include "rebuild and restore our community," "a better tomorrow for our children," "lighting the way for our future," "your voice in the people's house!" or "an America that works for you."

Probably, women do not decide to run or what to run for based on quizzes like this. Yet She Should Run highlights them, and women take their results seriously. This gives the outcomes[44] of these quizzes undue weight considering the nonsensicalness of the questions. The "Which Public Office Should You Run For?" quiz was even a point of programming during the Power in Purpose series; part one assigned the quiz as homework for part two. In part two, attendees were asked to share their quiz results aloud. It was crickets for several minutes. The facilitator then stepped in with, "I hope no one's being shy; I'm very comfortable with silence." After more silence, she joked, "All right, no one wants to play along today" with a small laugh. Several minutes later, one woman finally shared, but spoke about her childhood and not the activity. Women either had not taken the quiz or did not feel comfortable (or desirous) of sharing their quiz results beyond typing them into the chat. One woman who got State Legislature wrote that she was "unsure" if she was "prepared enough for such a high-profile position, especially without much experience working in [her] community at this point." Despite this being a strong

[44] As mentioned previously, the "Role Call" quiz purports to tell takers what role they should play in the fight for more equal representation (the result will be either candidate, champion, connector, insider, investor, or influencer). Based on the offices included in She Should Run's Public Office Profile Suite, the "Which Public Office Should You Run For?" quiz result tells women that they would be best suited to run for either mayor, school board member, city councilor, state legislator, judge, county commissioner, or U.S. representative.

example of women's belief that they are not qualified as a direct result of She Should Run's own quiz, neither She Should Run team members, the facilitator, nor other participants responded. Another woman "got US Congress, which wasn't surprising, more intimidating." This could have been an opportunity to follow up on what this woman found intimidating. Several women got City Council or School Board, including one who was already running for it. Ultimately, She Should Run is publicizing the quiz tool and women are using it without She Should Run helping contextualize their results or adding a disclaimer that the quiz is for fun and not meant to be determinative. The woman who was "unsure" about her result underscores that assigning women a political office based on a quiz is arbitrary and problematic, especially for women who are less politically savvy. Despite She Should Run's commitment to increasing equity in the pre-candidacy pipeline, the women likely to benefit most from (or be least harmed by) these quizzes are, once again, more privileged women who have high political self-efficacy or previous political experiences, or are equipped with other resources that could enable them to see the quizzes merely as entertainment—and take their results with a grain of salt.

Similarly, some of the suggested Community posts in the volunteer guide involve content that does not deliver obvious value for women hoping to mobilize toward political leadership. Hearkening back to the nonpartisanship restrictions discussed in Chapter 4, volunteers highlighted the difficulty of "trying to figure out what to post to not be political" and how that led to posting about "not serious stuff," like what women are reading or doing on the weekend. If She Should Run is trying to make the Community feel more like other social media platforms, these prompts are understandable. However, prompts to discuss non-political topics do not appeal to the organization's target audience. Eri shared: "Sometimes, when you're trying to create community, and you're trying to, you know, build community, you're talking about things

that are completely unrelated to running for office. You're like, 'how is your weekend?' And [users] are like, 'I don't care about my weekend. I'm trying to figure out how to get enough votes to win this election.'" Volunteers and users felt that the focus should be on topics related to running for office, rather than creating a casual social media environment.

To recap, She Should Run's branding and materials reveal incorrect assumptions about users that limit the organization's appeal to women desirous of a more professional platform. Its focus on accessibility can have the opposite effect for women turned off by the informality of the content. Further, women who are able to sift through the content that is useful to them and disregard the content that is not are likely to be women with more free time, more candidacy-related resources, and more efficacious psychological orientations to politics, compromising She Should Run's potential to make candidate recruitment more equitable for women without these privileges. From a technological perspective, women's lukewarm responses to quizzes and volunteer posts suggest that She Should Run is experimenting with technology's capacity to expand engagement with the issue of underrepresentation but struggling to design engagement modalities that are meaningful and helpful for users. There are no easy answers. Yet She Should Run, as a digital platform, has a wealth of user data at its fingertips. Given the seeming lack of technological expertise in-house, hiring a technological consulting firm could help the organization more productively track and analyze user data, examining how women engage with the platform to understand which materials grab attention and facilitate further involvement and which do not. Indeed, novel tools of engagement are most successful when accompanied by novel forms of "listening" to analytics that reveal how users behave (Karpf, 2018).

More traditional forms of listening would be helpful, too. Though volunteers shared that She Should Run holds occasional meetings with them and tries to be responsive to their feedback

about what is happening in the Community, this approach restricts organizational thinking to strategies and tactics that could work within the current structure of the Community rather than questioning platform engagement more broadly. She Should Run also solicits token feedback via emailed forms after events, but it is impossible to say how many women use those forms or whether the organization reads them (I provided feedback on the events I attended; no response). This approach again restricts feedback, asking only what women thought of a specific event. Finally, the survey of 419 women commissioned by She Should Run and conducted by Bixa in the spring of 2022 focused not on current users of the platform but on non-users, asking about what motivates women to run for office and about Gen Z and politics (She Should Run, 2023). It seems that She Should Run is thinking about how to serve women more effectively, but only within the confines of its existing brand and current platform structure. She Should Run could benefit greatly from conducting focus groups with *users* to learn where its brand and platform do and do not connect with women's needs.

5.4 Self-driven or lost at sea: Navigational shortcomings

Nearly every woman interviewed expressed that the platform was not user-friendly. Curiously, for an organization targeting women brand new to the consideration of candidacy, the platform provides little navigational assistance. The only way to find all of She Should Run's resources is to devote extensive time to clicking every menu and sub-menu and following every possible link. She Should Run clearly assumes women have enough time and capacity to explore without guidance. I find that because it is nearly impossible to log on and locate something specific, women often thought She Should Run did not address topics that actually are addressed somewhere on the platform. Women wanted a "one-stop shop" where they could learn all about running for office, but She Should Run is too difficult to navigate to fulfill this need. Despite She

Should Run's assertion that, "like most things in life, what you put in is what you get out" of the platform, luck and free time matter more than effort here.[45] Analyses suggest that navigational problems are rooted in the platform interface and the lack of an intake process for members upon joining.

First, She Should Run's advice to women to take their time exploring the platform and finding the content that appeals to them is not suited to women considering running, who are busy with jobs and families that preclude them from exerting the effort necessary to figure out how the platform can be useful to them. Like many of the women I spoke with, the platform design and lack of personal connection with staff or volunteers gave Fatima the impression that She Should Run did not understand her situation:

> I have a lot of questions around the Incubator and just how it works and functions...I'm like, okay. When am I gonna have time to look through a lot of the stuff? And then, if I have any questions along the way, who do I ask? How do I get information? Because it's not set up like where you're in a course via Zoom and they're going through a whole lot of the logistics. Just like if you have any questions along the way, do you ask them or what? It doesn't make sense. …Who do they think I am?"

Women further along the pipeline face the added time crunch of campaigning. Sonia, a Democratic Latina in her mid-40s who was running for office and has since won her seat, got the impression that She Should Run designed the platform "without thinking about the time commitment" that would be required to productively navigate it. Salma, a European-Arabian journalist in her early 50s who was also running for Democratic office, felt similarly. She attended a webinar or two but then abandoned She Should Run:

[45] As discussed in Chapter 4.3, women who post in the Community receive little or no response from others, including She Should Run team members, calling this assertion into further question.

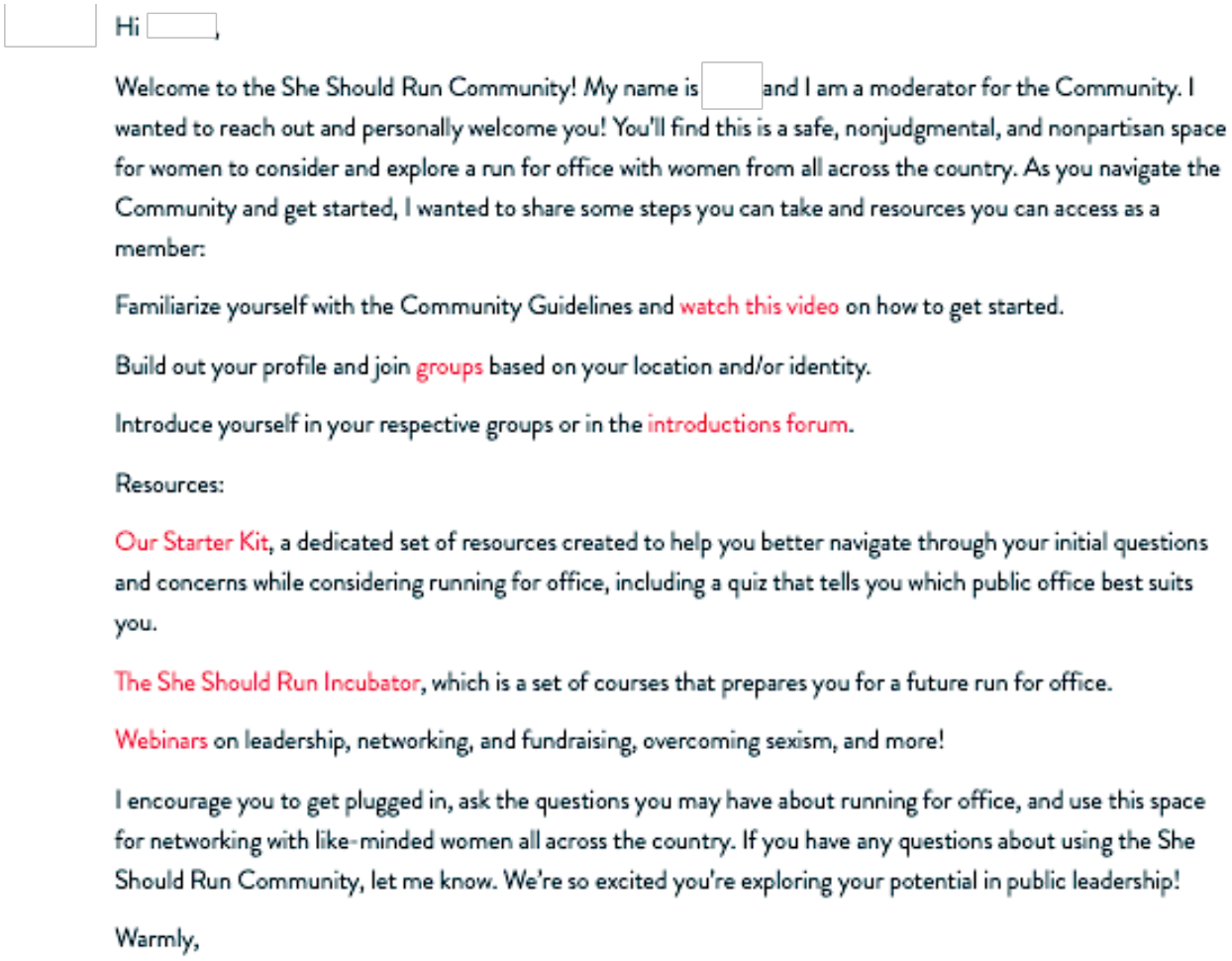
> It felt like a great idea but a cumbersome tool. Once you decide to run, you don't have the luxury of time anymore. So, unless you know it's going to be helpful right here, right now, you can't really spend hours trying to figure out how the tool works. Maybe I missed something incredibly valuable. You can't really, you know, dig deep into this tab and that tab…it doesn't really lend itself to the pace of a candidate who just decided to launch their campaign."

Fatima, Sonia, and Salma reveal that the poor navigability of the platform makes it difficult to benefit from the resources. The busier a woman is (having just launched a campaign, say) the less time she has to poke around. She Should Run could argue that the platform is not designed for women already running, but, as discussed earlier, it provides resources that are still helpful to women further along; many of the women who manage to find the platform are already running; and navigating the platform is difficult even for women who are not yet running. Volunteer Adriana urged She Should Run to "be more specific about what women can learn from the platform" to help women take full advantage of the available resources and more effectively determine where and how to engage: "While I thought it was really cool that all those resources were there, I just thought it could be a little bit more built out, so you know up front, like, when I click on this button, I'm going to learn this. And this is how long it's going to take me. All that stuff. Adding some more structure." Adriana's feedback spotlights the need for clearer communication about the resources on the platform to be integrated into the platform interface.

She Should Run seems to recognize the importance of navigational assistance when it comes to volunteers. Beth shared that "they kicked off a great kind of "welcome to your roles as leaders of the Community. And I came on with a group of other women who were leading pretty much every other affinity group. …I thought it was really helpful. It was two days, I think, that we spent on different contents. The history of how it started, how to navigate some of the tools."

Volunteers benefited from the live training around "how to navigate" the platform, helping them gain a better grasp of the resources available and how to access them. Yet apart from an automated welcome message sent by volunteers (see Figure 5.4), verbal instructions (see Figure 5.5) and a short introductory video about how to use the Community (that few women watched), She Should Run assumes the platform is intuitive enough for users to navigate without additional guidance. 49 out of 50 women proved this assumption incorrect. (The one woman who described the platform as "easy to navigate" was a group leader who had not actually tried to use the Incubator and admitted that she primarily interacted with She Should Run on Instagram.)

Figure 5.4. Community welcome message template.



Hi ,

Welcome to the She Should Run Community! My name is and I am a moderator for the Community. I wanted to reach out and personally welcome you! You'll find this is a safe, nonjudgmental, and nonpartisan space for women to consider and explore a run for office with women from all across the country. As you navigate the Community and get started, I wanted to share some steps you can take and resources you can access as a member:

Familiarize yourself with the Community Guidelines and watch this video on how to get started.

Build out your profile and join groups based on your location and/or identity.

Introduce yourself in your respective groups or in the introductions forum.

Resources:

Our Starter Kit, a dedicated set of resources created to help you better navigate through your initial questions and concerns while considering running for office, including a quiz that tells you which public office best suits you.

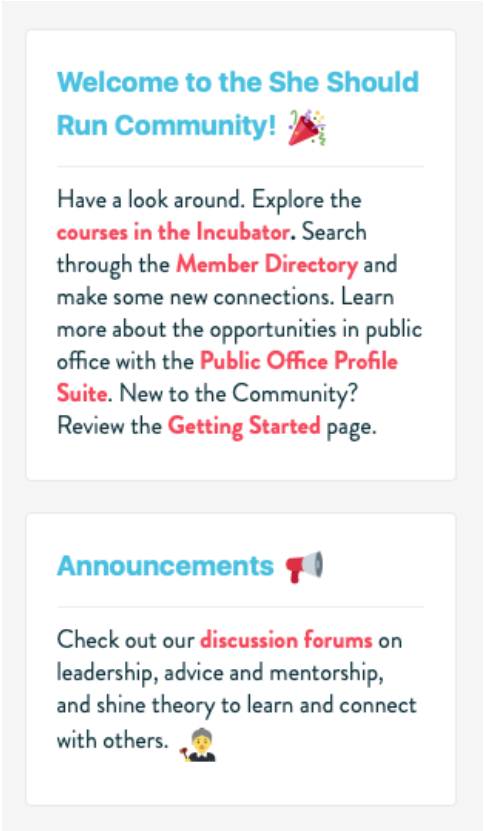
The She Should Run Incubator, which is a set of courses that prepares you for a future run for office.

Webinars on leadership, networking, and fundraising, overcoming sexism, and more!

I encourage you to get plugged in, ask the questions you may have about running for office, and use this space for networking with like-minded women all across the country. If you have any questions about using the She Should Run Community, let me know. We're so excited you're exploring your potential in public leadership!

Warmly,

Figure 5.5. Community sidebar.



Clearly, verbal instructions and an automated message are no substitutes for an intuitive, easily navigable user interface. Many users today just "don't tolerate a bad user experience" (Barnum, 2021, p. 2). According to Nielsen (2012), usability—how easy an interface is to use—involves learnability ("How easy is it for users to accomplish basic tasks the first time they encounter the design?"); efficiency ("Once users have learned the design, how quickly can they perform tasks?"); memorability ("When users return to the design after a period of not using it, how easily can they reestablish proficiency?"); errors ("How many errors do users make, how severe are these errors, and how easily can they recover from the errors?"); and satisfaction ("How pleasant is it to use the design?"). She Should Run falls short on all counts: Women struggle to accomplish basic tasks and the platform is slow even when users know how to use it.

It is not memorable and sometimes does not work, or women get frustrated and leave rather than continue to try to navigate. Last, the platform is singularly unpleasant to use. “Design thinking” (redesigning products around users’ goals, not the organization’s) coupled with usability research will be essential to support more “ease of learning, ease of use, intuitiveness, and fun” for women on the She Should Run platform (Barnum, 2021, p. 2).

Women particularly missed more guidance from She Should Run when they first joined. Dani expressed the desire for:

> Just, like, having a call with somebody when you first sign up. Like, hey, what are your goals, what do you want to do, do you want to run? Or are you trying to support women who are running? Understanding how the different programs work. I'm a more traditional learner. I like to speak with people. ... having an entry call, or even if it’s, like, an entry-level meeting for all people who signed up in April. Like, here's an entry class to show you the different paths. I think that would be really cool.”

Dani stressed that She Should Run’s current welcome mechanisms do not make women feel connected. Lindsay, a Democratic Latina in her late 30s working in higher education who had previously run, agreed that the platform was “overwhelming” and thought “having somebody help guide you through” upon joining would “make sure people are connecting on the platform in the way that would make it the most powerful.” Jordan, a Democratic Black woman in her early 30s working in politics, did not feel “taken care of properly.” Fatima never overcame her first feelings of overwhelm, thus avoiding the Community and sticking mostly to webinars:

> The initial conversations with the women who sign up are very, very important. Although we received an email to say welcome and we'd like to know more about you and blah, blah, blah, I was expecting a centralized [process], for a person to reach out to me and say, hi, see here, we saw that you signed up. Let's talk about where you are right now. What interests you in even coming to our platform

> space, our organization, how can we best help you? And then figure out almost like an intake, like what they do for health. They always do an intake. You never go into a mental health setting or doctor's office and they're just like, okay, sit down, here's everything we got. You're just going to do everything and then we'll figure it out later. It's just like, no. Sit down, have an intake appointment with me to be able to sift through exactly what it is that I am, and I think that that will probably be more effective for them. … I'm 47 years old. I don't have time to sift through a whole lot of stuff."

Fatima highlights the importance of guidance for women entering a new, time-consuming space, whether that's health care or politics. She Should Run positioning itself as a "provider" of resources but not helping women situate themselves within those resources left women feeling lost. Fatima emphasized that "intake" was especially important considering She Should Run's renewed commitment to involving women in equal representation beyond candidacy. She thought an "intake" process could help identify women who want to be lobbyists, campaign managers, speechwriters, and more, and connect them with other similar women, providing freedom to "move to this space over here" if one's desires changed. Based on her experience volunteering, Beth, too, concluded that "picking a point to engage is the most difficult part" of interacting with the platform.

As women continue to engage, Odessa expressed that "having that personal touch" would help women get the most out of the resources. Kim and Salma called for "more active mentoring" and "more hands-on support," respectively. Molly, who works with women in politics, also pointed to the dearth of organizational involvement as partially responsible for the time burden of using the platform and the lack of Community activity:

> It's so time-intensive, I think there probably needs to be another layer of human coaching. Where you're getting, you're checking in with someone. Just finding

> ways in which you can really humanize and then personalize the service. … Because sometimes I find people just need that push, or they just need you to sit down and say, like, let's look at the offices available and see what interests you. Did you read that newspaper article about so and so, like, what about running against them? Going deeper with individuals. But it's really hard to do when you're working on a program level at that scale, and layered on that, working with the budgets that most women's groups work with. But I think that could make all the difference in the world. And then even that, it's not that everybody needs the same thing. So, figuring out what different women need."

Molly articulates the difficulty of providing more personalized attention for a national nonprofit with a small team and slim margins. She Should Run may not have the (wo)manpower to meet individually with every woman who joins. However, this does not preclude the organization from implementing infrastructural changes that could help the platform feel more personal. Being short-staffed means that building as much navigational assistance as possible into the platform itself would be a productive use of limited resources. Short "intake" quizzes that constructively ascertain women's positionality and interests (read: no Beyoncé questions) could direct them to different places on the platform (with the freedom to move as desired). In the Community, the development of more groups and a restructuring of how content posted in those groups appears in the newsfeed could help women better connect with other users.

5.4.1 National reach in tension with state- and local-level needs

As Chapter 4 discussed, the Community asks women with different identities, at different stages of life, to share space without common denominators beyond gender. It is difficult to create trust in a digital context built on gender alone, but, for women who do not hold the racial or sexual identities for which affinity groups are offered, state groups are the only option.

Unfortunately, some states do not even have a group.[46] With no other ways to connect with smaller subsets of users, women felt alone on the platform despite She Should Run's 31,000+ members. She Should Run has perhaps failed to provide a "backbone network" with sufficient "digital engagement mechanisms for individuals to use in their own networking and participation choices," with the result that the Community is not conducive to the "fine-grained individual engagement" necessary to facilitate hybrid organizationally enabled connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 196). Nicky, who used She Should Run prior to running for and winning municipal office, voiced the desire for what she called more connection with "micro-communities." Dani echoed the need for "littler groups:"

> It works better. Like, we're gonna put these 25 people in a group, kind of being assigned to a group of people who are in your same position and wanting the same thing. Maybe some kind of standing meeting to share and learn. …It would be cool to bring the macro a little bit more micro and feel like you're coming up with people. …I believe in teams. I love community. It would be great to have that type of affirmation from the jump, when you're first starting, and then continually through some type of group."

Placing 31,000+ women in one space without further organization may be inclusive in theory, in line with She Should Run's desire to encourage all women to run, but is limiting to community in actuality. Amy drew a straight line between the deadness of the Community and the lack of smaller groups within the Community:

> The online Community, it's very quiet. People don't really engage with it. It's not actually a *community* [emphasis original]. Versus like with [another political organization], we have a WhatsApp group. They don't give you access to all hundreds of thousands of alumni that they have. It's just the cohort that you

[46] Posts within a state group show up on the global newsfeed for all users to see regardless of whether they belong to that state group.

> trained with. They do have Facebook groups for the broader cohorts, but really, you're connected in with your individual cohort. And when thinking about, how do you encourage people to actually run? I don't think it's even plausible to have the entire She Should Run network activated for every single person who ends up running. You just need a couple of people who are cheerleaders."

Amy highlighted the importance of encouragement (Fox & Lawless, 2010) but pointed out that some ways of structuring engagement are more effective than others. She suggested that "caucuses [would be] one way to do it. Where, even if in your cohort there is that diversity of ideology, you could still create these smaller, safer spaces where people could build up stronger community." Women felt state was too broad a category to be helpful; Emma longed for state groups to offer municipal sub-groups to "take it further to connect with other women in [one's] area." Volunteer Margaret similarly noted that district-level connection could be more helpful for women than state groups, but that the platform provides no way to find other users who are geographically proximate. In fact, the lack of activity in Anne's state group ultimately led her away from the platform even though she "loved She Should Run":

> I wish that my state group was more active, because I hadn't really thought of [She Should Run] much once I got going. Once I had filed, and I'm getting my campaign going, then I connected with a lot of more local resources, and those have all been very helpful finding people that are active around here. …There's a lot of times where I have gone back [to She Should Run], and I still only have that one response, and I *know* there are women in my state that are running. I wish [She Should Run] had more of a presence in areas. Like, could they not reach out to the different [local] party leaders and say, hey, we have this resource for women that are running for office? If they are reaching out equally, they can still be nonpartisan. I just wish there was more interaction with other people that are going through the same thing that I'm going through from the same perspective

> that I'm going through it. …That's what I wish I could get more of from She Should Run."

Anne leaves no doubt that the lack of more local connection limits the platform's potential to help women. Again, She Should Run could argue that it exists for women considering office and not women running. Yet even for women in the consideration phase, Naomi stressed that the platform's "macro" focus on running as a concept does not adequately address the state- or district-specific considerations women have as they deliberate whether to run. Women new to politics are also less likely to be self-directed in navigating the platform to meet their needs than women certain of which gaps they need the platform to fill. Ultimately, the lack of refinement in She Should Run's onboarding process and the indifferent architecture of the Community belie the importance of strategic attention to specific races, levels of office, and geographical contexts (Dittmar, 2015a, 2020). Diversifying and refining opportunities for engagement would facilitate increased consideration of contextual and institutional conditions to help women more effectively determine where and how to engage (Mahoney & Clark, 2019).

5.4.2 "What in the HTML hell is this?": Technological disconnects

She Should Run is a digital organization whose offerings are 99.9 percent virtual, and yet the platform runs on bare-bones BuddyBoss themes, the mobile site is primordial, and no app exists. A beggarly interface and rampant glitches suggest that She Should Run's imagined user is a woman who does not care about usability or has low enough technological expectations that user experience is not a determinative factor in her decision to use the platform. At the same time, as this chapter has discussed, She Should Run's imagined user must be technologically savvy enough to navigate an "overwhelming" array of resources. Such a woman would perhaps be older, more used to a 2000s-looking Facebook setup, or invested enough in the cause to go

out of her way to use a substandard platform. This was true of some women, who loved the content so much and were sure enough they wanted to run that they carved out the time to sit down at the computer and go through things (see Chapter 4). For many, however, the difficulties of navigating the platform and the lack of an app meant She Should Run was not worth the effort. Valerie, who had been a member of She Should Run for years but only attended webinars sporadically, was blunt about it: "There's not been enough improvements on the site and the experience over the years for me to go, this is the one I'm going to invest in." Calista, a White Abolitionist graduate student in her late 20s, echoed that even though she was a big fan of the webinars, using the platform itself would have required the hassle of "sitting down and reading" at a desktop computer as opposed to the ease of checking other social media on her phone. Apart from webinars, she perceived using the platform as "an aspirational goal" incompatible with the daily "sense of urgency" that made her feel like she did not have separate time to set aside for She Should Run.

Wanting an app was a common theme second in frequency only to the navigational issues of the platform more broadly. Having an app could help She Should Run be more visible to women every time they reach for their phones, increasing the likelihood of engagement with the platform and making it easier to post in the Community (Stocchi et al., 2022). A mobile app would also help She Should Run be more accessible to women on the go or women who do not work with or have personal computers, moving the platform in a more equitable direction. Women's desire for an app certainly revealed the extent to which mobile-based platforms have become integrated into women's lives, in stark contrast to the perceived burden of accessing desktop-based platforms. Most volunteers, like Beth, emphasized "the difficulty of getting people to another platform when there's already so many," especially when the rudimentary

interface of She Should Run leads it to "feel like a [lesser version] of a Facebook group" without the convenience of the Facebook app through which most users access that platform. Assuming users will rearrange their technological usage patterns to accommodate desktop browser-based She Should Run sessions (and overlook the underwhelming appearance and inactivity of the Community) does not square with She Should Run's target audience of women early in the possibly, maybe, one day consideration phase of running, who are less committed and thus less willing to put up with shoddy technology. This assumption does not make sense for women certain they want to run or already running, either. As previously established, women have even less time on their hands when there are campaigns to manage.

Further, the poor interface and lack of an app are incongruent with branding suggesting a target audience in their late 20s to early 40s. In the U.S., a full 93 percent of millennials (who fall squarely in this age range) use smartphones and are heavily reliant on mobile apps, even as "older generations also embrace digital life" (Vogels, 2019). Where women in their 50s and 60s might be amenable to sitting down at a computer, women in their 20s to early 40s—most of my sample—are more likely to see that requirement as unnecessarily cumbersome. Caroline, in her late 20s, reinforced that the lack of an app was out-of-touch with women's technological realities: "An app [is] what everybody's using. Nobody is going to the desktop and opening up a browser to, like, try to chat in a forum right now. If they had an app, I think that [women] would get a lot more utility out of it for sure." Greta, in her early 30s, repeated that no app "doesn't work for busy women" who want to be able to check in with the platform while they are doing other things like waiting to pick up kids from school.

Taken together, women's experiences highlight that the initial technological promise of She Should Run is not borne out by the experience of using the platform. As a matter of fact, She

Should Run is actively losing users due to poor functionality. Jordan, a Black Democrat in her early 30s working in politics, had hoped to join Emerge (a campaign training program for Democratic women) but was unable to do so because of the cost of the program, the long commute to her state's capital city, and the time commitment that the drive plus in-person programming would have entailed—barriers compounded by chronic pain and her caregiving responsibilities. She also hoped to use Emily's List, another campaign training program for Democratic women, but "their trainings were always at some obscure-ass times. It pissed me off. It was always something I couldn't make in person, or they wanted eight hours on a Saturday on Zoom. Nobody has the attention span for that. Not even me on a good Adderall day." When Jordan heard about She Should Run from a former colleague also working in politics, she was excited about it being free, online, and self-paced: "I got on [the external site], and I was like, oh, this would be great. I'll meet some other people." That excitement was short-lived. As soon as she made her account and saw the Community, she became less motivated to participate. She shifts uncomfortably, then throws up her hands:

> The first thing I noticed was, it's clunky. It looks like Myspace. I was like, how am I supposed to navigate this? I'm supposed to be part of this Community that looks like 2003? …The formatting, like—once I logged in, it just was like, what? Who designed this? What in the html hell? It reminded me of Myspace pages in high school. I couldn't interact with it. My good god, it literally looked like a Myspace layout. It killed me. It actually just took me out. I was like, are we for real? Is this what we're doing? First of all, make it an app. Make an app. Just Make. It. An. App. Let me interact. Make it like LinkedIn. (I don't even like LinkedIn, it's a sugar-daddy breeding ground, but [it works].) I just, I couldn't. I couldn't connect."

Jordan directly blamed "the formatting" of the Community for her inability to "interact with it." She also joined the chorus of pleas for She Should Run to "make it an app." In addition, Jordan inadvertently called attention to the fact that other digital spaces, even those dedicated to professional networking, are not always safe for women (Jankowicz, 2022). If the platform were of higher technological quality, it would help She Should Run more effectively sustain a hub of connection for professional women that is safer from predatory male users.

Even in webinars, the Zoom component ran smoothly,[47] but there were snags on She Should Run's end that hindered some women's participation. For one, community-building directives were not supported by organizers or programming. To wit, the last page of the Power in Purpose workbook exhorted participants to think of the women they had "interacted with during this series" as "members of [their] network" and to "commit" to connecting with each person in the next week. During the series, the facilitator told participants that "[their] network of support [could] start with people here in this virtual space." However, the technological infrastructure to facilitate this was not apparent or explained beyond a Zoom "happy hour" held in a different meeting room following the seminar. (As it represented an additional time commitment [and additional time on Zoom], only three women attended, and emails were not exchanged.) Apart from the happy hour, there was no way of following up with other

[47] Registration for webinars conducted via Zoom was simple, only requiring registrants to provide their names and email addresses. The registration screen highlighted She Should Run's other offerings with two lines of text at the top of the registration form: "By registering for this event, you will also receive free access to all of She Should Run's resources and content, including the She Should Run Community." The Reddit-style AMAs were hosted within the Community itself, so participants needed to have created an account in the Community for these events. Each of the events analyzed, except for the AMA, began with women waiting in a Zoom room for several minutes as organizers got ready. An ASL interpreter was prominently featured in all of the series as well, a fixture of She Should Run webinars likely implemented after the 2020 complaint filed against She Should Run with the Office of Human Rights in Washington, D.C. by a deaf woman who asked for and was refused ASL interpretation (Strapagiel, 2020). Zoom itself worked fluently at each event, with no noticeable lag or other issues.

participants short of copying women's names from the chat and later looking them up in the She Should Run Community or Googling them. Direct messaging was not a viable option with the networking call coming at the very end of the session; there was not time for women to DM each other. Although the registration page for the series told each registrant that she would now have an account in the She Should Run Community, women were not reminded of this during the series or given the suggestion to reach out to other attendees via the Community. Nor are there Community groups for women taking the Power in Purpose course, representing a missed opportunity to connect women analogous to the absence of Incubator-oriented Community groups discussed in Chapter 4.

Relatedly, the use of Slido and Jamboard during Power in Purpose caused issues for some attendees, highlighting the need for better preparation and communication from organizers—and the erroneous organizational assumption that women would be familiar enough with these technologies to use them unassisted. The first thing women were asked to do was respond to a Slido poll about their motivations for attending. For women tuned in on a desktop computer (including myself), this did not present a problem. Women using tablets or phones, however, wrote in the chat that "downloading Slido [was] slowing [their] answering" or apologized that they "could not download Slido." Employees did not respond to these issues in part one. Part two saw the CEO jump in to assure women that Slido was "a really easy tool to use" after the facilitator chastised women's slowness in replying and a woman wrote, "we're all trying to log in."[48] Part two relied heavily on Jamboard as well as Slido. Jamboard was difficult to use with many people writing at once, most of whom had not used it previously. One participant was

[48] As a counterexample, one woman entered the chat after technology complaints in part one to say that "the website [was] easy to use" and to "shoutout to [their] events/logistics/tech team--everything from registration to polling has been great." Yet the number of women experiencing technological issues was much larger, especially in part two.

typing instructions for text entry into the chat as another put into the chat the answers she could not figure out how to enter on Jamboard. She Should Run employees in the chat urged women to copy and paste others' text or "keep their text small so there's space for everyone's names." One woman could not use Jamboard at all on her device. As the board got even more crowded with women typing solutions to barriers previously entered, a participant suggested using orange sticky notes to help with the problem of the font "getting really small to read." The same participant told others about the magnifying glass tool to zoom in and read everything. In view of these technological hiccups and the use of Jamboard and Slido throughout the series, She Should Run could have devoted a few minutes to explaining these technologies and giving women time to set them up, but no changes were made when the series was conducted again. Instead, just as She Should Run abdicates community-building to volunteers, it seems to lay responsibility for technology at users' feet.

In sum, She Should Run seems to assume that all users are in the early stages of considering candidacy, that women want space to consider their values and not addressment of structural barriers, that women prefer fun content to serious material, and that a subpar platform is satisfactory for modern technology users. These incorrect assumptions represent four major ways in which She Should Run suppresses CCRTs' potential to mobilize women. Of course, these assumptions also represent opportunities for growth. I have discussed how She Should Run could refine its platform to welcome women at different phases of political involvement and how more discussion of structural barriers could increase the platform's value for the less-privileged women who have historically been most excluded from politics. This chapter also revealed women's responses to She Should Run's branding and submitted that the organization would do well to listen closer to women's needs. Finally, I explored how the technological shortcomings of

the platform compromise She Should Run's utility and how improved technology would better serve women. Chapter 6 summarizes my findings, reviews project limitations, and offers suggestions for future research.

Chapter 6 Conclusion: CCRTs Moving Forward

As explored in Chapters 1 and 3, academicians still grapple with why women are not adequately represented in politics. Some scholars prioritize internal factors, such as lack of ambition or not perceiving oneself as a politician, over external factors like financial difficulties or the possibility of violence (Lawless, 2011; Lawless & Fox, 2013). Others emphasize external factors, shedding light on the structural issues that impede women trying to enter politics (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013; Dittmar, 2015a). The women interviewed for this study spoke about both types of barriers. They dealt with internal struggles such as feeling underqualified, viewing politicians in a vastly different manner than they viewed themselves, and "mom guilt." For these internal barriers, She Should Run's messaging that "if you care, you're qualified" resonated. Emphasizing that women are qualified regardless of their backgrounds or previous experiences went a long way toward alleviating feelings of underqualification that could hinder women from running. More broadly, this focus may help dismantle ambition as a gatekeeping mechanism, welcoming women with the nascent ambition and budding political interest considered insufficient by other recruitment organizations. She Should Run's use of technology to connect women with politicians who shared their identities also helped women envision pathways to political leadership. In these respects, the theoretical affordances of accessibility and multiway communication discussed in Chapter 1 are being practically realized on the She Should Run platform.

That said, She Should Run struggles to adequately address the barriers women face, foster online community, and develop a platform that is easy to navigate and attractive to use.

For one, She Should Run misses an opportunity to speak to the concerns of moms, who make up a large portion of its user base. Women with children consistently mentioned feeling like She Should Run did not address the challenges they faced as mothers wanting to run or already running. In a world where "women's domestic responsibilities circumscribe their political careers" (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2014, p. 85), She Should Run potentially perpetuates the exclusion of mothers from the candidacy pipeline (Diaz, 2022). A focus on internal barriers may also limit CCRTs' potential to make candidate recruitment more equitable. The organizational imperative to encourage women seems to lead to an uneven treatment of external obstacles in comparison with consistent emphasis on assisting women in overcoming internal barriers. Unfortunately, the women I interviewed faced predominantly structural barriers: financial constraints, institutional sexism, and limited political networks. Their experiences challenge the idea that structural gender-based barriers are more figments of women's imaginations than concrete realities (Hayes & Lawless, 2015, 2016). My findings instead support the conclusion that "institutional, organizational, and structural barriers limit women's access to elected office more than their psychological predispositions" (Piscopo, 2019, p. 817).

She Should Run's focus on internal barriers makes the platform more useful for women with enough money or connections to have the luxury of considering running without the hindrance of major external obstacles, leaving out the same less-White, less well-off women who have traditionally been left out of politics—and who could benefit most from free, online recruitment resources. The theoretical affordance of accessibility is thus compromised here. To be sure, She Should Run acknowledges the existence of sexism and tries to help women feel empowered to fundraise. The fact of She Should Run being free is also an important part of lowering the barrier to entry into the pre-candidacy pipeline. Yet the platform downplays the size

of the sexism-related obstacles women face and the extent to which money can be prohibitive for women considering candidacy. From this vantage point, She Should Run continues in the vein of traditional candidate recruitment trainings that have failed to address systemic barriers (Piscopo, 2019) rather than taking advantage of technology's potential to speak to these barriers in innovative ways.

Nor does She Should Run yet provide a digital alternative to the traditional political party networks that still tend to play a major role in candidate emergence and privilege men and White candidates over women and candidates of color (Doherty et al., 2019; Janusz et al., 2022). She Should Run vaunts its Community as a place for women to build connections, but keeping its network so tightly closed by filtering out women farther along in the candidacy pipeline and shutting down women offering their campaign-related services (even for free!) suggests a shallow understanding of the role of networks in collective and connective action. In its rigid pursuit of network cohesion, She Should Run ignores the strategic importance of bridging ties to make women more competitive politically (McEvily & Zaheer, 1999). Specifically, communicating that the Community is not for women working in politics or those who have run or are running undercuts the network's capacity to offer users "new information, ideas, and opportunities" (McEvily & Zaheer, 1999, p. 1133) and shuts down women who could be power brokers in the network (Kwon, Rondi, Levin, De Massis, & Brass, 2020).

Several women suggested that She Should Run partner with local and state party organizations to highlight local engagement opportunities across the country or identify openings for elected or appointed positions that could then be publicized to women in the Community. Working with organizations on both sides of the aisle would enable CCRTs like She Should Run to remain "nonpartisan" while expanding the actual recruitment opportunities available to

women, an essential step toward increasing equity beyond providing educational resources and cultivating women's psychological orientations to politics (Burns et al., 2001). Relatedly, She Should Run bills themselves as "the only lead-finders for the field of women's representation." Yet the organization needs to take better advantage of technology's capacity for cross-promotion by linking to other organizations and aggregating resources while publicizing its own offerings in more places. The platform would be more effective as a resource hub than an outlier operating solo in the pre-candidacy space.

Regarding nonpartisanship, women certainly appreciated that they could join She Should Run without needing to demonstrate the degree of partisanship required to participate in party-aligned training or use party-aligned resources. However, the value of a blanket nonpartisan ethos must be questioned in today's polarized political climate. As explored in Chapter 4, She Should Run's insistence on nonpartisanship limits women's ability to connect with each other on the platform. Where shared partisanship provides an indicator of safety and commonality, shared gender identity alone leaves women feeling unsure of others in the space and undesirous of contributing to the Community. Even the women who spoke appreciatively of She Should Run's nonpartisan ethos as an initial draw were not spurred to sustained activity in the Community. Partisanship seems to be an identity too deeply held for gender to bridge the divide (Klar, 2018; Wineinger, 2022). Nonpartisanship may be an admirable goal, but insistence on it may mean that the affordances of safe space and community discussed in Chapter 1 remain theoretical rather than practical. Most women do not perceive the space to be safe or develop community connections, nullifying the respective material functionalities of the platform (Nagy & Neff, 2015). Just as party structures constrained women's progress historically—woman suffrage devolved into coalitional politics in part because activists could not promise to deliver women's

votes to a single party (McConnaughy, 2013)—partisanship may undercut modern efforts to advance candidate recruitment for all women. [49] Now as then, gender identity seems to be subordinate to and contingent upon other categories of identity, rather than the other way around (Bittner & Goodyear-Grant, 2017).

For She Should Run and CCRTs generally, the challenge is to create a safe space in which boundary maintenance does not end up stifling the life of the community (Clark-Parsons, 2018). The current modes through which She Should Run attempts "discursive reinforcement of safety" (Clark-Parsons, 2018, p. 2125), including cautioning women against partisan posting and commenting on candidates' posts that the Community is only for women considering running, leave women feeling *less* safe. Regarding technical reinforcement of safety (Clark-Parsons, 2018), splitting the platform into a non-partisan educational arm and smaller partisan communities could be a productive compromise between She Should Run's nonpartisan ideal and the potential benefits of partisanship. To embrace women's party affiliations in sub-communities rather than resist them could help women feel more comfortable contributing (Hampton et al., 2014) and facilitate the kind of "emerging storytelling public" that drives

[49] Ready to Run, the national network of training programs run by the Center for American Women and Politics, seems to operate successfully despite being nonpartisan. I suspect the reasons for this are threefold: First, Ready to Run is a network of national programs rather than a singular platform. These programs work at the local level with partners in more than 20 states around the country (Center for American Women and Politics, 2023b). Women who participate share geographic identities (Cramer, 2016) and can meet in person, helping establish commonalities across partisan lines that are difficult to build online with only womanhood held in common. The women I spoke with longed for She Should Run to provide opportunities to connect with women more locally. Second, Ready to Run targets women further along in the candidacy pipeline. Where She Should Run aims to reach women just beginning to consider candidacy, Ready to Run focuses more on "the nuts and bolts of organizing a campaign" (Center for American Women and Politics, 2023b). A curriculum built around technical topics likely lends itself to a nonpartisan ethos better than the deeply personal programming She Should Run offers to sensitize women to their political selves and cultivate their political leadership potential. Third, attempting to build and sustain an online community is a fundamentally different enterprise than conducting two-day trainings after which women return home. All the same, Ready to Run is perhaps less effective than it could be (Hodgson, 2017). Hodgson (2017) attributes this to focusing on technical problems ("routine problems with known solutions that can be solved by an expert or authority figure") at the expense of tackling "adaptive challenges," which "have no known solutions" and thus require "learning and innovation, stakeholder involvement, and ultimately a shift in values, beliefs, or behaviors" (p. 24). It is also possible that nonpartisanship presents challenges if this ethos impedes partnerships with party-aligned organizations or constrains women from speaking freely and bringing their full selves to the table.

affective engagement with political issues like underrepresentation (Papacharissi, 2014). As emotions spur political ambition (Scott & Collins, 2020), affective engagement may be particularly meaningful here. Not least, partisan content taps into people's emotions (Hasell, 2021) in ways that can heighten social media users' sense of engagement, building community and making users feel more energized about participating politically (Papacharissi, 2014). CCRTs should thus carefully weigh the decision to be 100-percent nonpartisan.

Additionally, women's personal goals can pose a challenge for nonpartisan CCRTs like She Should Run. Building collective action necessitates bringing people on board with the overarching goals of the action (e.g., Bimber et al., 2005), such that all CCRTs presumably face slippage between concern for representation more broadly (in line with the organizations' goals) and women's individual ambitions. However, for CCRTs like Ignite or Winning For Women that articulate clear support for one party and its agenda over the alternative, women join knowing that the issue stances motivating them to run and what they want to do once elected align with the recruitment organization's vision for the country. She Should Run, on the other hand, seeks to galvanize users to run, crystallizing their political views, while simultaneously asking them to support the organizational aim to put more women in office across the aisle—even if half hold views that the other half finds abhorrent. Surprisingly, She Should Run seems not to see this conflict. In fact, a recent organizational decision suggests the dissonance between the organization's goals and women's personal objectives may increase.

April 2023 saw She Should Run announce it is moving away from "the barriers women face when considering elected office"—something my research reveals women have in common regardless of party—to focus programming on "the spark that motivates women to take action in their communities" (She Should Run, 2023). To my knowledge, this shift stems not from

research conducted with She Should Run's users but from a survey of 419 U.S. women conducted via Bixa (described earlier in this dissertation) combined with data from UN Women and the YWCA's YWomenVote2022 Midterm Election Study (She Should Run, 2023). Based on its analysis of this research, She Should Run has determined to prioritize issues rather than barriers. Indeed, where past content spoke to running generally and took pains to avoid discussing specific political issues, She Should Run has announced a new series of webinars around the economy, climate change, reproductive health, racism, and gun violence (She Should Run, 2023). There are two points to make here: One, these are contentious issues where views tend to fall along starkly partisan lines. Asking women to talk about, say, abortion, without being partisan, seems like an impossible invitation destined to be met with silent consternation rather than increased engagement. Two, the women I spoke with could have gone on for hours just about the issues motivating them to consider candidacy or run for office. These women know well what problems they see in their communities and what they think should be done about them. The last thing they need is more talk of problems and less addressment of the barriers they face en route to solutions. Third, if I am a staunch pro-life Republican, I am unlikely to want to support an organization training Democratic women to be more effective pro-choice campaigners, and vice versa. Focusing on issues could end up hindering She Should Run's collective action aims rather than stimulating participation.

Beyond barrier and partisanship concerns, platform engagement could be increased by a more inclusive approach to membership that welcomes women further along in their political leadership journeys. Chapter 5 discussed how focusing only on women new to the consideration of candidacy does not square with the reality that women find She Should Run through Google searches, word-of-mouth, or following similar accounts on social media, presupposing a certain

degree of political interest or involvement. The organization does a disservice to users and itself by imposing an end date on its own utility. Women running expressed that there often were useful resources for them on the platform, although She Should Run's decision not to provide any nuts-and-bolts training also meant that some women left for other organizations. Women earlier in the pre-candidacy pipeline wished the platform would help connect them with women who could serve as political mentors. To more effectively leverage the affordances of community and multiway communication to "recruit, organize, and retain" participants (George & Leidner, 2019, p. 1), CCRTs must therefore thread the needle of targeting women new to the consideration of candidacy while still embracing more politically advanced women. One way to heighten visibility among women brand new to politics could be to rework She Should Run's search engine optimization (SEO) such that women inputting more general queries (e.g., "how to get involved in your community" as opposed to "help for women running for office") could find She Should Run. The organization could also promote awareness among community groups and school parent-teacher associations to reach more women who care about their communities but have never considered candidacy.

She Should Run's volunteer-centric approach to driving engagement and its struggle to strike the right organizational tone also contribute to anemic participation. The guide provided to volunteer group leaders offers on-brand posting ideas related to She Should Run's "core values"[50] but depends upon overextended volunteers who post only sporadically. In outsourcing the responsibility for growing the Community to volunteers, She Should Run abdicates the leadership role crucial to facilitating communication and sustaining vibrant cultures in organization-adjacent digital communities (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). The organization would

[50] Again, these are "imagine the possibilities," "challenge the status quo," "make an impact," "build inclusive community," "honor diverse voices," and "cultivate a culture of learning and curiosity."

benefit from user research geared toward understanding how She Should Run's brand is perceived and what kind of digital culture its users would value most (see Chapter 5.3). It is still early days for custom candidate recruitment technologies. She Should Run's struggles to drive participation and build an accessible but aspirational brand suggest that CCRTs could look to digital campaigning literature for inspiration around effectively using technology to distill and communicate nuanced messages and important topics (Baldwin-Philippi, 2015; Kreiss, 2016a; Kreiss et al., 2018; Kreiss & McGregor, 2018).

Finally, hybrid organizationally enabled connective action heavily relies on organizational auspices to facilitate participation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). She Should Run's poor technology makes it harder than it should be to participate, leaving women unmoved and undermining one of the core premises of organizationally enabled connective action. In addition to the platforms' navigational challenges, its technical interface is glitchy, sluggish, and lacks a mobile app. Bad technology complicates connective action because social media affordances are relational (Nagy & Neff, 2015; Vaast et al., 2017), playing a brokering role in meaning construction and materially shaping what users are able to contribute (Milan, 2015). Another dimension of that relationality stems from relationships between users—what user B does with the technology can impact what user A is able to do with it (Vaast et al., 2017). Limit what users are able to contribute or make it difficult to contribute at all, and users will soon stop trying. For CCRTs, improving the technology (and thereby increasing engagement) is essential, because extant research is right about the importance of encouragement to candidate emergence (Fox & Lawless, 2010; Lawless & Fox, 2013). Encouragement alone may not be enough (Dittmar, 2015a; Pruysers & Blais, 2018), but most of the women I spoke with became interested in running or ultimately ran because someone asked them to run and/or told them they would be

great in office. Communities within CCRTs could offer unprecedented opportunities for women to receive encouragement to propel their political leadership journeys.

However, affordances like community, safe space, accessibility, and multiway communication all depend upon usable technology. She Should Run's rhetorical emphasis on "meeting women where they are" masks incorrect assumptions about what women expect from the technologies they adopt. She Should Run's target user seems to be a woman who is technologically proficient enough to navigate a poorly designed platform and utilize novel web-based tools in real time with no guidance but simultaneously unbothered by an abysmal user experience worse than just about every other digital interaction in her life. There are some women who try to overlook the platform's flaws due to their commitment to the content and cause. Most are actively discouraged by its technological limitations. The challenge for custom candidate recruitment technologies, often operating on nonprofit budgets, is to develop tools that can meet women's technological expectations and provide more productive user experiences.

An app would be a great place to start. CCRTs have the potential to expand the range of meaningful modes of action available to women who care about equal representation or are interested in political leadership, but women have to use them first. Time and again, women mentioned the lack of an app as the worst thing about She Should Run.[51] Women perceived sitting down at their computers to use a desktop-based platform as a serious burden. Mobile apps, they expressed, felt more like social media and could easily be accessed throughout the

[51] She Should Run appears to have attempted app development at one point: Older materials mention something called "Pinpoint." This resource does not exist anymore. In February 2023, the URL pinpoint.SheShouldRun.org returned an error message saying that "This used to be a Bubble app!" The remainder of the error message read, "The domain pinpoint.sheshouldrun.org is connected to a Bubble application, but the application's plan does not offer a custom domain. If you are the owner of this app, please upgrade the app plan with Bubble to restore the connection." The Apple App Store offers various apps with "Pinpoint" in the name, but none are related to underrepresentation or She Should Run.

day. She Should Run clearly sees an app as unnecessary, but the absence of an app was one of the major reasons women did not participate more on the platform.[52] Offering an app would help She Should Run boost engagement by making it easier for women to access the platform and post content. An increased level of activity could also help the Community seem more valuable to users, in turn increasing their likelihood of participation. Most importantly, an app would better fulfill CCRTs' potential to make candidate recruitment more equitable. Not all women have a personal computer at home or the kind of professional setup where they can access She Should Run on the job. By contrast, 93 percent of U.S. Millennials (those turning 27 to 42 in 2023) and 90 percent of Gen Xers (those turning 43 to 58 this year) own smartphones (Vogels, 2019). Almost a quarter of Millennials are *smartphone-only* internet users who do not even have broadband internet at home (Vogels, 2019). Why does this matter? Because half of my sample is 34 or younger. Only two of the women I spoke with are over the age of 54. If these demographics are reflective of the platform population, She Should Run is missing the single most obvious way to "meet women where they are."

Of course, my project is missing some things, too**.** First, questions around organizational motivations and decision-making cannot be answered in the absence of interviews with employees and organizers. Textual analysis and ethnographic participant observation enabled me to incorporate organizational perspectives, but She Should Run's lack of response prevented the inclusion of important voices that deserve a space in the scholarship on CCRTs. Nor was it possible to determine the extent to which user research informed the initial design and development of the platform. To meet women's technological expectations and provide a more

[52] As mentioned in previous chapters, She Should Run's mobile website exists, but barely. Only one of my interviewees (a volunteer) had even tried using it, and she mentioned it negatively. This is understandable: It looks more like a Coding 101 end-of-semester project than anything else.

productive user experience, the importance of user-centered design here is clear. More work is needed to explore the discrepancies between imagined and actual users and to help CCRTs better meet women's needs. Second, the project scope (restricted to the platform itself and women's experiences with it) did not include She Should Run's social media posts. It could be productive to explore this content; interviews revealed that several women attended an event or got more involved with She Should Run because they had previously followed them on social media.

Third, the project focused exclusively on the She Should Run platform as emblematic of CCRTs. While I could thus go into far greater depth uncovering this novel phenomenon than I could have with a comparative project, it will be important to explore CCRTs used by other platforms and organizations. It is a new area of research with much still to be learned. Whether and how CCRTs embrace partisanship will be a significant point of distinction, as will CCRTs' structuration as independent nonprofit or for-profit organizations or as subsidiaries of larger organizational entities (such as political parties or administrations). She Should Run's status as an independent nonprofit with a small team means the organization cannot provide financial support or direct mentorship to users. Other CCRTs may operate with similar or different constraints. As revealed by the findings of this dissertation, the relative quality of CCRTs' technological interfaces will contribute to varying effectiveness as well. Further, all CCRTs must face a branding dilemma—how to come across as aspirational and appealing while still being accessible (Andjelic, 2021). So, too, will CCRTs need to strategize how best to publicize their resources and reach women throughout the candidacy pipeline. Future research could also pursue how other CCRTs balance the need to address practical issues while motivating women to run and the need to address both internal and external barriers, eventually moving toward a body of literature elucidating the best practices for doing so. Some women are in a place to appreciate

resources geared exclusively toward helping them communicate their values or craft their personal narratives, but this is no substitute for materials addressing the financial constraints, limited political networks, and institutional sexism that predominantly hinder woman candidate emergence (Piscopo, 2019).

In many cases, women were motivated to run despite these barriers by "rage and frustration" in response to political issues impacting them, their families, and their communities—not by "political ambition" per se.[53] Yet She Should Run (and much of the literature) uses "political ambition" to mean that women want to run less than men do and are therefore underrepresented. In casting women's not running for office in terms of the upper limit framework, the Power in Purpose series went so far as to imply that running for office is a core part of women realizing their potential and finding happiness. If a key premise of this framework is that people do not allow themselves more than a certain level of happiness, the application of that framework here seems to suggest that women might hold themselves back from running for office because they are afraid of what they could achieve or how happy they could be in politics. This is a take on the problem of underrepresentation I have not seen elsewhere in the literature or among other advocacy organizations in the woman candidate recruitment space. While acting within the self-perceived appropriate limits of one's happiness is not a conscious process, none of the women interviewed wanted to run for self-realization-related reasons. They all saw ugly things in their communities that they wanted to help change, but their personal happiness and professional goals were less motivational than a general sense that social problems are too dire to remain sitting on the sidelines. In fact, women conveyed that running for office sometimes

[53] See Scott & Collins, 2020, for more on emotion as a motivator. Notably, this paper also characterizes candidate emergence as a result of "political ambition."

represents a sacrifice of personal happiness and professional advancement in the pursuit of a greater good.

I am not sure of a better term than ambition to refer to why women run, but the data emphasize that motivations are deeply impacted by women's surroundings and socio-structural contexts. The motivating force for women cannot be understood merely as a factor of their internal worlds, some magical combination of self-confidence and mojo, but as a response to what is going on—and going wrong—in their external worlds. Situational assessment plays an enormous role in women's decisions to run. I put forward that "ambition," with its connotations of internal aspirations and professional goals, is not the most valid moniker for women's motivations. Framing the problem of underrepresentation around the need to increase women's political ambition is perhaps less productive than centering women's reactions to the issues impacting them and helping women overcome the barriers they face on the way to addressing those issues in office.

A fourth limitation is that this research design cannot establish causality. It is hard to say definitively whether She Should Run motivates more women to run. Women using the platform can nevertheless be divided into four groups: Women who are sure they want to run when they find She Should Run and whose involvement with She Should Run confirms that decision (Group 1A); women who are sure they want to run when they find She Should Run, but their involvement with She Should Run makes them not want to run (Group 1B); women who are not sure about running, and use of the platform moves them closer to running (Group 2A); and women who are not sure about running, and use of the platform further deters them from running (Group 2B). All the women who were certain they wanted to run at the time they encountered the platform found that the platform positively impacted or had no impact on that decision (Group

1A). It is telling that almost all the women in this group who said She Should Run was helpful rather than neutral were financially well-off White women in a position to spend time foraging for resources on a poorly designed platform and to worry more about internal than external barriers. Most women of color who were certain they wanted to run (or already running) were not negatively impacted by the platform per se but found it frustrating and not worth their time. None of the women I spoke with were women who were determined to run but then changed their minds after using the platform (Group 1B). Luckily, women who were intensely dissatisfied with She Should Run did not extend that negativity to running itself.

Many of the women in the consideration phase attested that their involvement with She Should Run furthered that consideration (Group 2A). A problem for this third group of women is that the platform curtails its audience to women early in the consideration phase of the pre-candidacy pipeline. Despite the applicability of many of the platform's webinars for women further along, once women determine they do want to run, they often leave the Community to seek out spaces more open to women ready to campaign or already on the campaign trail. Further, women in Groups 1A and 2A who liked She Should Run still felt that the poor technological interface was jarring and hindered their ability to use the platform. Most of these women found the events to be of much greater benefit than the Community, citing low engagement and the frustrating interface. As discussed in Chapter 5 and here in the conclusion, another subset of women considering or committed to running found the technology so off-putting that they left She Should Run entirely. There were a few women whose experiences with She Should Run took them from ostensibly considering candidacy to certainty that they did not want to run (Group 2B). All but one member of this group, however, joined the platform already fairly certain they did not want to run and hoping to support equal representation in other ways.

Despite its limitations, the qualitative nature of this project is also a strength. In our "era of rapidly shifting and multiplying political, economic, technological, and social contexts," scholars have argued that "the insights of qualitative work are central to the field" (Lawrence, Arceneaux, Clemm Von Hohenberg, Dunaway, Esser, Kreiss, Rinke, & Thorson, 2023, p. 5). New analytical frameworks and "inductive understandings of the world" are essential to "make sense" of novel phenomena like custom candidate recruitment technologies (Lawrence et al., 2023, p. 5). While more research is needed to continue advancing scholarly understanding of recruiting in a digital age, this dissertation has laid a foundation. I have shown how CCRTs may extend resources to women unable to access traditional in-person trainings and expand opportunities for political engagement in a representation-based democratic context that has historically excluded women. Second, I have demonstrated that She Should Run's emphasis on women as qualified regardless of background helps alleviate feelings of underqualification that can inhibit women. Though not a replacement for traditional political networks, these technologies can also help women connect with politicians who share their identities and more fruitfully envision pathways to political leadership. Moreover, online communities within CCRTs can serve as safe spaces for women to progress together.

At the same time, this dissertation has highlighted that inequities remain. She Should Run, for its part, seems to just scratch the surface of technology's capacity to mobilize women toward political leadership. Women still face major structural barriers to running, and CCRTs must develop content that adequately addresses these barriers. How women do or do not find CCRTs, what CCRTs talk about or avoid, how community is or is not fostered within CCRTs, and the technological infrastructure undergirding these platforms can all contribute to disparities as easily as facilitate greater inclusion. Custom candidate recruitment technologies certainly have

the potential to make woman candidate recruitment more equitable, but ongoing efforts to improve these technologies will be critical to realizing that potential.

Appendices

Appendix I Recruitment Email

Dear XX,

My name is Lauren Hahn, and I'm a PhD student at the University of Michigan. I [also attended XX webinar/am also a member of the She Should Run Community] and would love to hear more about your [run for XX office/political journey] and your experience with She Should Run, whatever it may be. While I'm not affiliated with them beyond being a member of the Community, I am doing my dissertation on how women interested in politics use She Should Run and similar organizations.

Would you be open to chatting over Zoom for an hour in the next few weeks? You would be a key contributor to important research into women's political empowerment. In appreciation of you taking an hour out of your busy schedule, you would also be compensated $40. I take your privacy seriously and keep all interview data anonymous.

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have questions or would like to learn more about the project. It would help me tremendously to include your voice, and you'd be a vital part of much-needed research around the movement for more equal representation. I hope to hear from you soon!

Sincerely,

Lauren Hahn

Appendix II Follow-Up Email

Hi XX,

I hope your week is off to a good start! Thank you very much for agreeing to speak with me as part of my dissertation research. I am looking forward to meeting you. I wanted to check in to confirm that XXXday, Month XX at X:XX still works for you. I'm re-attaching the meeting information below for your convenience. Of course, if something comes up, and it is a bad time, please don't hesitate to reschedule.

Cheers,
Lauren

Adapted from Lareau, 2021, p. 67-68

Appendix III Interview Intake

Thank you so much for agreeing to talk with me today! I appreciate you taking the time out of your other commitments in order to meet with me, and I don't take that privilege lightly. Is it ok with you if I go ahead and start the recording?

[Verbal confirmation.]

This is just so I have a record of our conversation. No one else will have access to it. First, I'll tell you a bit about me and the project, and then we'll cover payment and get started with the questions. Sound good?

[Verbal confirmation.]

Great. So as I mentioned when I first reached out to you, I'm a PhD student at the University of Michigan doing my dissertation research, or my big final project, on how organizations like She Should Run are trying to help women get more involved in politics. The point of this interview is just to hear about you and your political journey and your experience with She Should Run, whatever that looks like. I'm hoping to hear your thoughts and feelings and ideas about your experience with politics, what is/was helpful with She Should Run, what wasn't so helpful, that kind of thing.

Finally, your privacy is really important to me. I'll change your name, I'll change your city or state if you mention it, I'll make sure nothing you say can be traced to you. After transcribing our interview and changing those things, the original recordings will be deleted. Only then will my primary advisor and a couple other professors who are advising me be able to take a look at the anonymized research. I also want to reiterate that I'm not affiliated with She Should Run in any way, just interested in how organizations like She Should Run are trying to help women get involved in politics. Finally, you are free to take a break, skip any questions that make you uncomfortable, or stop at any time. I want to stress that there aren't any right or wrong answers. It's more like an informal conversation.

No matter whether you stop early or complete the full interview, you will receive $40. You will receive a check directly from the University of Michigan. I just need a mailing address for you. Your name and address will be kept confidential and deleted as soon as payment is processed. I can write that down by hand here or you can type it into the chat box.

Next, I'll put a link to a super short survey in the chat box. This is just to collect some basic demographic information. Again, this information will be de-identified and cannot be linked to

you in any way. You can leave Zoom open and come right on back when you are done with the survey. Take all the time you need and just let me know when you're done.

Appendix IV Interview Protocol

Core Questions

How did you get interested in politics? (Women who have not run) / I know you have answered this question many a time, but I would like the unedited version, not the stump version: What motivated you to run for office? (Women who have run/are running/holding office)

Where is She Should Run in that for you? How did you discover them?

Tell me about your experience with She Should Run so far.
- Probe: What do/did you like/find helpful about She Should Run?
- Probe: What do/did you dislike about She Should Run or see as areas for improvement?

Would you have joined She Should Run if you had to pay for it/if it wasn't free?
- Probe: How much would you have been willing to pay?

What do you think about She Should Run being nonpartisan?
- Probe: How do you think She Should Run being nonpartisan impacted your experience?

What are the biggest barriers you personally face[d] to running for office?

How well do you think She Should Run addresses[d] those barriers?

What factors would/did you need to have in place to feel like, "OK, yes, I can run now"?

Similar question as before, how well do you think She Should Run addresses(d) those factors?

Why do you think women are underrepresented in public office?

What do politics and leadership mean to you? You can talk about those together or separately, whatever makes sense to you.

Has She Should Run had an impact on how you think about politics and leadership?

Is there anything else you think it is important for me to know that I haven't yet asked?

Question Bank (As Time Allowed)

If you could design your own dream resource for women like yourself to get more involved in politics or run for office, what would it look like?

Probe: Would it be online, offline?

Probe: What would it offer?

What would you say is the mission of She Should Run?

Probe: Who would you say She Should Run is for?

Probe: How would you describe She Should Run?

What was it like transitioning from private citizen to public figure? (Women who have run/are running/holding office)

What were you expecting when you first got involved with She Should Run?

Probe: How has your expectation compared to your experience?

Have you explored or used other resources around running for office?

What do you think about She Should Run's overall image?

Appendix V She Should Run Screenshots

Figure V.1 About Us - What We Do page.

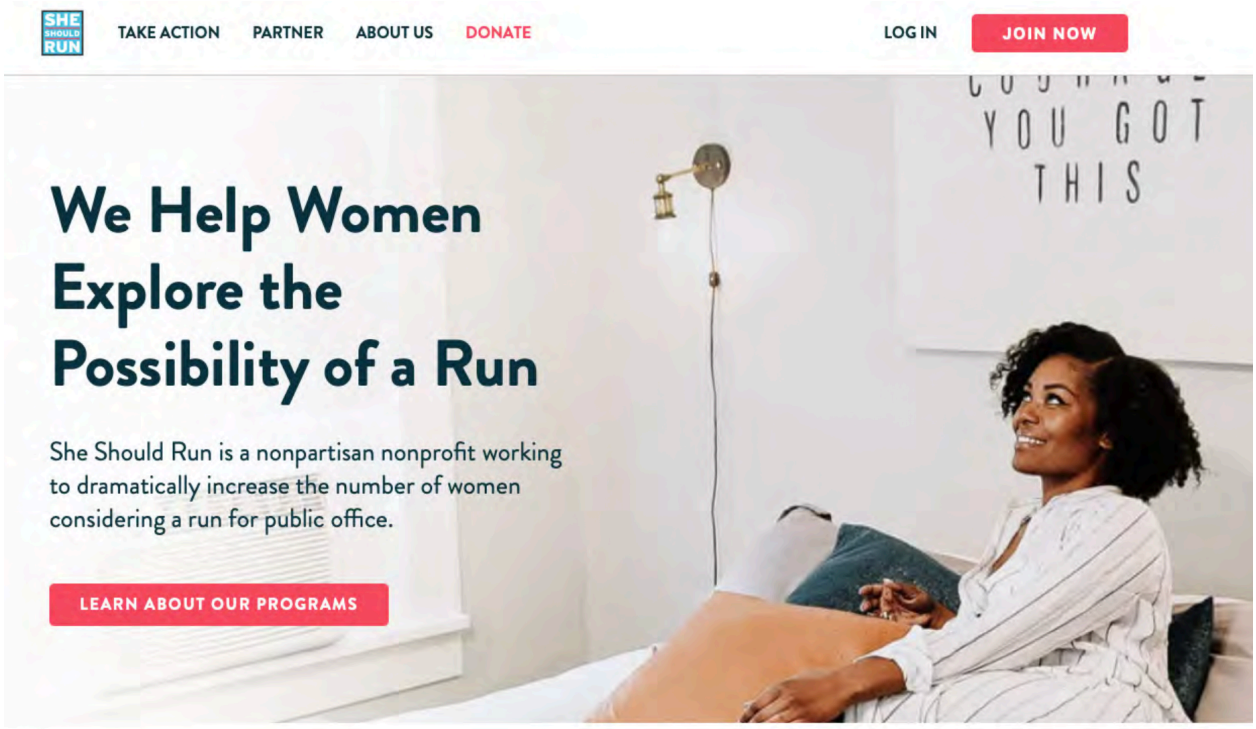


Figure V.2 Homepage header from April 2023.

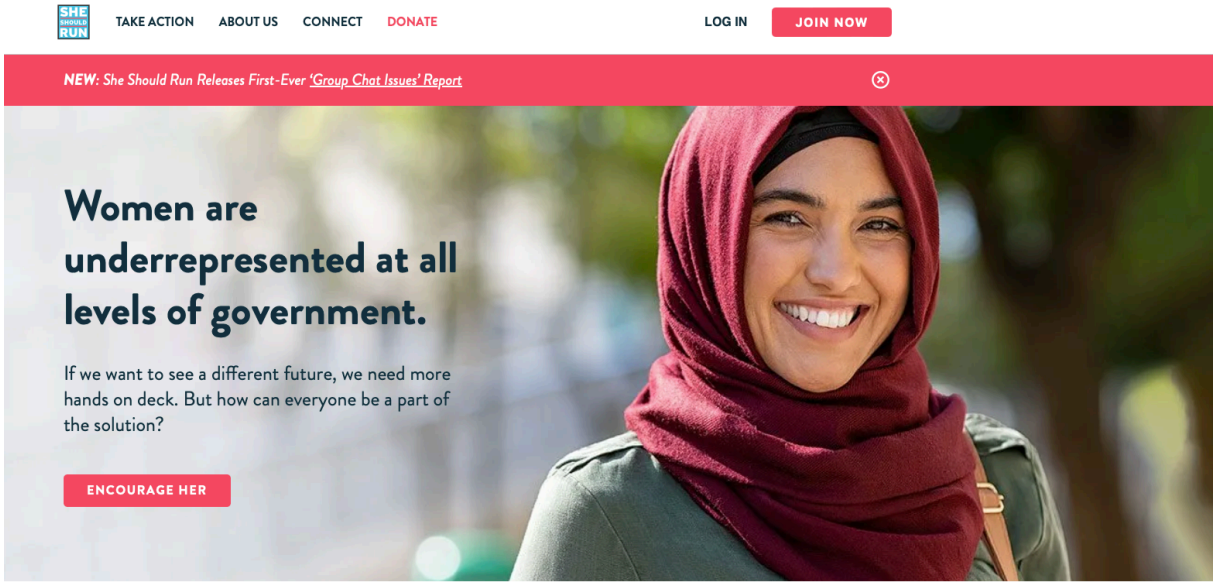


Figure V.3. Homepage header prior to April 2023.

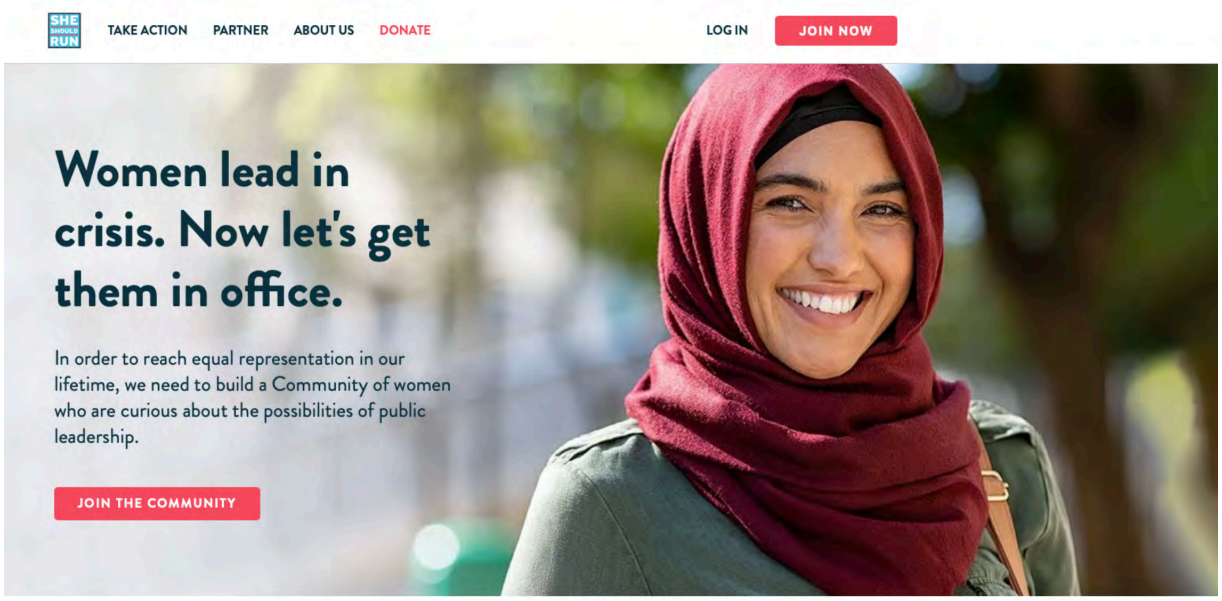
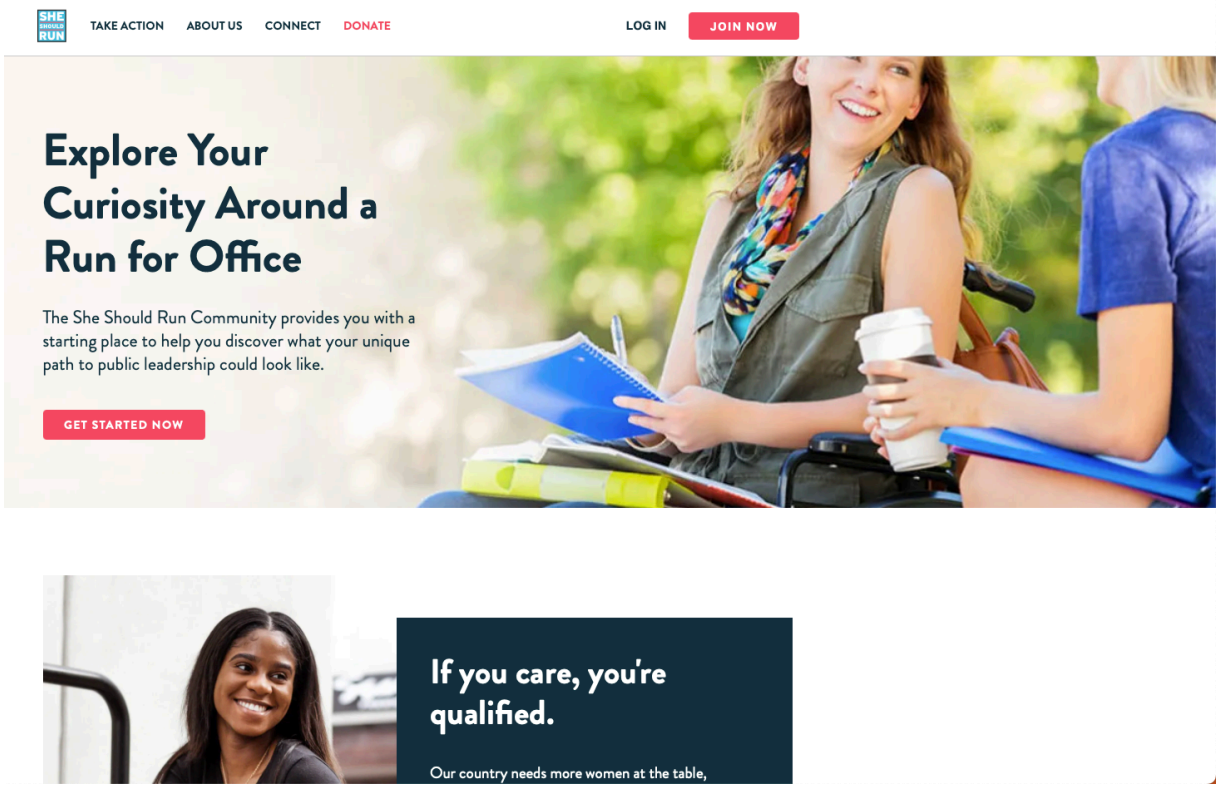


Figure V.4 Take Action - Begin Your Journey - Join the Community page.



Note: This figure displays the top pane of this webpage only, i.e., what is visible to a viewer on a 13" laptop screen without scrolling.

Bibliography

Anderson, E. (2013). *The imperative of integration*. Princeton University Press.

Anderson, S. (2023, March 24). *How fast should a website load in 2023?* Hobo SEO Consultancy. https://www.hobo-web.co.uk/your-website-design-should-load-in-4-seconds/

Andjelic, A. (2021). *The business of aspiration: How social, cultural, and environmental capital transforms brands*. Routledge.

Baldwin-Philippi, J. (2015). *Using technology, building democracy: Digital campaigning and the construction of citizenship*. Oxford University Press.

Barnum, C. M. (2021). *Usability testing essentials: Ready, set...test!* (2nd edition). Morgan Kaufmann.

Beckwith, K. (2021). Democracy with and without women: Inclusion, exclusion, and violence. *Perspectives on Politics*, *19*(3), 925–930. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721001262

Bekiempis, V. (2018, November 1). Republicans more likely to view Muslim Americans negatively, study finds. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/01/new-america-study-report-republicans-muslims-trump-midterms

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2011). Digital media and the personalization of collective action: Social technology and the organization of protests against the global economic crisis. *Information, Communication & Society*, *14*(6), 770–799. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2011.579141

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2013a). *The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2013b). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, *15*, 739–768. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661

Bernhard, R., Shames, S., & Teele, D. L. (2021). To emerge? Breadwinning, motherhood, and women's decisions to run for office. *American Political Science Review*, *115*(2), 379–394. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000970

Bimber, B. (2017). Three prompts for collective action in the context of digital media. *Political Communication*, *34*(1), 6–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2016.1223772

Bimber, B., Flanagin, A. J., & Stohl, C. (2005). Reconceptualizing collective action in the contemporary media environment. *Communication Theory*, *15*(4), 365–388. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2005.tb00340.x

Bimber, B., Flanagin, A.J., & Stohl, C. (2012). *Collective action in organizations: Interaction and engagement in an era of technological change*. Cambridge University Press.

Biroli, F. (2018). Violence against women and reactions to gender equality in politics. *Politics & Gender*, *14*(4), 681–685. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X18000600

Bittner, A., & Goodyear-Grant, E. (2017). Digging deeper into the gender gap: Gender salience as a moderating factor in political attitudes. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, *50*(2), 559–578. doi:10.1017/S0008423917000270

Bjarnegård, E., & Kenny, M. (2015). Revealing the "secret garden": The informal dimensions of political recruitment. *Politics & Gender*, *11*(04), 748–753. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X15000471

Bledsoe, T., & Herring, M. (1990). Victims of circumstances: Women in pursuit of political office. *The American Political Science Review*, 213–223. https://doi.org/10.2307/1963638

Boler, M., Macdonald, A., Nitsou, C., & Harris, A. (2014). Connective labor and social media: Women's roles in the 'leaderless' Occupy movement. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, *20*(4), 438–460. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856514541353

Bos, A. L., Greenlee, J. S., Holman, M. R., Oxley, Z. M., & Lay, J. C. (2021). This one's for the boys: How gendered political socialization limits girls' political ambition and interest. *American Political Science Review*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421001027

Boschker, M. S. J., Bakker, F. C., & Michaels, C. F. (2002). Effect of mental imagery on realizing affordances. *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology Section A*, *55*(3), 775–792. https://doi.org/10.1080/02724980143000622

Bratton, K., Haynie, K., & Reingold, B. (2006). Substantive impact of the changing face of elected officials. In C. Hardy-Fanta (Ed.), *Intersectionality and Politics: Recent Research on Gender, Race, and Political Representation in the United States* (pp. 71–96). Routledge.

Broockman, D. E. (2014). Mobilizing candidates: Political actors strategically shape the candidate pool with personal appeals. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, *1*(2), 104–119. https://doi.org/10.1017/xps.2014.3

Brown, N. E. (2014). Political participation of women of color: An intersectional analysis. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, *35*(4), 315–348. https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2014.955406

Burawoy, M. (1998). The extended case method. *Sociological Theory*, *16*(1), 4–33. https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00040

Burns, N. (2005). Finding gender. *Politics & Gender*, *1*(1), 137–141. doi:10.1017/S1743923X05221013

Burns, N. (2007). Gender in the aggregate, gender in the individual, gender and political action. *Politics & Gender*, *3*(01), 104–124. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X07231010

Burns, N., Jardina, A., Kinder, D. R., & Reynolds, M. (2011). *Explaining gender gaps and racial divides in partisanship* [Paper]. American Political Science Association Annual Meeting.

Burns, N., Schlozman, K. L., & Verba, S. (1997). The public consequences of private inequality: Family life and citizen participation. *American Political Science Review*, *91*(2), 373–389. https://doi.org/10.2307/2952362

Burns, N., Schlozman, K. L., & Verba, S. (2001). *The private roots of public action*. Harvard University Press.

Burrell, B. (2008). Likeable? Effective Commander in Chief? Polling on candidate traits in the "Year of the Presidential Woman." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, *41*(4), 747–752. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096508080980

Campbell, D. E., & Wolbrecht, C. (2006). See Jane run: Women politicians as role models for adolescents. *Journal of Politics*, *68*(2), 233–247. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2006.00402.x

Carroll, S. J., & Sanbonmatsu, K. (2013). *More women can run: Gender and pathways to the state legislatures*. Oxford University Press.

Center for American Women and Politics. (2023a). *Current numbers*. Rutgers University. https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/current-numbers

Center for American Women and Politics. (2023b). *Ready to Run*. Rutgers University. https://cawp.rutgers.edu/programs/ready-to-run

Chen, S. M. (2020). Women's March Minnesota on Facebook: Effects of social connection on different types of collective action. *New Media & Society*, *22*(10), 1785–1807. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819882694

Clark-Parsons, R. (2018). Building a digital Girl Army: The cultivation of feminist safe spaces online. *New Media & Society*, *20*(6), 2125–2144. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817731919

Cook, J., Purdie-Greenaway, V., Garcia, J., & Cohen, G. (2011). Chronic threat and contingent belonging: Protective benefits of values affirmation on identity development. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *102*, 479–496. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026312

Copeland, L., Hasell, A., & Bimber, B. (2016). Collective action frames, advocacy organizations, and protests over same-sex marriage. *International Journal of Communication, 10*, 3785–3807.

Corder, J. K., & Wolbrecht, C. (2018). Disappointed hopes? Female voters and the 1924 Progressive surge. In H. J. McCammon & L. A. Banaszak (Eds.), *100 Years of the Nineteenth Amendment: An Appraisal of Women's Political Activism* (pp. 19–45). Oxford University Press.

Cortellazzo, L., Bruni, E., & Zampieri, R. (2019). The role of leadership in a digitalized world: A review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01938

Cramer, K. (2015). Transparent explanations, yes. Public transcripts and fieldnotes, no: Ethnographic research on public opinion. *Qualitative & Multi-Method Research, 13,* 17-20. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.893069

Cramer, K. J. (2016). *The politics of resentment: Rural consciousness in Wisconsin and the rise of Scott Walker*. University of Chicago Press.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, *1989*(1), Article 8.

Crenshaw, K. (2017). *On intersectionality: Essential writings*. The New Press.

Cross, W., & Young, L. (2013). Candidate recruitment in Canada: The role of political parties. In R. Koop & A. Bittner (Eds.), *Parties, elections, and the future of Canadian politics.* (pp. 24–45). University of British Columbia Press.

Cucchiara, M. B. (2013). *Marketing schools, marketing cities*. University of Chicago Press.

Daniels, J. (2015). The trouble with white feminism: Whiteness, digital feminism, and the intersectional internet. *City University of New York Academic Works*. https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1212&context=gc_pubs

Dhima, K. (2020). Do elites discriminate against female political aspirants? Evidence from a field experiment. *Politics & Gender*, *18,* 126–157. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000227

Diamant, J. (2023, January 3). *Faith on the Hill: The religious composition of the 118th Congress*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/01/03/faith-on-the-hill-2023/

Diaz, J. (2022, November 4). Why aren't more mums running for office? One group is hoping to change that. *NPR*. https://www.npr.org/2022/11/04/1133634546/mothers-running-for-office-election-midterm

Dittmar, K. (2015a). Encouragement is not enough: Addressing social and structural barriers to female recruitment. *Politics & Gender*, *11*(04), 759–765. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X15000495

Dittmar, K. (2015b). *Navigating gendered terrain: Stereotypes and strategy in political campaigns*. Temple University Press.

Dittmar, K. (2020). Urgency and ambition: The influence of political environment and emotion in spurring US women's candidacies in 2018. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, *3*(1), 143–160. https://doi.org/10.1332/251510819X15728693158427

Doherty, D., Dowling, C. M., & Miller, M. G. (2019). Do local party chairs think women and minority candidates can win? Evidence from a conjoint experiment. *The Journal of Politics*, *81*(4), 1282–1297. https://doi.org/10.1086/704698

Dolan, K. (2018). *Voting for women: How the public evaluates women candidates*. Routledge.

Downs, A. (1957). An economic theory of political action in a democracy. *Journal of Political Economy*, *65*(2), 135–150. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1827369

Dubois, E., & Blank, G. (2018). The echo chamber is overstated: The moderating effect of political interest and diverse media. *Information, Communication & Society*, *21*(5), 729–745. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1428656

DuBois, E. C. (2012). Working women, class relations, and suffrage militance: Harriot Stanton Blatch and the New York woman suffrage movement, 1894–1909. *The Journal of American History, 74*(1), 34–58. https://doi.org/10.2307/1908504

Ehrenberg, J. (2017). What can we learn from Occupy's failure? *Palgrave Communications*, *3*, 17062. https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2017.62

Evans, G. (2000). The continued significance of class voting. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *3*(1), 401–417. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.3.1.401

Fields-White, M. (2011). The root: How racism tainted women's suffrage. *NPR*. https://www.npr.org/2011/03/25/134849480/the-root-how-racism-tainted-womens-suffrage

Fiore-Gartland, B., & Neff, G. (2015). Communication, mediation, and the expectations of data: Data valences across health and wellness communities. *International Journal of Communication, 9,* 1466-1484.

Foucault, M. (1984). Of other spaces: Utopias and heterotopias. *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité*. https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf

Fox, R. L. (2003). Gender, political ambition and the decision not to run for office. *Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University.* https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/initialdecisiontorun_0.pdf

Fox, R. L., & Lawless, J. L. (2004). Entering the arena? Gender and the decision to run for office. *American Journal of Political Science*, *48*(2), 264–280. https://doi.org/10.2307/1519882

Fox, R. L., & Lawless, J. L. (2005). To run or not to run for office: Explaining nascent political ambition. *American Journal of Political Science*, *49*(3), 642–659. https://doi.org/10.2307/3647737

Fox, R. L., & Lawless, J. L. (2010). If only they'd ask: Gender, recruitment, and political ambition. *Journal of Politics*, *72*(2), 310–326. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381609990752

Franceschet, S., & Piscopo, J. M. (2014). Sustaining gendered practices? Power, parties, and elite political networks in Argentina. *Comparative Political Studies*, *47*(1), 85–110. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414013489379

Frederick, A. (2013). Bringing narrative in: Race–gender storytelling, political ambition, and women's paths to public office. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, *34*(2), 113–137. https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2013.776379

Gamson, W. A. (1992). The social psychology of collective action. In A. D. Morris & C. McClurg Mueller (Eds.), *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (pp. 53–76). Yale University Press.

Garikipati, S., & Kambhampati, U. (2020). Leading the fight against the pandemic: Does gender 'really' matter? *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3617953

Garland, A. (2020). How I got here: Erin Loos Cutraro. *Universitas*. https://www.slu.edu/universitas/archive/2021/how-i-got-here-erin-loos-cutraro.php

George, J. J., & Leidner, D. E. (2019). From clicktivism to hacktivism: Understanding digital activism. *Information and Organization*, *29*(3). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoandorg.2019.04.001

Gibson, J. (1979). The theory of affordances. In J.J. Gieseking & W. Mangold. (Eds.), *The People, Place, and Space Reader* (pp 56-60). Routledge.

Gibson, J. (1986). *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Taylor & Francis.

Gillespie, T. (2010). The politics of 'platforms.' *New Media & Society*, *12*(3), 347–364. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809342738

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (2009). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Transaction Publishers.

Goss, K. A. (2012). *The paradox of gender equality: How American women's groups gained and lost their public voice.* University of Michigan Press.

Hampton, K., Rainie, L., Lu, W., Dwyer, M., Shin, I., & Purcell, K. (2014). *Social media and the "spiral of silence."* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2014/08/26/social-media-and-the-spiral-of-silence/

Haraldsson, A., & Wängnerud, L. (2019). The effect of media sexism on women's political ambition: Evidence from a worldwide study. *Feminist Media Studies*, *19*(4), 525–541. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1468797

Harris-Perry, M. V. (2011). *Sister Citizen: Shame, stereotypes, and Black women in America*. Yale University Press.

Hasell, A., & Weeks, B. E. (2016). Partisan provocation: The role of partisan news use and emotional responses in political information sharing in social media. *Human Communication Research*, *42*(4), 641–661. https://doi.org/10.1111/hcre.12092

Hawkesworth, M. (2003). Congressional enactments of race-gender: Toward a theory of raced-gendered institutions. *The American Political Science Review*, *97*(4), 529–550. doi:10.1017/S0003055403000868

Hayes, D., & Lawless, J. L. (2015). A non-gendered lens? Media, voters, and female candidates in contemporary congressional elections. *Perspectives on Politics*, *13*(1), 95–118. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592714003156

Hayes, D., & Lawless, J. L. (2016). *Women on the run: Gender, media, and political campaigns in a polarized era*. Cambridge University Press.

Henderson-King, D. H., & Stewart, A. J. (1994). Women or feminists? Assessing women's group consciousness. *Sex Roles*, *31*, 505–516. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01544276

Hendricks, G. (2009). *The big leap: Conquer your hidden fear and take life to the next level*. HarperCollins.

Henrich, J., Heine, S. J., & Norenzayan, A. (2010). Most people are not WEIRD. *Nature*, *466*(7302), 29–29. https://doi.org/10.1038/466029a

Herbst, S. (1994). *Politics at the margin: Historical studies of public expression outside the mainstream*. Cambridge University Press.

Hern, E. (2017). The trouble with institutions: How women's policy machineries can undermine women's mass participation. *Politics & Gender*, *13*(03), 405–431. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X16000519

Hess, A. (2017, June 14). Why women aren't welcome on the internet. *Pacific Standard.* https://psmag.com/social-justice/women-arent-welcome-internet-72170#.8nzcedsr4

Hicks, M. (2017). *Programmed inequality: How Britain discarded women technologists and lost its edge in computing*. MIT Press.

Hinojosa, M., & Kittilson, M. C. (2020). *Seeing women, strengthening democracy*. Oxford University Press.

Hodgson, A.P. (2017). *Technical versus adaptive training: Mobilizing women political candidates to thrive on the campaign trail* [Dissertation]. University of Kansas.

Hogan, B. (2009). *Networking in everyday life* [Dissertation]. University of Toronto.

Holman, M. R. (2014). *Women in politics in the American city*. Temple University Press.

Holman, M. R., & Kalmoe, N. P. (2021). Partisanship in the #MeToo era. *Perspectives on Politics*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721001912

Holstein, J., & Gubrium, J. F. (2003). *Inside interviewing: New lenses, new concerns*. SAGE.

Horowitz, J. M., & Igielnik, R. (2020). *A century after women gained the right to vote, majority of Americans see work to do on gender equality*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/07/07/a-century-after-women-gained-the-right-to-vote-majority-of-americans-see-work-to-do-on-gender-equality/

Huddy, L., Mason, L., & Aarøe, L. (2015). Expressive partisanship: Campaign involvement, political emotion, and partisan identity. *American Political Science Review*, *109*(1), 1–17. doi:10.1017/S0003055414000604

Hume, D. (1739). *A treatise of human nature: Being an attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects; and dialogues concerning natural religion*. Longmans, Green & Company.

Ivory, C. (2013). The role of the imagined user in planning and design narratives. *Planning Theory*, *12*(4), 425–441. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095212470546

Jackson, S. J., Bailey, M., & Welles, B. F. (2020). *#Hashtagactivism: Networks of race and gender justice*. MIT Press.

Jackson, S. J., & Foucault Welles, B. (2015). Hijacking #myNYPD: Social media dissent and networked counterpublics. *Journal of Communication*, *65*(6), 932–952. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12185

James, H. (2019). *Still running backwards and in high heels: Female candidate fundraising process, perception, and challenges in the 50 states* [Dissertation]. Rutgers University.

Jankowicz, N. (2022). *How to be a woman online: Surviving abuse and harassment, and how to fight back*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Jankowicz, N. (2021, January 28). Online harassment toward women is getting even more insidious. *Wired*. https://www.wired.com/story/online-harassment-toward-women-getting-more-insidious/

Janusz, A., Barreiro, S.-N., & Cintron, E. (2022). Political parties and campaign resource allocation: Gender gaps in Brazilian elections. *Party Politics*, *28*(5), 854–864. https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688211018424

Jardina, A., & Burns, N. (2016). Advances and ambivalence: The consequences of women's educational and workforce changes for women's political participation in the United States, 1952 to 2012. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, *2*(4), 272–301. https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2016.2.4.10

Jerolmack, C., & Murphy, A. K. (2019). The ethical dilemmas and social scientific trade-offs of masking in ethnography. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *48*(4), 801–827. https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124117701483

Joshi, D., & Goehrung, R. (2018). Conceptualizing and measuring women's political leadership: From presence to balance. *Politics & Gender*, *14*(3), 350–375. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X18000120

Jungherr, A., Rivero, G., & Gayo-Avello, D. (2020). *Retooling politics: How digital media are shaping democracy*. Cambridge University Press.

Kaplan, D. M. (2009). *Readings in the philosophy of technology*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Karpf, D. (2012). *The MoveOn effect: The unexpected transformation of American political advocacy*. Oxford University Press.

Karpf, D. (2018). Analytic activism and its limitations. *Social Media + Society*, *4*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117750718

Katz, E. (1957). The two-step flow of communication: An up-to-date report on an hypothesis. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *21,* 61-78. https://doi.org/10.1086/266687

Keller, J., Mendes, K., & Ringrose, J. (2018). Speaking 'unspeakable things': Documenting digital feminist responses to rape culture. *Journal of Gender Studies*, *27*(1), 22–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2016.1211511

Kenney, M. (2001). *Mapping gay L.A: The intersection of place and politics*. Temple University Press.

Khan, R., Mahmood, A., & Salim, A. (2020). Arab Spring failure: A case study of Egypt and Syria. *Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ)*, *4*(1), 44–53. https://doi.org/10.47264/idea.lassij/4.1.5

Kitchens, K. E., & Swers, M. L. (2016). Why aren't there more Republican women in congress? Gender, partisanship, and fundraising support in the 2010 and 2012 elections. *Politics & Gender*, *12*(04), 648–676. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X1600009X

Klandermans, B. (1997). *The social psychology of protest*. Blackwell Publishers.

Klar, S. (2018). When common identities decrease trust: An experimental study of partisan women. *American Journal of Political Science*, *62*(3), 610–622. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12366

Knapik, M. (2006). The qualitative research interview: Participants' responsive participation in knowledge making. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *5*(3), 77–93. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500308

Kohler, J. (2021, January 19). 2020 election: Why more white women didn't rally behind the Biden-Harris campaign. *Fortune*. https://fortune.com/2021/01/19/2020-election-white-women-voters-biden-harris-trump-progressive/

Kreiss, D. (2012). *Taking our country back: The crafting of networked politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama*. Oxford University Press.

Kreiss, D. (2016a). *Prototype politics: Technology-intensive campaigning and the data of democracy*. Oxford University Press.

Kreiss, D. (2016b). Seizing the moment: The presidential campaigns' use of Twitter during the 2012 electoral cycle. *New Media & Society*, *18*(8), 1473–1490. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814562445

Kreiss, D., & Adams, K. (2019). Navigating the brogrammers and the boys' club: Women's representation and experiences in political technology. *New Media & Society*, *21*(9), 1967–1987. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819835573

Kreiss, D., Adams, K., Ciesielski, J., Fernandez, H., Frauenfelder, K., Lowe, B., & Micchia, G. (2020). *Recoding the boys' club: The experiences and future of women in political technology*. Oxford University Press.

Kreiss, D., Lawrence, R. G., & McGregor, S. C. (2018). In their own words: Political practitioner accounts of candidates, audiences, affordances, genres, and timing in strategic social media use. *Political Communication*, *35*(1), 8–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2017.1334727

Kreiss, D., & McGregor, S. C. (2018). Technology firms shape political communication: The work of Microsoft, Facebook, Twitter, and Google with campaigns during the 2016 U.S. presidential cycle. *Political Communication*, *35*(2), 155–177. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2017.1364814

Kreitzer, R. J., & Osborn, T. L. (2019). The emergence and activities of women's recruiting groups in the U.S. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, *7*(4), 842–852. https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2018.1531772

Krook, M. L. (2010). Why are fewer women than men elected? Gender and the dynamics of candidate selection. *Political Studies Review*, *8*(2), 155–168. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-9302.2009.00185.x

Krook, M. L. (2020). *Violence against women in politics*. Oxford University Press.

Kuperberg, R. (2018). Intersectional violence against women in politics. *Politics & Gender*, *14*(4), 685–690. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X18000612

Kwon, S.W., Rondi, E., Levin, D. Z., De Massis, A., & Brass, D. J. (2020). Network brokerage: An integrative review and future research agenda. *Journal of Management*, *46*(6), 1092–1120. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206320914694

Lareau, A. (2021). *Listening to people: A practical guide to interviewing, participant observation, data analysis, and writing it all up*. University of Chicago Press.

Lawless, J. L. (2011). *Becoming a candidate: Political ambition and the decision to run for office*. Cambridge University Press.

Lawless, J. L. (2015). Female candidates and legislators. *Annual Review of Political Science, 18,* 349-366. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-020614-094613

Lawless, J. L., & Fox, R. L. (2010). *It still takes a candidate: Why women don't run for office*. Cambridge University Press.

Lawless, J. L., & Fox, R. L. (2013). *Girls just wanna not run: The gender gap in young Americans' political ambition* [Report]. Women and Politics Institute, School of Public

Affairs, American University. https://www.american.edu/spa/wpi/upload/girls-just-wanna-not-run_policy-report.pdf

Lawrence, R. G., Arceneaux, K., Clemm Von Hohenberg, B., Dunaway, J., Esser, F., Kreiss, D., Rinke, E. M., & Thorson, K. (2023). New methods, "old" methods: Emerging trends and challenges in political communication research. *Political Communication Report, 27, 1-8.* https://doi.org/10.17169/REFUBIUM-39044

Light, B., Burgess, J., & Duguay, S. (2018). The walkthrough method: An approach to the study of apps. *New Media & Society*, *20*(3), 881–900. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816675438

Linabary, J. R., Corple, D. J., & Cooky, C. (2020). Feminist activism in digital space: Postfeminist contradictions in #WhyIStayed. *New Media & Society*, *22*(10), 1827–1848. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819884635

Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2019). *Qualitative communication research methods* (Fourth edition). SAGE.

Liss, M., Crawford, M., & Popp, D. (2004). Predictors and correlates of collective action. *Sex Roles*, *50*(11/12), 771–779. https://doi.org/10.1023/B:SERS.0000029096.90835.3f

Litt, E. (2012). Knock, knock. Who's there? The imagined audience. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *56*(3), 330–345. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2012.705195

Ljungberg, E. (2020). Media practices in the making of an "other space": Communicating inclusion, exclusion, and belonging in a controversial heterotopia. *New Media & Society*, *22*(12), 2166–2182. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819888399

Lovenduski, J. (2005). *Feminizing politics*. Polity.

Luker, K. (2008). *Salsa dancing into the social sciences: Research in an age of info-glut*. Harvard University Press.

Mahoney, A. M., & Clark, C. J. (2019). When and where do women's legislative caucuses emerge? *Politics & Gender*, *15*(4), 671–694. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X18000806

Malik, N. (2023, January 30). England's old boys' club has evolved into 'the network', made up of high rollers and City slickers. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jan/30/england-old-boys-club-zahawi-wealthy-network

Mansbridge, J. (1999). Should Blacks represent Blacks and women represent women? A contingent "yes." *The Journal of Politics*, *61*(3), 628–657. https://doi.org/10.2307/2647821

Martin, C., & Rudulph, H. (2017, October 10). How I ran for office on a $1,000 budget—and won. *Cosmopolitan*. https://www.cosmopolitan.com/politics/a12252844/chassity-martin-1000-campaign-budget/

McCammon, H. J., & Banaszak, L. A. (Eds.). (2018). *100 years of the Nineteenth Amendment: An appraisal of women's political activism*. Oxford University Press.

McConnaughy, C. M. (2013). *The woman suffrage movement in America: A reassessment*. Cambridge University Press.

McConnaughy, C. M. (2019, March). *Woman suffrage in the United States*. Curtain Up: Women in Parliament and Politics in International Comparison, Commission for the History of Parliamentarism and Political Parties (KGParl), Department of Gender History, Historical Institute, Friedrich Schiller University Jena, and the Working Group on Parliaments in

Transition, Institute for Contemporary History, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Prague. Berlin, Germany.

McDonagh, E. (2009). *The motherless state: Women's political leadership and American democracy.* University of Chicago Press.

McEvily, B., & Zaheer, A. (1999). Bridging ties: A source of firm heterogeneity in competitive capabilities. *Strategic Management Journal, 20*(12), 1133-1156. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0266(199912)20:12%3C1133::AID-SMJ74%3E3.0.CO;2-7

McGregor, S. C., Lawrence, R. G., & Cardona, A. (2017). Personalization, gender, and social media: Gubernatorial candidates' social media strategies. *Information, Communication & Society*, *20*(2), 264–283. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1167228

McGregor, S. C., & Mourão, R. R. (2016). Talking politics on Twitter: Gender, elections, and social networks. *Social Media + Society*, *2*(3), 205630511666421. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116664218

McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Cook, J. M. (2001). Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *27*(1), 415–444. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.415

Mendelson, C. (2007). Recruiting participants for research from online communities. *CIN: Computers, Informatics, Nursing*, *25*(6), 317–323. https://doi.org/10.1097/01.NCN.0000299653.13777.51

Milan, S. (2015). From social movements to cloud protesting: The evolution of collective identity. *Information, Communication & Society*, *18*(8), 887–900. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1043135

Miller, A. H., Gurin, P., Gurin, G., & Malanchuk, O. (1981). Group consciousness and political participation. *American Journal of Political Science*, *25*(3), 494–511. https://doi.org/10.2307/2110816

Moncrief, G. F., Peverill, S., & Jewell, M. E. (2001). *Who runs for the legislature?* Prentice Hall.

Morell, S. (2023). Supporting women: How women's candidate training organizations shape women's ambition and representation [Dissertation]. *University of Michigan.*

Nagy, P., & Neff, G. (2015). Imagined affordance: Reconstructing a keyword for communication theory. *Social Media + Society*, *1*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115603385

Nelson, L. K. (2018). Feminism, consciousness-raising, and continuity between the waves. In H. J. McCammon & L. A. Banaszak (Eds.), *100 Years of the Nineteenth Amendment: An appraisal of women's political activism* (pp. 175–197). Oxford University Press.

Nielsen, J. (2012, January 3). *Usability 101: Introduction to usability*. Nielsen Norman Group. https://www.nngroup.com/articles/usability-101-introduction-to-usability/

Nielsen, L. (2019). *Personas—user focused design*. Springer.

Noelle-Neumann, E. (1974). The spiral of silence: A theory of public opinion. *Journal of Communication*, *24*(2), 43–51. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1974.tb00367.x

O'Brien, D. Z. (2018). "Righting" conventional wisdom: Women and right parties in established democracies. *Politics & Gender*, *14*(01), 27–55. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X17000514

Ocampo, A. X., & Ray, J. (2020). Many are called but few are chosen: The emergence of Latino congressional candidates. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, *8*(4), 738–761. https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2019.1629968

Olson, M. (1965). *The logic of collective action: Public goods and the theory of groups*. Harvard University Press.

Ortega, M. (2006). Being lovingly, knowingly ignorant: White feminism and women of color. *Hypatia*, *21*(3), 56–74. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2006.tb01113.x

Ostfeld, M. C., & Yadon, N. D. (2022). ¿Mejorando la raza?: The political undertones of Latinos' skin color in the United States. *Social Forces*, *100*(4), 1806–1832. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soab060

Papacharissi, Z. (2014). *Affective publics: Sentiment, technology, and politics*. Oxford University Press.

Parks, M. R. (2010). Social network sites as virtual communities. In Z. Papacharissi (Ed.), *A networked self: Identity, community, and culture on social network sites* (pp. 113–131). Routledge.

Paxton, P., Kunovich, S., & Hughes, M. M. (2007). Gender in politics. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *33*(1), 263–284. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131651

Pearson, K., & McGhee, E. (2013). What it takes to win: Questioning "gender neutral" outcomes in U.S. house elections. *Politics & Gender*, *9*(04), 439–462. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X13000433

Pezalla, A. E., Pettigrew, J., & Miller-Day, M. (2012). Researching the researcher-as-instrument: An exercise in interviewer self-reflexivity. *Qualitative Research*, *12*(2), 165–185. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794111422107

Piscopo, J. M. (2019). The limits of leaning in: Ambition, recruitment, and candidate training in comparative perspective. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, *7*(4), 817–828. https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2018.1532917

Piscopo, J. M., & Kenny, M. (2020). Rethinking the ambition gap: Gender and candidate emergence in comparative perspective. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, *3*(1), 3–10. https://doi.org/10.1332/251510819X15755447629661

Preece, J. R. (2016). Mind the gender gap: An experiment on the influence of self-efficacy on political interest. *Politics & Gender*, *12*(01), 198–217. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X15000628

Preece, J. R., Stoddard, O. B., & Fisher, R. (2016). Run, Jane, run! Gendered responses to political party recruitment. *Political Behavior*, *38*(3), 561–577. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-015-9327-3

Pruysers, S., & Blais, J. (2017). Why won't Lola run? An experiment examining stereotype threat and political ambition. *Politics & Gender*, *13*(02), 232–252. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X16000544

Pruysers, S., & Blais, J. (2018). A little encouragement goes a (not so) long way: An experiment to increase political ambition. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, *39*(3), 384–395. https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2018.1475793

Pruysers, S., & Blais, J. (2019). Narcissistic women and cash-strapped men: Who can be encouraged to consider running for political office, and who should do the encouraging? *Political Research Quarterly*, *72*(1), 229–242. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912918786040

Reingold, B., Kreitzer, R. J., Osborn, T., & Swers, M. L. (2020). Anti-abortion policymaking and women's representation. *Political Research Quarterly*, *74,* 403-420. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912920903381

Reingold, B., & Smith, A. R. (2012). Welfare policymaking and intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender in U.S. state legislatures. *American Journal of Political Science*, *56*(1), 131–147. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00569.x

Rinehart, S. T. (2013). *Gender consciousness and politics*. Routledge.

Ronzhyn, A., Cardenal, A. S., & Batlle Rubio, A. (2022). Defining affordances in social media research: A literature review. *New Media & Society, 0*. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221135187

Rosenwasser, S. M., & Dean, N. G. (1989). Gender role and political office: Effects of perceived masculinity/femininity of candidate and political office. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *13*(1), 77–85. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1989.tb00986.x

Rule, W. (1981). Why women don't run: The critical contextual factors in women's legislative recruitment. *Western Political Quarterly, 34,* 60-77. https://doi.org/10.2307/447890

Sanbonmatsu, K. (2015a). Electing women of color: The role of campaign trainings. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, *36*(2), 137–160. https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2015.1019273

Sanbonmatsu, K. (2015b). Why not a woman of color?: The candidacies of US women of color for statewide executive office. In *Oxford Handbooks Online*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935307.013.43

Schaeffer, K. (2023, January 9). U.S. Congress continues to grow in racial, ethnic diversity. *Pew Research Center.* https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/01/09/u-s-congress-continues-to-grow-in-racial-ethnic-diversity/

Schlesinger, J. A. (1966). *Ambition and politics: Political careers in the United States.* Rand McNally.

Schlozman, K. L., Burns, N., & Verba, S. (1994). Gender and the pathways to participation: The role of resources. *Journal of Politics*, *56*(4), 963–990. https://doi.org/10.2307/2132069

Schlozman, K. L., Burns, N., & Verba, S. (1999). "What happened at work today?": A multistage model of gender, employment, and political participation. *Journal of Politics*, *61*(1), 29–53. https://doi.org/10.2307/2647774

Schneider, M. C., Holman, M. R., Diekman, A. B., & McAndrew, T. (2016). Power, conflict, and community: How gendered views of political power influence women's political ambition. *Political Psychology*, *37*(4), 515–531. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12268

Scott, J. S., & Collins, J. (2020). Riled up about running for office: Examining the impact of emotions on political ambition. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, *8*(2), 407–422. https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2020.1757806

Setzler, M. (2019). Measuring bias against female political leadership. *Politics & Gender*, *15*(4), 695–721. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X18000430

Shah, P., Scott, J., & Gonzalez Juenke, E. (2019). Women of color candidates: Examining emergence and success in state legislative elections. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, *7*(2), 429–443. https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2018.1557057

Shames, S. (2014). *The rational non-candidate: A theory of (uneven) candidate deterrence* [Dissertation]. Harvard University.

Shames, S. (2017). Intersectionality and political ambition. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.241

She Should Run. (2012). *Form 990: Public disclosure copy*. She Should Run. https://www.sheshouldrun.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SSR-2011-12-TAX-Form-990-Public-Disclosure-Copy.pdf

She Should Run. (2021). *Form 990: Public disclosure copy*. https://www.sheshouldrun.org/wp-content/uploads/SSR-990-2020-Public-Disclosure.pdf

She Should Run. (2023). *The issues motivating women*. https://www.sheshouldrun.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-Issues-Report.pdf

Shnabel, N., Purdie-Vaughns, V., Cook, J. E., Garcia, J., & Cohen, G. L. (2013). Demystifying values-affirmation interventions: Writing about social belonging is a key to buffering against identity threat. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *39*(5), 663–676. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213480816

Small, M. L., & Calarco, J. M. (2022). *Qualitative literacy: A guide to evaluating ethnographic and interview research*. University of California Press.

Smith, G., & French, A. (2009). The political brand: A consumer perspective. *Marketing Theory*, *9*(2), 209–226. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593109103068

Smith, J. L., Paul, D., & Paul, R. (2007). No place for a woman: Evidence for gender bias in evaluations of presidential candidates. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, *29*(3), 225–233. https://doi.org/10.1080/01973530701503069

Sobieraj, S. (2018). Bitch, slut, skank, cunt: Patterned resistance to women's visibility in digital publics. *Information, Communication & Society*, *21*(11), 1700–1714. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1348535

Sobieraj, S. (2020). *Credible threat: Attacks against women online and the future of democracy*. Oxford University Press.

Steinert-Threlkeld, Z. C. (2017). Spontaneous collective action: Peripheral mobilization during the Arab Spring. *American Political Science Review*, *111*(2), 379–403. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055416000769

Stocchi, L., Pourazad, N., Michaelidou, N., Tanusondjaja, A., & Harrigan, P. (2022). Marketing research on mobile apps: Past, present and future. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *50*(2), 195–225. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-021-00815-w

Strapagiel, L. (2020, November 14). "She Should Run" has been accused of not accommodating a deaf woman. *BuzzFeed News*. https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/laurenstrapagiel/she-should-run-complaint-from-deaf-woman

Suk, J., Abhishek, A., Zhang, Y., Ahn, S. Y., Correa, T., Garlough, C., & Shah, D. V. (2021). #MeToo, networked acknowledgment, and connective action: How "empowerment through empathy" launched a social movement. *Social Science Computer Review*, *39*(2), 276–294. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439319864882

Sung, E., & Mayer, R. E. (2013). Online multimedia learning with mobile devices and desktop computers: An experimental test of Clark's methods-not-media hypothesis. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *29*(3), 639–647. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.10.022

Swain, K. E. O., & Lien, P. (2017). Structural and contextual factors regarding the accessibility of elective office for women of color at the local level. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, *38*(2), 128–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2016.1198653

Thakur, D., & Hankerson, D. (2022). An unrepresentative democracy: How disinformation and online abuse hinder women of color political candidates in the United States. *Center for*

Democracy & Technology. https://cdt.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/update-anunrepresentativedemocracy-a11y-102622-1710.pdf

Theocharis, Y., & Van Deth, J. W. (2018). The continuous expansion of citizen participation: A new taxonomy. *European Political Science Review*, *10*(1), 139–163. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773916000230

Tremblay, M. (2007). Democracy, representation, and women: A comparative analysis. *Democratization*, *14*(4), 533–553. DOI: 10.1080/13510340701398261

Vaast, E., Safadi, H., Lapointe, L., & Negoita, B. (2017). Social media affordances for connective action: An examination of microblogging use during the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. *MIS Quarterly*, *41*(4), 1179–1205. https://doi.org/10.25300/MISQ/2017/41.4.08

Van Duyn, E. (2018). Hidden democracy: Political dissent in rural America. *Journal of Communication*, *68*(5), 965–987. https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqy042

Verba, S., Burns, N., & Schlozman, K. L. (1997). Knowing and caring about politics: Gender and political engagement. *Journal of Politics*, *59*(4), 1051–1072. https://doi.org/10.2307/2998592

Verba, S., Burns, N., & Schlozman, K. L. (2003). Unequal at the starting line: Creating participatory inequalities across generations and among groups. *The American Sociologist, 34,* 45–69. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12108-003-1005-y

Vogels, E. A. (2019, September 9). Millennials stand out for their technology use, but older generations also embrace digital life. *Pew Research Center.* https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/09/us-generations-technology-use/

Wajcman, J. (1991). *Feminism confronts technology*. Polity.

Weiss, R. (1995). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. Simon and Schuster.

Welch, S. (2018). Women in state legislatures from the Gilded Age to the global age. In H. J. McCammon & L. A. Banaszak (Eds.), *100 Years of the Nineteenth Amendment: An Appraisal of Women's Political Activism* (pp. 151–172). Oxford University Press.

Wellman, B. (2001). Little boxes, glocalization, and networked individualism. In M. Tanabe, P. van den Besselaar, & T. Ishida (Eds.), *Digital Cities II: Computational and Sociological Approaches* (pp. 10–25). Springer.

Wellman, B. (2005). Community: From neighborhood to network. *Communications of the ACM*, *48*(10), 53–55. https://doi.org/10.1145/1089107.1089137

Willson, M. A. (2006). *Technically together: Re-thinking community within techno-society*. Peter Lang.

Wineinger, C. N. (2022). *Gendering the GOP: Intraparty politics and Republican women's representation in Congress*. Oxford University Press.

Wright, S. C., & Lubensky, M. E. (2007). The struggle for social equality: Collective action versus prejudice reduction. In S. Demoulin, J. P. Leyens, & J. F. Dovidio (Eds.), *Intergroup Misunderstandings: Impact of Divergent Social Realities*. Psychology Press.

Xu, M., & Storr, G. (2015). Learning the concept of researcher as instrument in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 17,* 1-18. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2012.1768

Xydias, C. V. (2007). Inviting more women to the party: Gender quotas and women's substantive representation in Germany. *International Journal of Sociology*, *37*(4), 52–66. https://doi.org/10.2753/IJS0020-7659370403

Yeoman, I., & McMahon-Beattie, U. (2014). Exclusivity: The future of luxury. *Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management*, *13*(1), 12–22. https://doi.org/10.1057/rpm.2013.29

Zenger, J., & Folkman, J. (2019, June 25). Research: Women score higher than men in most leadership skills. *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2019/06/research-women-score-higher-than-men-in-most-leadership-skills

Zenger, J., & Folkman, J. (2020, December 30). Research: Women are better leaders during a crisis. *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2020/12/research-women-are-better-leaders-during-a-crisis

Zulli, D., & Zulli, D. J. (2022). Extending the Internet meme: Conceptualizing technological mimesis and imitation publics on the TikTok platform. *New Media & Society*, *24*(8), 1872–1890. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820983603