

Engaging Women in Public Leadership in West Virginia

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Abstract

As the 113th Congress begins to tackle the issues of the day, men and women alike celebrate the inclusion of a record number of women representatives. The historic numbers indicate progress, but the reality is that women compose slightly more than half of the national population but less than twenty percent of the national legislative representatives. Women fare slightly better at the state level, holding just under a quarter of state legislative seats and executive offices. In this study we explore the challenges faced and advances made by women in attaining statewide executive office in rural states by examining how they have fared in Appalachia and particularly West Virginia. We integrate theoretical understandings and statistical data with lived experiences gleaned from personal interviews conducted with the women who have held executive office in West Virginia.

Introduction

As the 113th Congress begins to tackle the issues of the day, men and women alike celebrate the inclusion of a record number of women representatives – 98 in both chambers combined, plus three female nonvoting members (Parker, 2013). Since the election in 2012, major media outlets have covered the increase in women in the U.S. and state legislatures and speculated on the policy implications of this historic election (Blackwill, 2013; Foley, 2013; Helderman, 2013; Houser, 2013; Welch, 2013). Many, including several among the women legislators themselves, believe this milestone will have positive implications for the nation; Representative Tammy Duckworth told the *New York Times*, “The women, I think, are going to reach across the aisle a lot more” (as quoted in Parker, 2013, p. 1).

The consensus in popular media is that this, the most diverse Congress in U.S. history, is a major achievement for American women. While the historic numbers indicate progress, the reality is that they are still low compared to the U.S. population. Although women compose slightly more than half of the national population, the record numbers of women in the Senate and House of Representatives – twenty and seventy-seven (not including three non-voting delegates), respectively (18 percent in total) – still comprise a minority of national legislative representatives (Lucey, 2013; Howden & Meyer, 2011). The historical numbers are even more dismal: “Of the nearly 2,000 senators in the history of Congress, only 44 have been female” (Foley, 2013, n.p.).

The apparent gender diversity in Congress comes at a time when the role of women in politics is increasingly at the forefront of discussions at the state, national, and international levels. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has been integral in the push for more women in public service around the globe. Beginning with her high profile and sometimes

criticized work during her time as First Lady, and throughout her own campaigns for the U.S. Senate and the White House, Clinton has worked to educate women on the importance of engagement in public life. Her leadership of multiple gender-oriented projects continued throughout her tenure as Secretary of State and culminated in the 2011 launch of the Women in Public Service Project (WPSP), a partnership with the U.S. Department of State and five leading women's colleges. This initiative works "to advance women to positions of influence in governments and civic organizations" (Women in Public Service Project, 2013). Since its creation, the WPSP has held multiple summits and conferences, offering training and support to women to encourage and increase their participation in public service positions in many capacities. These outreach and educational efforts are having positive effects in training women on the roles they can play in elected office.

Women have fared slightly better in the states than in federal service; however, women also hold a minority stake in elected positions of state governance. On average, 24 percent of legislative seats and 23 percent of statewide executive offices are occupied by women (Rutgers, 2013a; Rutgers, 2013b). While organizations similar to the WPSP exist at state levels, efforts to increase women's representation in public office are often not coordinated across states, or even between similar organizations within states. Similarly, research on women in public office tends to focus more on national endeavors and issues than on statewide efforts.

This study endeavors to advance our understanding of the challenges faced and advances made by women in attaining state-level public office, and particularly state executive office, by examining how women have fared in Appalachia and particularly West Virginia. Appalachia has long been characterized as being the most impoverished area of the country, with greater health disparities and higher mortality rates that are exacerbated by isolation and adherence to regional

traditions. While other Appalachian states benefit from external and often urban influences, West Virginia is unique in that it is the only state in the region that is entirely contained within Appalachia. The purpose of this research is to determine whether the distinctive characteristics of the region and West Virginia have inhibited women from attaining statewide executive office. We examine how those women in West Virginia who have achieved elected leadership positions perceive the challenges and accomplishments they experienced during their campaigns and then during their time in office. We also explore the challenges they anticipate for women seeking executive office in the future.

We begin with a review of the factors that inhibit women in their efforts to achieve representative and leadership roles within elected office and the importance of increased women's participation. Then our attention shifts to Appalachia and the status of women in executive office in the Appalachian states in order to set the stage for a close examination of West Virginia. A discussion of relevant theory and available data are supplemented by the perceptions and insights, obtained through personal interviews, of the women who have achieved statewide executive office. This integration of theory and lived experience offers a greater understanding of the challenges faced by women who seek to attain state executive offices within a rural context.

Theoretical understandings of women's absence from public office

That efforts like the WSP are even needed in the United States, where women received the right to vote almost a century ago, is perplexing. The reasons for continued underrepresentation can be organized into four hypotheses: the situational hypothesis, the gender role attitudes hypothesis, the political gender role socialization hypothesis, and the role model hypothesis (Elder, 2004).

The situational hypothesis posits that women are under-represented as a result of “the very practical restrictions imposed by women's additional roles of taking care of the home and the children, duties that still are placed disproportionately on women” (Elder, 2004, p. 30). In fact, women run for public office early in their career, prior to starting a family, and then leave public life once their children are born, or they defer political careers until past their primary years of child-rearing and family responsibilities (Emily’s List 2013; Marshall & Mayhead, 2000; Rosenthal, 1998,).

In an interview with Wendy Gruel, a candidate in the 2013 election for mayor of Los Angeles, Nagourney (2013) notes

Ms. Greuel’s loss was also a reminder of at least lingering challenges for women running for an executive office, like governor or mayor, which can be more time-demanding and grinding than a legislative job. “There are still a lot of factors that make it difficult for women to get elected in executive positions, and we saw a lot of them play out in Los Angeles,” said Ms. Lake, the pollster. Ms. Greuel, who is the mother of a young son, said she often encountered evidence of the reluctance of voters to elect a woman, and particularly a mother. “There are still stereotypes of ‘How can women be a good elected officeholder and a good parent?’ she said. “We found that in focus groups: ‘How will you be able to do both?’ Those same questions aren’t asked of a male.”

Even as women have entered the workforce and worked toward equality outside the home, they continue to bear the bulk of the responsibility for household tasks as well, working what effectively constitutes a “second shift” (Rosenthal, 1998, p. 39). In 2011, women spent, on average, 2.16 hours per day on household tasks, while men spent an average 1.37 hours per day on the same tasks (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Further, the vast majority of single

parents are single mothers: almost 83 percent of custodial parents are women, whereas just over 17 percent of single parents are men, “a statistic unchanged from 1994” (Grall, 2009, p. 2). Not only do mothers, single or not, provide more childcare than fathers; often, “mothers provide more childcare than in earlier generations... This increase in the time demands of childcare somewhat offsets the gains that mothers experience from fathers’ greater participation” (Eagly, A.H. & Carli, L.L., 2007).

A study conducted in 2003 (Fox) examined women’s decisions to run and to decline to run for public office. The findings of his survey research (p. 9-10) indicated that

Women respondents are significantly less likely to be married and have children. Clearly, some women who become top-level professionals de-emphasize a traditional family life. When we consider the household division of labor, though, we see that women who live with a spouse or partner are nine times more likely than men to be responsible for more of the household tasks; the numbers are similar for childcare arrangements. Hence, from the outset, it is important to note that among members of the sample “being married” and “having children” carry different responsibilities for men and women.

As long as women continue to be responsible for the majority of family and household responsibilities, and as importantly, continue to be viewed as such, even in addition to their work outside the home, this situational impediment to public office will remain.

According to the gender role attitudes hypothesis, expectations that politics is a man’s world discourage women from seeking public office. “Women must negotiate a liberal democratic political culture in which liberalism’s masculine control over democracy conceives of democracy as a weak and fragile entity (as feminine) and as a rhetorical stylistics causing a decline in civil discourse” (Sheeler, 2000, p. 15). An illustration of the continued influence of

strict gender roles can be seen in the comparison of women entering the political realm through representative positions rather than the executive. In 2013, 1769 women (or 24%) of state legislators are women, while only 5 women (10%) are governors (Rutgers, 2013a; 2013b). One explanation for this may be the difference in gender role expectations. “After all, leading requires aggression, initiative, expertise, and reason,” traits generally ascribed as masculine (Sheeler, 2000, p. 16). Representation, on the other hand, requires the more traditionally feminine traits of “concern and deference to the public good, connection, and concern for humane rather than personal interests” (Sheeler, 2000, p. 16).

Fortunately, these attitudes appear to be shifting. “Over the 20th century, the American public has become significantly more accepting of women taking an active role in the public sphere...over 90 percent of Americans now say they are willing to vote for a qualified woman candidate for Congress and the presidency” (Elder, 2004, p. 30). Despite this increase in acceptance of women in politics, “a considerable minority of Americans continue to hold conservative gender role stereotypes” (Elder, 2004, p. 30). Although it is a small faction, it is possible that this group of more traditional voters is perceived as larger than it actually is; women are likely to perceive the electorate as being biased against women candidates even though “when women run for office, they are just as likely as men to win their races” (Lawless & Fox, 2012, p. 7).

The political gender role socialization hypothesis suggests that, despite the openness of the electorate to vote for women candidates, women do not seek political office because, “even though more and more people are explicitly rejecting traditional gender role stereotypes about politics, there may be more subtle socialization processes occurring, which lead to lowered levels of political interest and ambition among pre-adult women” (Elder, 2004, p. 31). Although both

men and women report that they do not consider politics to be a “man’s world,” the subtle socialization of children from a young age may still discourage girls from pursuing public service careers. Further evidence of the impacts of socialization can be seen in the results of a 2013 survey of more than 2,100 college students. In this survey, Lawless & Fox identified several contributing factors to the gender gap in political ambition, including “political socialization in the family” (p. 6). Although both men and women appear to have been exposed to comparable patterns of political education and activities with family, the numbers change dramatically when looking at political ambition. “Overall, 40 percent of male respondents, but only 29 percent of female respondents, reported encouragement to run for office later in life from at least one parent” (Lawless & Fox, 2013, p. 7). Early political socialization and encouragement from parents has a strong and “dramatic impact on their children’s political ambition. Fifty percent of college students whose mothers regularly suggested that they run for office reported that they would definitely like to run in the future. Only 3 percent who received no such encouragement...expressed interest in a future candidacy” (Lawless & Fox, 2013, p. 7).

The lack of political interest in young women is further exacerbated by the effects of the role model hypothesis, “which suggests that with relatively few women holding highly visible political offices, girls see little reason to become interested in politics or harbor political aspirations” (Elder, 2004, p. 31). Women are significantly more likely to seek lower-profile positions at the local level than at the state or national level (Fox, 2003, p. 7; Marshall & Mayhead, 2000). “Women are more likely than men to report interest in a school board position. But men are approximately 40 percent more likely than women to consider running for the state legislature. And men are roughly twice as likely as women to express interest in a federal position” (Lawless & Fox, 2012, p. 6). This reluctance to seek high-profile positions leaves

younger women who may be interested in entering public service without many women role models to observe and emulate, or mentors to provide personalized encouragement and guidance, further exacerbating the under-representation of women. This corresponds to studies which identify the lack of preparation, and environments that encourage preparation differently based on gender, as barriers to women's entry into the political arena (Marshall & Mayfield, 2000, Rosenthal, 1998). In describing the differing ways in which women and men develop the skills needed for political participation, Rosenthal (1998, p. 39) notes that women "hone their leadership ability in the classroom and community center rather than the boardroom and locker room." The impact of these differences in experience is also noted by Lawless & Fox in their study of political ambition among college students. When exploring the extent to which young men and women engaged in school communities and extracurricular activities, the researchers found that "few gender differences in participation emerged, with one notable exception: organized sports" (Lawless & Fox, 2013, p. 10). Although the connection between sports and political ambition may not be immediately evident, "the competitiveness associated with sports appears to serve as a significant predictor of interest in running for office" (Ibid, p. 10). These results suggest that "playing organized sports either provides an opportunity to develop, or reinforces the propensity toward, a competitive spirit" (p. 11).

For women these barriers to entry and success in elected office, and particularly those in state executive offices, are interrelated. Negative attitudes, stereotypes and sex discrimination, family demands and traditional role expectations, limited career choice and preparation, and a political structure that favors incumbents combine to make entry more challenging for women. Women find themselves having to prove their credibility again and again in a world that still perceives politics and political behaviors as male endeavors. Further, since women tend to start

at lower levels, the climb to statewide office is much steeper and their ability to take on the increased responsibilities that accompany higher offices may not be taken as seriously, even if they are more qualified than male candidates (Marshall & Mayfield, 2000). Finally, though no less driven for power and status, women often advocate for 'softer' policy issues such as education and social welfare and articulate motivations that champion legislation for creative problem solving with more emphasis on the goals of involving people in the policy process, building coalitions, empowering others, building consensus (Silva & Grabe, 2011; Rosenthal, 1998). These orientations are generally perceived as feminine and not necessarily belonging in the rough and tumble world of political management.

The importance of women's representation in elected office. Finding a solution to these obstacles that prevent women from seeking public office and ensuring that women are proportionately represented in government is important in democratic governments like the United States. As women see more women representatives in public office, the government and the laws that it passes and enforces become more legitimate. However, legitimacy does not automatically require representation that mirrors the demographics of the population. For many years, even after the ratification of women's suffrage, many believed that female representatives were not necessary to represent the interests of women. Because each man was empowered and expected "to rule his family and to represent his family's interests in the "outside" world," many did not understand "how it could be possible for a woman to have interests separate and distinct from those of her husband" (Sapiro, 1981, p. 701). Like supporters of any under-represented group, supporters of women's rights have historically been asked to validate the ideas that (1) a woman's interests are unique to her as a woman and can therefore not be represented by her

husband; and (2) women, as a sub-group of the population, comprise an interest group with cohesive interests and policy preferences.

That women have a clear commonality of interest does not mean that they are a monolith, that all women are “consciously allied, or that there is a clear and obvious answer to any given problem articulated by the entire group that differs substantially from answers articulated by others” (Sapiro, 1981, p. 703). Just as men are divided on a number of issues while still sharing many common experiences and problems, so too are women divided by their individual experiences, race, age, or marital status. However, “research in various fields of social science provides evidence that women do have a distinct position and a shared set of problems that characterize a special interest,” legitimizing the idea that there is a need for their shared interests to be proportionately and appropriately represented in the process of the government (Sapiro, 1981, p. 703). Even when male representatives are sympathetic to the issues important to women, research indicates that this is not as effective a form of representation for women’s interests, that “women are better representatives of women than men are” (Arceneaux, 2001, p. 144).

In addition to representing a different demographic, women often have different policy priorities than men. Because of this difference in priorities, relying on men to fully represent the interests of their female constituents can have “serious implications for the type of policy states pursue, which in turn affects the responsiveness of the political system to more than half of U.S. citizens” (Arceneaux, 2001, p. 144). Although women remain in the minority in all branches of government at every level, enough women have served to provide information on their policy priorities. When asked to list their priority bills, women list “more legislation pertaining to children and the family” (Thomas & Welch, 1991, p. 450). Women are also more likely to sit on

health and welfare committees than men and less likely to be on business or economics committees (Rosenthal 1998; Thomas & Welch, 1991). These tendencies tend to match expectations of many, as the realm of children and family has long been considered the purview of women. Palley points to the “increasing number of women within the public sector” as calling increased “attention to the importance of issues that center on family, children, and women” (as referenced in Silva & Grave, 2011, p. 31). Despite their importance to women both in and outside of government, “these issues have been largely ignored by male legislators;” only with the influence of “special interest auxiliary organizations [have] women legislators in the United States...generated greater attention” to them (Seipel, 2010, p. 353). Though they appear to be more important to women, these policies do not only impact women: “In those places where women enjoy greater gender equality, government policies and practices have benefited not only women but the whole of society” (Seipel, 2010, p. 351).

In addition to focusing on different issues than their male counterparts, women in public service often approach their roles differently. “In a study of roll-call voting behaviors on the issue of economic and regulatory policy in the United States, female legislators from 28 states (particularly members of the Democratic party) paid more attention to their constituency than to party position as compared to their male counterparts. While men tend to operate from an individualistic approach or party politics, women tend to operate from socially-oriented political views” (Seipel, 2010, p. 351). This experience of a difference in working styles seems to be shared by the women currently serving in Congress. Several women interviewed in the days following their oaths of office mentioned the capacity of women to work together. Senator Kay Hagan told the *Huffington Post* that “women have a tendency to work in partnerships, and that's

something I think the American public would really appreciate us doing, working across the aisle” (quoted in Foley, 2013, n.p.).

Research in social psychology appears to validate differences in how women and men interact, indicating that “men and women use different communication styles and strategies, and studies of group interaction show that men can effectively – even if unintentionally – freeze women out of conversations and debates, or simply render their communication ineffective” (Sapiro, 1981, p. 711). This matches the research of Kanter, who “suggests that when a minority of 15 percent or less exists within an organization, members of that minority feel constrained in their behavior” (as cited in Thomas & Welch, 1991, p. 447). If this is the case, an increase in female representation will help to mitigate the effects of these differing communication styles, allowing women to interact more effectively and freely, even in groups that are predominantly male.

Women in constitutional offices in Appalachia

Appalachia has distinct cultural characteristics that differentiate it from the remainder of the nation. It is a 205,000-square-mile area and constitutes approximately eight percent of the nation’s population with just over 25 million people. Boundaries stretch from southern New York to northeastern Mississippi and include portions of thirteen states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia, as well as the entire state of West Virginia. The region’s economy has shifted from dependence on mining, forestry, agriculture, chemical and heavy industry to manufacturing and service industries. Six of the nation’s top ten poorest states are in Appalachia. Mississippi leads the pack with a poverty rate of 22 percent and West Virginia is a close second at 19 percent, compared to the national average of just over 13 percent (U.S.

Census, 2012). Significant health disparities and disproportionately high mortality rates, due in large part to coal mining activity, also distinguish the region (Borak et al., 2012).

The characteristics that make the Appalachian region unique also influence the roles of women in executive office in the member states. Since ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, only 5 of the 34 women elected to the state's highest office during the past 93 years have been in Appalachia (Rutgers, 2012a). That said, one of the first woman governors in the country was Emma Guy Cromwell (D), Governor of Kentucky from 1926-1929 (Rutgers, 2012).

To date, 387 women have been elected to executive offices in states within the Appalachian region. Although Appalachia accounts for only eight percent of the national population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), Table 1 shows that the region has elected 15 percent of the nation's women governors, 25 percent of the women lieutenant governors, 18 percent of the women secretaries of state, 25 percent of the women treasurers, 37 percent of the women auditors and 22 percent of the women attorneys general. In total, of the women elected to constitutional offices since 1920, 85, or 22 percent, were elected to offices within Appalachia. Admittedly, however, the majority were not for the primary leadership positions of governor or lieutenant governor.

<TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>

Women in executive office in West Virginia

Correspondingly, women in West Virginia tend to be conservative yet strong and assertive, and with a history as pioneers and protestors. "The same woman who is perfectly capable of running the tractor and does, of making decisions about whether we're going to plant wheat or corn, of building a house or deciding to build a house, that same woman is the one that's

more than likely to voice an anti-ERA attitude on the grounds that the Bible did not mean for women to play a dominant role” (Robertson, 1979, n.p.). A more recent study of cultural factors in West Virginia (Coyne, Demain-Popescu, & Friend, 2006, p. 4) indicated the decline of patriarchal prevalence. “Some women in the groups reported erosion of patriarchal roles in their communities that has resulted in women being expected to be decision makers in what were traditionally men’s roles. According to participants, role changes sometimes occurred because men worked long hours and passed their responsibilities on to women.” Another quote, that appeared to be more in keeping with the tone of the interviews, noted that women were no longer told what to cook by their husbands; they could decide what they were going to cook.

These characteristics correspond to the descriptive and geographic models of political culture developed by Elazar (1972). In the traditional political culture,¹ which he attributes to the South, including Appalachia, government is seen as “an actor with a positive role in the community, but the role is largely limited to securing the maintenance of the existing social order” (Elazar, 1972, n.p). Political leaders are expected to maintain conservative and custodial responsibilities, including class and gender stratifications, and are not looked to for innovation.

A more recent study by Brisbin Jr., Dilger, Hammock and Plein (2009) debunked some of the stereotypical characteristics of West Virginia’s political culture, including the perceptions of an Appalachian regional consciousness and backcountry orientation, as well as economic dependency and labor-management conflict theories. The authors noted, however, that the state and local governments are hampered by the state’s inability to generate the necessary revenues for more and better public services and local government’s inability to self-direct policy matters

¹ Other models include the moral political culture affiliated primarily with the upper western and eastern portions of the U.S., and the individual political culture which pertains primarily to the mid-west.

or to raise the revenues essential for support of the public school systems. “The consequence is a politics of making do and scraping by” (p.9).

It is no surprise then that women hold only 16 percent of elected offices in West Virginia. Of the 134 members of the state’s General Assembly, only 22 women are in representative offices: 20 women have been elected as state delegates and two as state senators (see Table 2). In line with national trends, there are more women, numerically and proportionally, in representative office than in executive leadership roles. As noted earlier, representation differs from leadership; developmental roles for women and men differ significantly in that women are directed toward service-oriented endeavors that prize organization skills and emotional labor² (Guy, Newman & Mastraci, 2008), whereas men are expected to take on leadership activities that prize rationality and strategic thinking (Sheeler, 2000). This helps explain why women are making more headway in the state’s House of Delegates and Senate than in executive offices.

Of West Virginia’s executive offices, women have never been appointed or elected governor – the epitome of state leadership – or to any other leadership role, for that matter, other than Secretary of State. It took thirty-seven years after women won the right to vote for the first woman to be appointed to the ranks of the state’s constitutional officers and almost another fifty years before the first woman was elected.

<TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE>

The Secretary of State’s office has been described in the literature as being “traditionally a woman’s office” (Sheeler, 2000, p. 24). In examining leadership roles for women through interviews with state governors, Sheeler (2000) identifies four clusters of metaphors in media that characterize female leaders and undermine their work. Pioneering women are trailblazers,

² For more information on emotional labor in public service, see the award-winning book, *Emotional Labor: Putting the Service in Public Service*, by Mary E. Guy, Meredith A. Newman and Sharon H. Mastraci.

more symbolic than serious leaders; puppet leaders are perceived as manipulated and/or controlled by men, usually husbands or partners; unruly women challenge traditional gender roles and boundaries; and beauty queens reinscribe traditional hierarchical roles, particularly those found within the family structure. She associates beauty queens with the office of the Secretary of State, noting that women in this office generally start out as school teachers, homemakers or former first ladies prior to entering public service.

Nationally, in the last decade, the Secretary of State's office has been one of the two state offices most occupied by women. It was second only to the Lieutenant Governor's office, sometimes considered an irrelevant office (Long, 2013) and for which candidates are often paired with the Governor in state elections. Table 3 illustrates the number of women elected to statewide executive office between 2000 and 2012. The Secretary of State's office has been consistently occupied by approximately twelve women (with men in the other 38), while the number of women in most of the other executive offices has been slowly declining.

<TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE>

Conversations with West Virginia's Secretaries of State

Interviews with the three women who have held the office of Secretary of State in West Virginia validate the literature and models presented here in many ways, but in many others they illustrate strong, pioneering women who have given their all for the betterment of the state through the performance of their duties while in office. In all instances they have and continue to encourage women's participation in state governance.

Helen Holt (R), 1957-1959

At nearly one hundred years old, Helen Holt reflected on her career in public service. When Helen was appointed to the office of Secretary of State in 1957 she became the first woman to hold a statewide office. Helen was appointed to the office by Governor Cecil Underwood to fill the vacancy left by the death of D. Pitt O'Brien. Prior to her appointment, she served as a member of the House of Delegates, fulfilling her late husband's term from 1955 to 1957. Helen did not seek re-election at the end of her term as a state Delegate; rather, she chose to run for delegate to the Republican National Convention, leading the ticket as delegate-at-large. Her popularity in that capacity prompted her appointment to Secretary of State. Strategically, her appointment also reduced the Democratic majority on the Board of Public Works, the state's initial executive authority (replaced with the chief executive structure via constitutional amendment in 1968). At the time of her appointment, Helen was a single mother, teaching Biology and Chemistry at Greenbrier Women's College (WV Division of Culture and History, 2012).

Helen's entry into public service came about because of her work with her husband, who had been elected to the legislature. Of his time in the legislature, she notes: "We were a team." Such a trajectory into politics is not uncommon, and was the same for many of the first women to serve at the state level. The first three women elected governor in the United States were elected to replace or serve as surrogates for their husbands, while the first person elected governor in her own right didn't take office until the mid-1980s (Carroll, 2004). When the Secretary of State died, the Governor pushed her to take the appointment, saying "Helen, you have to do this and the people want you and I need you and the state needs you." After some consideration, she agreed. As Helen notes, "that was the beginning..."

Helen subsequently ran for reelection but did not win. That may have been because she never campaigned but, as Secretary of State, she spoke all over the state. “As a woman it was a novelty so every place wanted me to speak.... Women weren’t serving in politics.” At a time when gender roles were even more strictly observed than they are now, it was difficult to find the right balance between femininity and politics. “Back then even I thought that a women who did something like that was a little bit crude, so I was determined to prove that one could be a lady and serve in politics, ... in a public office, too.” She never thought about being a trailblazer: “I was just doing a job that was given to me to do and I felt that the lord put me there and I had to do it....Of course it was my nature to do the best possible job that I could do.”

She had to learn the roles and responsibilities of the Secretary of State. No one at the state knew what the job entailed. She started out writing a weekly column, and her first topic was election law; she wanted people to know what it was that the Secretary of State was responsible for. She spoke to a local Rotary Club about the state seal– the Secretary of State is the keeper of the state seal and is responsible for its use on state documents -- and the men in attendance (apparently there were no women) found it very interesting. Like most women, Helen had to “hone [her] leadership ability in the classroom” (Rosenthal, 1998). In her time in office Helen used her teaching skills to learn everything she could about the office and to educate the public about its role and responsibilities. She also continued to advocate for general education, arguing that one couldn’t be effective as a citizen or in life without an education.

As for women’s roles in executive offices, she stresses that “women can do anything men can...I think in some ways women are better executives. Just like anybody can do a job if he works at it and tries to learn -because I learned by doing - there’s no reason why a woman can’t do it just as well as a man.” Asked if attitudes toward women in office have changed in the state,

Helen responded, “Just look at Natalie [Tennant]....She led in the University as well as then being elected Secretary of State. I think women respect her and I know they respected me, because I commanded respect. The Secretary of State is an important office in the state.” The officeholder serves all the people of the state and “can set an example for others on how to be genteel and courteous and be an example of what a state officer should be.”

When Helen took the position of Secretary of State, she was a single mother with three children. She felt the Lord put her there for a reason; “I wanted him to take charge of my life; I had to do what he said because I didn’t know what to do.” In the interview with Secretary Tennant (2009), she stated,

“I never looked for a job....I always felt the Lord put me in a position, and once he put me in a position he would help me. I never campaigned. I didn’t know how to. I didn’t ask people to vote for me. I felt if they liked what I was saying they would vote for me. And I never thought of myself as a trailblazer. It’s only until recently I began to look at what I did in that way.”

Helen continued in public service after her tenure as Secretary of State, accepting a presidential appointment to start a nursing home program, working with the Federal Housing Administration and state and local governments to see creation and development of the program through to completion and paving the way for others to duplicate her efforts.³

In taking on the Secretary of State position, as well as the presidential appointment, there was no prior metric, no guidelines or job description to follow. In fact, Helen developed manuals for use in duplicating the nursing home program that she created from the notes she kept as she

³ “In 1960, Helen Holt left West Virginia to accept a special assistant position with the Federal Housing Administration in Washington D.C. She worked on initiating a program to construct nursing homes around the nation. She served in senior capacities in the Federal Housing Administration within the Department of Housing and Urban Development throughout her career. Holt's early research led to the first federal programs for nursing homes and care for the elderly.” <http://www.sos.wv.gov/secretary-desk/Pages/SecretariesofState1901-2000.aspx>

developed the project. Helen grew up always wanting to do a good job, so taking on such complex jobs was in her nature – she liked to learn. Taking on challenges like this is not a gender issue but a character issue. She just wanted to get things done, and didn't care about getting credit; she learned when in the state legislature that “it was better to give a man an idea and then help them carry them out. That was a good way to get things done and I enjoyed doing that.”

Finally, Helen offered her thoughts about the differences between serving as a representative in the House of Delegates and as a member of the state's executive branch. “The executive has to be a leader and has to come up with the ideas. As a member...they would be a follower and should fit into group working....Not that an executive shouldn't too as they have to work with other people....and there are a lot of people in the House that take leadership positions.”

Betty Ireland (R), 2005-2009

As the first woman ever elected to the executive branch of state government, Betty Ireland served as Secretary of State for West Virginia from 2005 to 2009. Prior to her election to statewide office, Betty taught for several years in the West Virginia public school system before moving into the private sector as an executive in the pension industry. She served on the City of Charleston Board of Zoning Appeals, as an At-Large representative of the Charleston City Council and as executive director for the WV Consolidated Public Retirement Board.

While in office Betty served on the executive board of the National Association of Secretaries of State. Her technological initiatives earned her recognition as one of America's Top 25 Doers, Dreamers & Drivers by Government Technology Magazine, and as an active member of the Stennis Center for Public Service she was honored at its annual Southern Women

in Public Service conference. She was named hero of the year in 2008 by the Charleston Public Safety Council for her advocacy for victims of domestic violence and a 2009 Honoree of the West Virginia Education Alliance for being a role model for those educated in the West Virginia public school system.

Betty is passionate about supporting women's engagement in public service and politics. She is a founding member of the Vandalia Rotary Club in Charleston and a director of the WV Colleges and Independent Universities Board, as well as a board member of the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce (Stennis Center 2008). She has been asked to speak at various meetings at the Stennis Center for Public Service Leadership and is actively involved Maggie's List⁴, a conservative organization that actively supports women candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate.

At the onset of the interview, when asked about the broader issue of women in politics, she noted that "Women aren't represented in elective office in executive positions to the extent that we are in the general population. It's always a challenge to get women in the top echelons because we are the ones who still have the babies and cycle in and out of the workforce...there is still a stigma for a woman being in a very powerful position." She went on to describe her run for governor, during which she was told she was too tall to be governor, she wasn't tough enough, it's too hard for women, and she wasn't conservative enough because she hadn't taken her husband's last name.

Betty's interest in public service started at a young age. Her father was actively engaged in public service in Charleston, including membership on city council, so she grew up in an environment that celebrated public service. Later in college she was active in numerous

⁴ Information about the Stennis Center's *Women's Leadership Initiatives* can be found at <http://www.stennis.gov/programs/womens-leadership-initiatives>. Information about Maggie's List, an organization dedicated to electing fiscally conservative women, can be obtained from <http://www.maggieslist.org/>.

committees and organizations, often in leadership positions, so it was something that “although it might not have come naturally to me, I think many times we women think ‘oh who me, am I really strong enough to do that?’” But leadership came naturally to her and during her professional life she knew she wanted to work in public service.

As noted above, a common barrier to entry for women in politics is a political system which favors incumbents. For Betty, the opportunity to enter the public realm arose when Joe Manchin left the Secretary of State’s office to become governor and a vacancy was created. “When you’re in politics, or think you’re in politics, when a spot opens up it’s rather refreshing, rather than having to run against an incumbent.” At that same time she had just left a position with a law firm in the private sector, and thought “I’ve got the skill set to do this.” She saw the Secretary of State’s office as primarily an administrative office, and she had experience managing offices and people. Prior to running for Secretary of State Betty had run the state’s retirement system so she knew state government and had worked closely with the legislature. To her “it was a natural; this is not only what I need to do, it’s what I want to do.”

Her run for governor was based on the same criteria: she had the skill set, and the governor was leaving for the U.S. Senate so there was another vacancy. It was an interesting time in West Virginia politics. But she was outspent in the primary at the very last minute by a self-funded male millionaire. She said she ran because “I knew state government, I had certainly been elected to the executive branch of government before, and I thought that it would be a good thing for me to do.”

According to Betty, even funding a campaign presents unique challenges for women. Men have more personal wealth, much more so than women. “No one likes to sit on the phone and ask for money but it is something you have to do. Women in particular are not used to doing

this type of thing unless you've been in an executive position or a professional fund raiser... it is something we're not used to doing and we're a little shy about doing it. It takes a lot of courage..." Betty is not hesitant about calling and asking for money but in that election there were many people running. She got a lot of support from women, but "traditionally, they would not write big checks. A \$100 check was highly unusual for a woman not in politics to write." She wonders what politics would look like if money and fund raising were not such a big factor in getting elected; she also spoke about Senator Rockefeller's recent decision to leave office at the end of his term and what campaigns for that office might cost. "It all boils down to who has the most money; it's all about money, which is unfortunate. But there is a strong woman candidate already in that race (Rep. Shelley Moore Capito) who we think will do very well."

She also noted the lack of role models for young women interested in politics. "Younger women are desperate for women to run this state, run this country.... Women feel that we are the caretakers, we are the consensus makers. We are still outnumbered, obviously, way outnumbered in U.S. Congress and many state legislatures. There is still bit of a stigma with the older generation in having a woman be the head of state." When asked about running for governor, or U.S. Congress, she was unsure. "Timing is everything... You have to see if you have the passion for it, do you have the financial wherewithal to run in a very, very crowded primary, does your family want to do that, does your family mind that you get exposed to the things that happen, the ugly things that happen in a campaign. You have to weigh all those things."

Politics for women in West Virginia is pretty much the same as that nationwide. There are a lot of women who get elected in the South. "What holds us back is that fact that we [West Virginia] are very small and not growing; we don't attract many new people from other areas

who bring their ideas; we don't have an inward migration. We do get stuck in the same circles of thinking, but that's probably not so much different from the rest of the country.”

West Virginia became a state in 1863 yet it took over 140 years to elect a woman to the executive branch. Betty wasn't the first to run; many women ran before her but didn't get elected. “And now it's 2013...and now you [the authors] have only two women [who were elected] to talk to – it doesn't make me very happy.”

Be that as it may, I didn't run to be the first woman of anything. In fact, I did not know when I was running what the eventual outcome, how important that would be. I will tell you, the four years I spent at the Secretary's office, we had a lot of young women and young girls who would come through and they were so happy to have a woman in that office. I felt that it was incumbent upon me to conduct myself honorably, honestly, and set some kind of role model for them.”

In the future, Betty hopes women's representation in government comes closer to their numbers in the general population. It comes down to women having the time, the inclination, the funds, and having the backing, *having the encouragement to run for public office* (emphasis by interviewee). “Socialization and social rules and the gendered nature of work” prepare men with what are understood to be primary leadership qualities, such as “rules, roles and controls” within a hierarchical context (Rosenthal, 1998, p.28) “Men typically have no qualms that they are qualified for the job [public office];” most men spend their lives in business positions or other positions where they are constantly expected to move up the corporate ladder, so it comes more naturally to consider to run for public office as an outgrowth of their work. They don't need encouragement. Women, on the other hand, require a lot of hand holding and a great deal of encouragement. Women are not used to the attacks from the media; the exposure to criticism,

the lies and the attacks that are part of the deal. Men have lived most of their lives in that environment. “It’s not the same for women.”

“If we had more women in leadership positions in Congress...particularly major committees – we would be able to cut through the stagnation and partisanship that is going on in Washington.” For women, the emphasis in leadership is on relationships and “connectedness without hierarchy,” on nurturing rather than controlling, and on empowering others and encouraging change (Rosenthal, 1998, p.28). Women get along, they talk, “because that’s what we’re used to doing, we’re used to sitting down and talking and figuring out the problem and coming back again and again until it’s solved.” Betty believes that “as we go on and get newer generations of men in Congress and the state legislatures, I think that you’ll find a smoothing out...you’ll see that they are more likely to see women as equals.”

As an afterthought, Betty noted that embracing and using power are also areas of particular weakness for women. “We women don’t always know how to use our own power, and we tend to doubt the strength of what power can do. I think this is a direct result of not having enough experience of testing and using power.” In contrast, men rarely do not recognize their own power, although “some certainly use it better than others.” Some men in powerful positions still see women as sexual beings and some women find that combination seductive. “Power is a strong aphrodisiac. If not handled properly, it can make us (men and women both) do things we would not ordinarily do, but on the other hand, it can also cripple us to the point we are not effective, if we don’t know how to use it constructively.”

Natalie Tennant (D), 2009-present

Natalie Tennant is no stranger to breaking barriers as a woman. She received a bachelor’s degree in journalism and a master’s degree in corporate and organizational communication from

West Virginia University, and while there became the first woman to represent the university as the Mountaineer Mascot. She then went on to a career in television broadcasting and reporting, and it was there, covering state government, that her passion for public service blossomed. Natalie first campaigned for Secretary of State in the 2004 elections. She never got past the primary, losing by about 1,000 votes; however that did not deter her. She ran again in 2008 and was elected; she became the first woman to be reelected to a constitutional office, and began to serve an unprecedented second term as Secretary of State after the 2012 election. During her first term, Natalie piloted an online voting initiative for West Virginia military members and overseas citizens for the primary election. She testified before Congress on the success of her program in February 2011.

Early in life Natalie discovered that “being part of it, being part of the decision-making is your first thought” of public service and public office. For Natalie, public service covers a wide variety of ways to participate, not just holding public office. Teachers and nurses are public servants because “you are doing something for the greater good....it’s an ability to help those around you....Maybe we should call everything that we do public service because it is, if we’re doing a good job then we are helping our fellow human beings.” Natalie considers being a “television reporter [as] a form of public service in that you inform and educate your community.”

Natalie chose to run for executive office because she felt she could do the job and she wanted to serve the citizens of West Virginia. Also, being in the legislature was not an option because the West Virginia legislature is a part-time legislature; she could not work part-time as a reporter and part-time as a lawmaker. The Secretary of State position was a full-time position, it was an open seat, and she had name recognition from her days as a reporter. Natalie said, “I

didn't have a whole lot of money at all, but used it very wisely and worked really hard and used the skills that I had from understanding television a little bit when I purchased commercials." She was successful in part, because "people like to see folks who lose and come back and try again and don't give up."

Like Betty, Natalie ran for governor in the special election in 2011. She cited a number of reasons for deciding to run:

you look at (1) where you might fit in, (2) if the timing is right in terms of timing for the situation and in terms of timing for your personal situation, and I felt that we had done some really good things in the Secretary of State's office and I'm a go-getter and I thought that WV was at a time period when you could really be at this crossroads and say here's someone who has shown initiative, who's shown bold ideas and has gone out and accomplished those. And in some respects West Virginia needs that, too.... And it was a quick race.

So why run for governor in the special election in particular? The system favors incumbents, women have a better chance when running for an open seat (Marshall and Mayhead, 2000). "There was an opportunity offered by an unusual vacancy, and you never know what happens sometimes with unique situations like that," Natalie stressed. For the first time in modern times, there was a special election for Governor, creating a unique situation in which candidates would not have to run against an incumbent, or event against the successes of a previous full-term executive.

In her campaigning, she wanted people to know you don't have to do things the same way you've always done them. She wanted to focus on transparency and accountability because she had shown what they were doing at the Secretary of State's office. As a result, other

candidates started talking about accountability and transparency, too. “That’s why we need people to run for office. Not necessarily to win...because we only have one Secretary of State and one Governor. But you still have those voices and those ideas that help to shape others’ ideas.”

In considering future runs, she has looked toward 2016 and learned from her earlier campaign. In 2014 there will be an open seat in the U.S. Senate for the first time in 30 years, and in 2016 there will be an open race for Governor. “You have to look at where your skills might be best placed. I look at a big picture.” Her focus as Secretary of State has been to pull the other state agencies to work together.

How have things changed for women who want to be in executive office? One thing that hasn’t changed is the expectation that women will remain the primary care provider for children and family. “For women, some things never change...if we have children, we’re always the mother....I don’t know that things have changed much. I know there are unique situations that women go through.... My concern is the family.” Natalie arranges her travel schedule – speaking engagements, meetings, etc. – around the schedules of her young daughter and husband, who is a state senator. The challenge is that “They say they want women candidates, but women candidates come with children.”

“If I don’t have enough resources, it’s because I didn’t work hard enough to get them.” But that may not be the case for others. She doesn’t dwell on gender differences or any other reason why she can’t do something. She uses research from organizations such as the Barbara Lee Foundation⁵ to learn how to best position herself and her candidacy. “I have to show that I am qualified and that I am a leader.”

⁵ For more about how The Barbara Lee Family Foundation advances women’s equality and representation in American politics, please see <http://www.barbaraleefoundation.org/>

“I want to see more women in the legislature because I see how I as an executive am inclusive, because I think that women probably do look at the bigger picture and I think that women look at the ripple effect of something.” That would encourage good working relationships between the legislature and the executive branch. “Women are collaborative.”

Integration of theory and practice

There is considerable correlation between the statements made by the three Secretaries of State about their service as statewide executive officers, the theories offered to explain women’s underrepresentation in elected office, and the arguments offered for the importance of women’s participation. Helen Holt and Natalie Tennant talked about the personal challenges of trying to juggle home and family responsibilities with the responsibilities of elected office. Traditional gender role expectations, as characterized by the situational hypothesis – whether they are simply perceptions of constituent voters or real-time logistical challenges (juggling day care with speaking engagements, for example) – act as a deterrent to women when considering to enter a political race or take on an elected office. All three women believe that the roles for women in business, society and politics are expanding and that cultural expectations of gender roles, particularly in respect to child and family responsibilities, are becoming increasingly more equitable. They expect this to translate into increased access for women to statewide offices and, in turn, inspire constituents to more fully appreciate the unique contributions that women make to state governance.

Many of the challenges the women identified fell within the gender role attitudes hypothesis. They noted ingrained gender roles, including socialization norms that begin in childhood and extend into college and adulthood through preparation for business and family responsibilities as well as a discriminatory culture that perceives leadership qualities to be

inherently masculine and women's roles as supportive and family-oriented. The gender roles attitudes and political gender role socialization hypotheses, in which expectations that politics is a man's world, discourage women from seeking public office and constituents from accepting women in traditionally-male leadership roles. All three women talked of taking advantage of opportunities as they present themselves, particularly the absence of an incumbent in an open seat or waiting for a similar advantage. While they did not say so directly, this would preclude them from having to compete with a man for a position that had been traditionally occupied by a man, in a male-oriented setting. They also noted other challenges to running for office and effectively performing required duties when in office, including learning to effectively ask for money, and internalizing the idea that women can do anything men can do and then conveying that awareness to constituents through demonstrations of qualifications, leadership, passion and commitment – all characteristics automatically attributed to men. Betty observed that women approach positions of leadership differently than men; they often focus on “softer” policy issues such as education, welfare and other social policies, and are more collaborative in their efforts to resolve ideological differences.

All three women talked in various ways about the need to encourage and mentor young women and their desire to serve as role models for young women. This fits with arguments put forth in the gender role socialization and role model hypotheses, which indicate that enculturation of young adults into traditional gender roles, combined with the role expectations placed on men and women in political office – including the scarcity of well-respected women in highly visible political office – discourage young women's interest in a political career. Betty and Natalie specifically identified the need to provide emotional, cultural and financial support and mentoring to women interested in running for statewide elective offices. All three talked

about ways in which they wanted to provide positive role models for younger women, as well as the importance of actively encouraging future leaders through involvement with national organizations created for that purpose.

Conclusion

As we celebrate West Virginia's 150th birthday, it is important to note the state's dismal record in electing women to executive office. Three women who held executive office all served as Secretary of State, which is perceived in the literature as a feminine office, and is the only state executive office to which women have been appointed or elected. It is equally important to note that the last two Secretaries of State have been and are currently women, with the current Secretary of State beginning her second term in office.

In this study we explored the theoretical underpinnings of women's underrepresentation in elected office and the importance of women's participation. We looked at the statistics of women in representative and leadership offices nationwide and in Appalachia and then specifically for women in state executive offices in West Virginia. We compared those findings to lived experiences gleaned through interviews with the three women in West Virginia who held the office of Secretary of State, noting the correspondence between the literature, data and personal perceptions and insights. Many of the sentiments and insights shared by the three women interviewed here echoed the trends identified in the literature on women in public service. Our review of this literature, as well as the insights gathered from elected officials in West Virginia, indicates that under-representation of women is an issue at all levels of government, with a complex set of factors that may influence women in their decisions to pursue public office.

More than 90 years after the 19th Amendment extended suffrage to women, it is clear that achieving parity in representation is not something that will happen on its own. Without concerted efforts to encourage women to pursue public office and to eliminate the stereotypes and other barriers to public service, women are likely to remain in the minority of representation, with their priority issues taking a backseat to others. Recommendations from the women interviewed here echo recommendations throughout literature on women in leadership. The creation of “networks that allow for higher-status women to mentor other women within the organization can help increase their presence in leadership positions” (Silva & Grabe, 2011, p. 37).

Long-standing national organizations, such as the National League of Women Voter and EMILY’s List and more local organizations around the country, such as Loretta Durbin’s Illinois’ Women’s Institute for Leadership, have been encouraging women’s participation in political life. Ms. Ireland described her ongoing work with the West Virginia Republican Party to encourage women to run for public office. In addition, new organizations to support and study women in politics have emerged, including Rutgers’s Center for American Women In Politics, Secretary Clinton’s Women in Public Service Project, and Emerge America, which began as a western regional organization, among a growing number of others. The insights gleaned from studies of how current female representatives have overcome the barriers noted here, renewed support for incumbents and dedicated recruitment of new candidates may ultimately combine to allow women in West Virginia, Appalachia, and the United States to achieve leadership representation in all branches of government.

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Table 1. Women in State Executive Office in the Appalachian States, 1920-2012								
State	Governor	Lieutenant Governor	Secretary of State	Treasurer	Comptroller	Auditor	Attorney General	Total
AL	1	2	8	8		9		28
GA			2					2
KY	1	2	6	5		3		17
MD		1						1
MS		2		1				3
NC	1	1	1	1		1		5
NY		3						3
OH	1	4	1	2		2	2	12
PA		1		4		2		7
SC	1	1						2
TN								0
VA							2	2
WV			3					3
Total Appalachia	5	17	21	21	0	17	4	85
Total U.S.	34	69	117	83	10	46	28	387
Source: http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/Statewide-HistoricalListing.php								

Table 2. Women in Representative and Leadership Offices in West Virginia, 2013				
	Men	Women	Total	% Women
<i>West Virginia Legislature</i>				
WV House of Delegates	80	20	100	20%
WV Senate	32	2	34	6%
Total	112	22	134	16%
<i>West Virginia Constitutional Offices</i>				
Governor	1		1	
Secretary of State		1	1	
Treasurer	1		1	
Auditor	1		1	
Attorney General	1		1	
Commissioner of Agriculture	1		1	
Total	5	1	6	17%
<i>U.S. Representatives</i>				
Congress	2	1	3	
Senate	2	0	2	
Total	4	1	5	
TOTAL WOMEN IN PUBLIC OFFICE	121	24	145	16%
Sources: Chronology of Women in the West Virginia Legislature 1922-2009, http://www.legis.state.wv.U.S./Educational/publications/legis_women.pdf , and WV Legislature, The Legislative Process, http://www.legis.state.wv.U.S./Educational/citizens/process.cfm#process1				

Table 3. Women in State Executive Offices, 2002-2012										
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Governor	5	7	9	8	9	8	6	6	6	6
Lt. Governor	17	18	16	15	11	9	8	9	11	11
Secretary of State	12	10	10	12	12	12	12	12	11	12
Treasurer	12	9	8	8	11	17	10	10	7	8
Comptroller	4	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4
Attorney General	9	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	7	7
Auditor	6	7	8	7	6	6	8	8	7	6
Note: Data missing for 2006 Source: Rutgers, Center for American Women and Politics, Fact Sheet Archive http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/resources/FactSheetArchive.php#statewide										