1. Self-Assessment Essay

Writing is a skill that will never become unnecessary. Throughout my life, I’ve greatly enjoyed writing. I took AP English as a junior and created an independent study for myself my senior year where I studied and wrote essays on 20 different novels my teacher and I decided on. It was one of the most rewarding experiences to see myself grow each time I finished another novel. For my portfolio, I will be using my research paper entitled “The Influence of Gender in Politics” to show the writing goals, “Demonstrate information literacy skills by finding and evaluating a variety of source materials”, and “Formulate viable research questions, hypothesis, and conclusions.” I included a paper from my American Literature class last year named “The Power and Necessity of Loss” to “demonstrate critical reading skills by summarizing, paraphrasing, analyzing and synthesizing information from a variety of source materials.” Many of the course goals focused on showing your ability to revise your work. This was a particularly tough one to demonstrate, as I don’t save rough drafts of any of my papers. I decided the only way to display it was through comparison. I included my independent study final from high school named “Writers and their Environments.” At the time, I thought this was an amazing paper. However I will compare it to my other English essay, “The Power and Necessity of Loss” to show my ability to “access accurately the strengths and weaknesses of their own writing and develop individual plans for revision and improvement.” My next selection is a bit more informal than my previous ones. I included a speech I wrote for a competition my senior year in high school. I believe it shows a different type of writing style, and I will use it to show “Understand and use the concepts of purpose, audience, and rhetorical situation in their writing.”
This sociology research paper was one of the most difficult I had faced yet in my academic career. I had to find sources from all many different formats, as well as finding highly specific research studies. It was not an easy task, but through the trial and error process of this paper, I learned many techniques about finding and understanding sources. During the time of this paper, I was at a college in Florida. We were lucky to have an extensive library database of research articles. I used simple keywords to find articles relevant to my research, such as “women, gender, politics, bias”. However, those were all secondary sources also analyzing similar phenomenon. The next task was trying to find primary articles that actually displayed sexism themselves. As my main focus was around the 2008 election, it was difficult to find articles from that long ago. One great way I learned to find more relevant material was looking at the works cited and references of articles I had already found. This was an extremely helpful thing to do, and led me to find many of my sources. On page 6-7 of my research paper, I display my ability to demonstrate quantitative sources. I tried to explain the data in a way that would be understandable to anyone without statistical background, while still providing the actual results for anyone who wanted to see it. I also have many survey results I analyze, as well as quotes from major media figures.

In the same paper, I show my ability to demonstrate a clear research question, hypothesis, and conclusion. I clearly state my goal at the end of my introduction saying, “My research goal is to learn about the many ways sexism effects women in politics, and how prominent it is.” I then say what I think will be required to successfully complete that goal. Next, I say specifically what I will include in the paper so the reader knows what to expect. This is a good way to make your ideas clearer to others, as they know
exactly what you are trying to show from the very beginning and can evaluate your
writings with your hypothesis in mind. My section entitled “Summary” is the beginning of my
conclusion. I remind readers of the various ideas I’ve presented throughout the paper, and
combine them all together into one clear idea. I also remind readers why this issue is so
important to all of us, and explain what we have to do to combat sexism in our daily lives.
My conclusion line references my very first line, successfully tying the paper together and
bringing it to a fitting close.

My next paper we will be discussing demonstrates my ability to analyze and
paraphrase many different sources. My paper “The Power and Necessity of Loss” focuses
primarily on 5 different works, two of which are poetry and the remaining are short
stories. I bring all of these different works from diverse writers together to show a
common theme. One skill I have been taught that I demonstrate in this paper is even
when you’re analyzing a quote, it’s good to break it down further and even just discuss a few
words of it. I show this when I analyze the influence of the words “let you” in my first quote
from The Mother. I summarize this poem, and while poetry is by no means objective, I
explain what I believe the writer intended by various lines. To move on from this poem to
the next, I use a transition sentence in order to synthesize the two works, comparing their
approach to the same topic. This makes shifts between works seem much less abrupt. I
summarize some important lines, as to avoid overwhelming readers with too many direct
quotations, such as when I say “She eventually just asks the man to stop talking, as she realizes the
futility of their conversation.” Skipping ahead to the conclusion, I display my ability to
combine many works together using a common theme. I display similarities between all
the characters and their inability to accept loss.
Now, let’s compare what I displayed that paper to my final for my high school English class in order to show my ability to see mistakes in my own writing. One extreme weakness of this paper is I simply tell the audience, instead of backing it up with proof from the canon. For example, I say “Cathy in *East of Eden* clearly represents a selfish person who only helps herself.” However, that was my extent of my discussion on that character. I find it quite funny I said she “clearly” represents something, when obviously it wasn’t clear to the readers who didn’t have any quotes or summary of that story! I compared this to my summary of “The Mother” in my other essay, for example, when I said a common theme was regret and questioning your own decision, I included a quote right after to further explain what I mean, and also prove my point to the reader. Absolutely none of this paper has enough detail. I think I had a lot of great ideas, however I didn’t execute them correctly. If I could do it over again, I would slim the topic down a lot. I would make the entirety of the paper about the affects of war on various authors, I think that would’ve given me much more time to flush out my ideas more and truly focus in on specific details in the story. This would also have been beneficial, as there is a large disconnect between my three main body paragraphs. I neglect to bring the different historical events together with any sort of transition sentences. I’m truly a bit embarrassed to include this paper, but since I thought it was fantastic only six months before my paper on loss, it shows how much I’ve already learned in college and how much I will continue to in my other various English classes.

Lastly, I included one of my personal favorite pieces of mine. I had the idea for this speech in my mind for a few years, but I’d never been able to write it how I envisioned it. When I first began to write speeches, I often got critiqued about how my
speech just sounded like reading an academic essay out loud. While it was difficult for me to stray from the conventions I was used to, I learned how to fit your writing to be more directed towards a certain audience and to perform a different purpose than an essay does. I think my speech on time displays this very well. I start off the speech with a rhetorical situation for the audience. While I often start off my essays with a quote, I preferred this as it allowed me to connect more to the audience and get them engaged in my ideas. I used a clear topic sentence at the end of my introduction, to explain the exact purpose of my speech. I tried to make this piece more approachable, while still maintaining scientific integrity. I cite an idea from Popular Science, but then go on to explain it in an average situation everyone would have experienced. If I had been writing this speech for a science magazine, I would’ve likely used much more jargon, however it’s important to understand your audience and how to best demonstrate your ideas to them. After a point where I do use a lot of technical terms explaining relativity, I throw in a joke at the end in case I had lost some listeners. While this type of informal writing doesn’t necessarily always have a place in academia, I think making sure what you’re writing is approachable and interesting for your audience is an important skill.

I believe the various writing pieces I included demonstrate my understanding of the course goals for the writing seminar. I think I definitely still have a lot of room for improvement, but as an English major, I definitely will not lacking in writing challenges in the future. Thank you for your consideration.
2. Analysis Paper: The Power and Necessity of Loss

In John Steinbeck’s famous novel *The Winter of Our Discontent*, he writes, “It's so much darker when a light goes out than it would have been if it had never shone.” This quote resounds deeply with almost everyone. Loss is a common thematic element in all different forms of literature. It is a defining element in “The Mother” by Gwendolyn Brooks, “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway, “Because My Father Always Said He Was the Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play “The Star-Spangled Banner” at Woodstock” by Sherman Alexie, and “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost. Loss is an inevitable part of the human experience, and it manifests in many different ways in these four stories. Whether it is a tangible loss that has a resolution, or a loss of possibilities, loss is one of the most powerful human emotions, and it greatly affects the decisions and mindsets of the characters in all of these works.

“The Mother” by Gwendolyn Brooks is a truly heart breaking poem. Regardless if it you have experienced a similar situation, it utilizes such powerful imagery that you can understand as much as possible without having the actual experiences Brooks does. Brooks expresses deep loss in the very first line; we are not eased into the speaker’s pain. She writes, “Abortions do not let you forget” (2313). This line demonstrates how loss commands attention. The use of the words “let you” shows that the memory of the loss is in control, not her anymore. It also seems that if she could choose, she would want to forget, as to stop the pain and grief of remembering. One common theme with loss and grief is regret, and questioning of your own decision. The speaker shows this by
thinking, “if I sinned, / if I seized your luck/ and your lives/ from your unfinished reach,… believe me that even in my deliberateness/ I was not deliberate” (2314). The distinction that even though she did make the decision, she did not want to take lives away is very important. It shows how even though you can think out a decision and believe you are making the correct choice, you may come back to questions aspects of it in the future. It’s clear that she feels guilt, since she finds it so important to explain that she didn’t mean to cause harm. She also ironically feels guilt at feeling guilt, expressed by the line “Though why should I whine,/ whine that the crime was other than mine?” (2314) Her emotions are extremely complex in this poem. It’s unclear if the speaker regrets her decision to have an abortion, or still believes it was the correct decision for her. The speaker seems to regret the immense loss she is feeling, and the idea that she could’ve taken away a life, but it may have still been a necessary decision. This is an extremely difficult concept to understand to anyone who has never had to make the difficult choice the speaker faced, which is why she uses the words, “believe me,” before the line “I loved you all;” (2314) She has to make sure everyone truly believes and understands that she did not want to take away life, but it was necessary at the time. It’s important to take away from this poem that even if a loss is by choice, it doesn’t take away any of the pain. Loss is still loss.

“Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway provides a strong contrast to “The Mother”. Brooks shoves the emotionally charged subject of abortion at the reader in the very first line, whereas Hemingway never even writes the word abortion in his story, and the reader realizes through context
clues that it is the subject. “Hills Like White Elephants” shows a couple discussing the possibility of getting an abortion. The man is trying to convince a woman named Jig, saying, “It’s really not anything. It’s just to let the air in.” (1952) That line is one of the only clues we get towards the nature of the procedure. This is causing a conflict in their relationship, as she seems to realize that she would want a child. The couple was likely primarily travelers, as shown by the line where the man “looked at the bags against the wall of the station. There were labels on them from all the hotels where they had spent nights.” (1953) It is important that he is a traveler, which contrasts with what the idea of a father figure; someone who is stable and stagnant. Jig remarks on this saying, “We could have everything and every day we make it more impossible.” (1952) She knows that they won’t be able to continue their relationship; regardless of if she has the child, the two are simply not communicating and want different futures. When the man asserts, “We can go everywhere.” She says “No we can’t. It isn’t ours anymore. And once they take it away, you never get it back.” (1953) In this line, “they” represents the reality of the world and the pain that comes with that. As Brooks is forever scarred by her loss, the woman realizes that you can never go back to a state of innocence before you experience loss. The man is refusing to believe that loss is a reality of life. He believes if she gets an abortion, they will be okay. He says “It’s the only thing that’s made us unhappy.” (1952) But, this shows ignorance of the pain that comes from getting an abortion as well. Regardless of what decision Jig makes, she has been permanently changed. She eventually just asks the man to stop talking, as she realizes the futility of their conversation.
She knows that the reality of loss has entered their life, and there is no going back. If we had only an internal dialogue from Jig’s perspective, it would likely be more similar to Brooks’ poem, however Jig is faced with trying to explain her situation outwardly, and to a man who could never experience what Jig is going through.

In “Because My Father Always Said He Was The Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play “The Star-Spangled Banner” at Woodstock”, we experience the loss of a parent in a child’s life, instead of the opposite in the previous two stories. As a child, loss is often much more difficult to understand. When the boy’s father rode away on a motorcycle, and eventually stopped writing, it was extremely difficult to comprehend. He romanticized many aspects of his father’s personality. His father was obsessed with Jimi Hendrix. When his mother tried to explain why his father left, the son asked “Is this because of Jimi Hendrix?” (2558) The mother responds that part of it was. Jimi Hendrix represented freedom to the father; it was a different time the day he went to that Jimi Hendrix concert. He once said to his son, “Nobody can give everything away. It ain’t healthy.” (2558) His father was so enamored with freedom that he likely felt he was simply giving too much of himself away. He was so afraid of losing the old days that he gave up those important to him. This story shows that sometimes loss is necessary. As the common phrase goes, change is the only constant in life. You sometimes need to give up some things to get to a better place in life. The son remarks of the mother, “She missed my father. Not enough to want him back. She missed him just enough for it to hurt.” (2558) This shows that the mother understood what the father didn’t.
Loss is essential to life. It doesn’t mean you made a wrong decision, or should try to fix it; sometimes you just need to accept it and hope that it stops hurting one day.

“The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost displays the most profoundly different type of loss in these selections; he lost something intangible. All of our previous works were a physical lost of a person or relationship, however this poem is a realization of a loss that happened slowly and invisibly over the years. This poem is easily one of the most misinterpreted of all time. Many see it as a rallying cry for the underdog, implying that it’s always okay to go against the grain and walk alone. However, this poem has much more meaning than that. The speaker is faced with a choice, and chooses the one that was grassy, despite saying that the “Though as for that the passing there/ had worn them really about the same.” (1801) The point of this poem is not, despite contrary belief, that the poem less traveled is better, as he clearly states they are about the same. Rather, the point is that in life you often have to make choices that will have a big effect on your life. Often we look back, wondering what would happen if we had made the other choice, or taken the other road, but we simply cannot know. Frost shows this in many ways. For one, the poem is titled, “The Road Not Taken”, referring to the road he did not take. He is lamenting the loss of that path, and whom he could’ve been if he took that path. He tells himself “I kept the first for another day!/ Yet knowing how way leads on to way, /I doubted if I should ever come back.”(1801-1802) Frost realizes that he will likely continue to face more choices that will stem from his first path, and despite telling himself he will be able to come back, he knows he will really likely get too far away.
He realizes, “I shall be telling this with a sigh./ somewhere ages and ages hence.” (1802) The fact that he is going to be telling with a “sigh” is very important as sighs often demonstrate regret and sadness. He knows that this is a moment that will be defining in his life, and he will be always questioning what could’ve been. He is sad over the loss of what might have been. This is something that is very easy to do, as we often think “the grass is always greener”, however in reality his life could’ve been much worse had he chosen the other path. However, it’s still difficult him to not know. Frost is a man who wants to experience everything, and is “sorry I could not travel both.” (1801) He believes that choosing the road he did “has made all the difference.” (1802) We are left to wonder how much difference it truly did make. However, when you consider how Frost says that crossroads lead to more crossroads, it is likely that he could’ve had an entirely different life had he made the other choice. The loss of what could’ve been is extremely difficult to deal with, as there is no closure, or certainty. Frost captures the complexity of this loss completely, and it is a shame many don’t understand the true meaning of this poem.

When one experiences loss, it is a defining moment in their life. “The Mother”, “Hills Like White Elephants”, “Because My Father Always Said He Was The Only Indian….”, and “The Road Not Taken” all display the power of loss and it’s effects. The pain from loss often never goes away, it simply can get slightly better in time. The speaker in the Brooks poem forces herself to receive closure, though it’s clear she will have regrets throughout her life, in a dismal ending the
women in Hemingway’s story puts her mask back on and stops creating conflict, Alexie’s story concludes with an abandoned son who will have to grow up without a father, and Frost’s poem leaves the reader wondering what roads they did not take. However, it is important to not make the same mistake as some of these characters and to accept the reality of loss. Pain over losing something is simply a sign of how important it was to you, and the fact that humans can feel so deeply about something they know is finite is one of the defining parts of humanity.
3. Documented. Research-Based Project

The Influence of Gender in Politics

Introduction to Sociology
December 2013
The Influence of Gender in Politics

The United States Congress is currently composed of only eighteen percent women; to put it in exacts numbers, the House of Representatives holds 78 women and 357 men, and The Senate holds 20 women, and 80 men. It’s shocking to think that a demographic that composes 50% of the country is such a small part of our federal governing body. This is a problem that is not discussed nearly as often as it should be in our modern society. There are many factors that contribute to the low amount of women in congress, which makes it a very difficult problem to combat. One of the most prominent issues is the continued belief that politics just is a “man’s job.” This belief is held by both men and women alike, and continues to be socialized into our children. The key to getting an equal representation of women in Congress is to change how the media treats women in politics and have more representation of women in mainstream politics.

My research goal is to learn about the many ways sexism effects women in politics, and how prominent it is. I believe the systematic exclusion of women from the politic process is an issue that will require careful scrutiny of many aspects of our own behavior and the media’s in order to locate and correct the deeply entrenched sexist undertones. I will first discuss literature that grounds and explains many complex ideas, and then show specific media examples of sexism.

In order to learn more about this issue, I went to the library databases and located some scholarly articles regarding the issues. I primarily looked for data regarding the 2008 election, as that was an especially prominent election in
regards to gender since Hilary Clinton and Sarah Palin were both involved. I also looked for more general survey based studies and history of past elections involving women. I used keywords such as, “women, gender, politics, bias, sexism” in order to find results relevant to my research questions. I also look for primary news articles reporting on Sarah Palin or Hilary Clinton in a biased way during the election season. We will be discussing many sources. First, Amy King’s 2010 quantitative analysis of bias against women in Australian elections, another content analysis of media portrayals of women by Devitt in 2002, Jennifer Lawless’s survey of perceptions of difficulty of elections in 2008, a 2013 content analysis of the New York times by Lindsey Meeks, and another study by Lawless which proves that the commonly stated idea that representation is important stands up against quantitative analysis. This literature has a common theme of taking ideas that we often see, and really showing how prominent they are. We may see an occasional sexist comment and think that it’s only that one news source, however by gathering data on how often it happens, these abstract concepts become easier to ground and understand.

My focus is to show literature that gives quantitative data and specific examples to these ideas of gender bias, and then use specific examples in the media to highlight the ideas that this literature explains. While beginning to look at the various factors influencing our political sphere, it’s important to start with the obvious one: outright sexism, and beliefs that women will simply never be as qualified as men for positions of power. While it’s obvious that sexism isn’t completely gone in America, it’s unclear how much it affects voting habits. Amy King asked this question in 2010 in Australia,
where it is facing a similar problem as the United States Congress with lack of women.

One important difference to note between the two systems is voting is mandatory in Australia. She concluded, by looking at many elections, that regardless of political party, or if just running as independent, women face around a .6% outright bias at the ballot box. It has been steadily decreasing from a 5% bias during WW2. Amy compared this trend with the decreasing of the wage gap for women in Australia and it followed the same suit. Showing that as society sees women as competent and worthy workers, it carries over to politics. One often wonders where this idea begins in our society. One important place to look is the classroom. Conley writes in You May Ask Yourself, “Girls are frequently bullied out of classroom discussion, put down by their male classmates, and effectively silenced. Boys and girls may share one classroom, but they receive two separate educations.” (Conley 312) The belief that one’s own opinion is important is central to politics, and if girls are being taught from a young age that theirs is less important than their male counterparts, that is very detrimental. The numbers found in King’s study still seem very low comparing to the real visible sexism that was seen in 2008 when Hilary Clinton and Sarah Palin both had serious chances at being in positions of power. However, it’s very hard to measure blatant sexism as, hopefully, most people wouldn’t admit to their beliefs, as it would be condemned. This is why we have to look at the other ways it manifests subtly and through media in our culture.
One of the most prominent ways it is visible is in our media. Duerst-Lahti explains it well it perfectly, stating that the media were more likely discuss personal image, apparel, and personal life of female candidates, otherwise referred to as the “hair, husband, and hemline problem.” This is something that pervades many aspects of culture. Women are often much more concerned with their physical appearance because they know they will be judged by it. A 2002 study of popular news reports by Devitt showed important results regarding this. She studied many news sources and had over a thousand mentions of both female and male candidates. She found that 17.3% of the mentions of the female candidate involved their personal life, compared to only 12.1% of the male candidates. The lost reporting coverage often came from discussing the candidate’s stance on issues, showing 28.9% for females, and 33.8% for males. Both of these sets of percentages differ significantly. These differences in reporting can be absolutely detrimental to a females campaign. Some could believe that the female candidate was unqualified simply because the media didn’t spend enough time reporting on her stances on the political issues they care about. Ex-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi was no stranger to this phenomenon. She remarked in the movie, *Miss Representation*, “When I was first running for office, my youngest child was a senior in high school, but one of the questions I was asked the most was, “Whose going to take care of your children?” And of course, this is a type of question that a man is never been asked.” Questions like this show our deeply ingrained gender roles, when a man goes off to a powerful job, he is earning for his family, but if a woman does it, she is abandoning them. If someone
believes a woman is abandoning her family to do her job, then they will see in a more negative light, and that is a concern men never have to face. This also is a perfect example of how some one might not be aware their voting is being influenced by institutional sexism. If you don’t carefully think about the implications behind questions like the one mentioned above, it would be easy to be influenced by them. Women also have to appear more qualified on level men don’t – attractiveness. Men have to seem approachable and friendly, but their physical appearance simply isn’t called into question as frequently. This is because society in general is much more critical of women’s appearances. High profile news outlets will report on what female politicians are wearing or looked like, but never for males. Another study evaluating similar concepts is Lindsey Meeks 2013 content analysis of New York Times reporting on both Hilary Clinton and Sarah Palin. One factor she looked for is how often the candidate’s gender was mentioned. Both Sarah Palins and Hilary Clintons were mentioned statistically significantly more often than Obama, Biden, or McCain’s. They also were in turn less often given unique labels, such as, “first black president” or “first Catholic vice president”. (537) The results can be seen below.

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<th>Table 1. New York Times Articles with Novelty Labels by Candidate.</th>
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<td>Clinton’s presidency (n = 228)</td>
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<td>Palin’s vice presidency (n = 48)</td>
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*Difference between Clinton and Obama/McCain for Gender Label coverage was significant, p < .05.*
This shows that they the gender of women candidates is constantly brought into question, as it seems like such an unusual factor, which distracts from other information.

Some may wonder why it’s important to have visible women role models in Congress. Marie Wilson, a founder of The White House project that encourages women to be in leadership positions, answers this eloquently with “You can’t be what you can’t see.” If women see other women achieving and breaking barriers, they won’t feel they can do it themselves and they will limit themselves. Some evidence of this is seen in Jennifer Lawless’s 2008 study regarding gender differences in the perceptions of the electoral system. When asked if they believed “local elections are highly competitive”, 57% of women said “Yes compared to 47% of men. When asking if they believed congressional elections were highly competitive, 61% of women said yes, compared to 48% of men. Both of these differences are statistically significant. Lawless believes this is because women are aware they would likely face some sexism running as a woman, and this reflects that. Jennifer Lawless did another study in 2004 regarding the importance of representation. We all say it as a concept, but she wondered if the numbers backed up that ideal. She hypothesized that women would feel more represented by other women in Congress regardless of their political party. If the member of Congress was of their party, women had a .95 and .97 approval rate for male and female candidates respectively. If the member of Congress was not of their party, it was .82 for males, and .88 for females. The male approval rates for members of Congress not of their party were .77 male, and .76 female. This shows that the support of females for other females is statistically
significant. (Lawless 88) Even if it’s not a candidate of their party, they still feel more supported by a female candidate. The implications of this are very important. It seems that male candidates just simply cannot provide some qualities that women want, which is why it is so startling that the number of women in positions of power is so low. The absolutely crucial voice of female citizens is not being represented correctly and this needs to be remedied.

After thinking about all the subtle media bias brought to light by this literature, I decided to search myself for some of examples of sexism, and analyze how they add to the overall image of women.

Belief in Inferiority of Women

On the show The O’Reilly Factor, the question, “What would be the downside of having a woman become the president of The United States?” is asked to an author Marc Rudov, who immediately responds, “You mean besides the PMS and the mood swings, right?” (Ironside 1) Rudov later claims that this was a joke, and that his main problem is if the candidate has a “female agenda.” Regardless of it Rudov intended this as a joke, jokes often reflect ideas held in our culture. His belief that a woman would be hampered simply by her own biology represents a view that will be very hard to overcome; that women are simply inferior. Rudov’s joke also shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the female body, as I think most would say that the mood swings primarily affect little decisions like what flavor of ice cream we’d want, not political decisions. The fact
that he even thought this was an appropriate joke is frankly horrific. Another important part is his idea that a female candidate would have a “female agenda”. Rudov claims that Hilary, “Hillary embodies the female agenda. She wants to be the feminist in chief. She represents women. It says so on her website. And a lot of women are voting for her because she’s a woman.” He doesn’t explain it much more than this, but comments like this are often heard when discussing women in politics. People say that women only receive the votes of other women based on the fact that they are women. However, I don’t think that this is necessarily a bad or uncommon trend. The fact that women feel more represented by women is simply a reality, as shown in Lawless’s 2004 study. One could easily argue that men often just vote for other men because they are men, and don’t vote for women for this reason. Women often simply have no choice but to vote for a male candidate, so this may have been difficult to observe and study quantitatively in the past. People will always vote based on characteristics that candidates can’t control, but it seems pretty clear that that trend generally benefits the majority.

Concern with Superficial Matters

In 2010 rumors began to swirl that Sarah Palin got breast implants. It got to the point that one Fox News anchor verbatim asked Sarah Palin if she had got them. Sarah Palin responded that she had not, and mockingly called it “Boob- gate”. While Palin obviously intended this as a joke, it highlights a very serious idea. Our media sees the possibility of a female candidate getting a boob job almost as shocking and important as real political scandals, such as Watergate.
The fact that Palin even had to address this in an interview is insulting. This highlights the idea of “hair, hemline, husband” problem that Duerst-Lahti titled. It’s hard to imagine any male politician being asked any questions regarding physical appearance during his limited interview time. Our media treats female politicians the exact same way they treat female celebrities. Part of being an actor or actress is often being critiqued for your physical appearance, that’s not to say it’s correct, but it’s more logical in that field of work than the treatment of politicians the same way. They are sending a message to female politicians by constantly asking about physical attributes; your appearance is more important to the media than your political platform. Every moment wasted discussing some superficial ideal is potentially a swing voter lost because they didn’t get to learn about a candidate’s platform. Sarah Palin faced a lot of discussion about her appearance because she was traditionally beautiful, however, if you do not face that standard, the backlash from the media is much worse. Elena Kagen was elected to the Supreme Court in 2010, and is the fourth female justice on the court. Micheal Savage said on his radio show The Savage Nation in 2010, which was the third most listened to radio show at the time, “Kagan looks like she belongs in a kosher deli. Isn’t there such a thing about the aesthetics of the appointee? Don't they have to look a -- I mean, is there a certain aesthetic that you have to -- you know, it's one thing to be a legal scholar, it's another thing, like you have to look at these people. Let's put it to you this way, she's not the type of face you'd want to see on a five dollar bill.” This quote is superficial, sexist, and frankly idiotic. The idea that one would have to consider the aesthetic appearance of an appointee is absurd, and something
that has never been brought up about a male candidate. John McCain was 76 when he ran for president, and frankly, no one at 76 years old is the image of health and beauty, however no one ever proposed that we shouldn’t elect him because he wouldn’t look good on a five dollar bill. This is the perfect example of the intense scrutiny of women’s appearances by both men and women alike. Every woman has an additional issue that they need to win the U.S. populace over on – appearance. The way we report on women needs to change to remove this unfair standard.

Archetypes that Dehumanize Women

One way that really sheds light on sexism in politics is contrasting Sarah Palin and Hilary Clinton. When the media was confronted with two female leaders with a chance to be in a powerful position, they weren’t sure how to handle it, so they forced both of these women into typical archetypal roles. As explained by Amanda Fortini at New York magazine, “They are two of the most pernicious stereotypes that are applied to women: the bitch and the ditz..... On the national political stage and in office buildings across the country, women regularly find themselves divided into dualities that are the modern equivalent of the Madonna-whore complex: the hard-ass or the lightweight, the battle-ax or the bubblehead, the serious, pursed-lipped shrew or the silly, ineffectual girl.” Hilary Clinton is shown by the media as a hard woman who forgoes love and family to get to power. She seems cold, and unlikeable. There has been a “joke” product created of a Hilary Clinton figure that function as a nutcracker. This image was applied to women in politics often. As it seemed one had to give up their
traditional motherly duties to succeed in politics. But when Palin hit the stage, we were
confronted with a new image. Caroline Heldman explained in Miss Representation,
“Clinton tried to be properly masculine and properly feminine, and she lost. Sarah Palin
puts out this different image of hyper femininity and she gets beaten up in really
degrading gendered ways.” Palin was seen as the woman next door. She wasn’t that
smart, but hey, at least she was beautiful! The media completed focused on her aesthetic
appearance and her family and ignored any of her stances on the issues. She was
extremely sexualized. Two months before the election, a popular video came out in which
many people said proudly, “I masturbated to Sarah Palin”, and implied that they would
vote for her because of her physical attributes. Videos like that are extremely
dehumanizing. They turn Sarah Palin into an object for pleasure instead of a human
being. A male candidate has never had to face any sexualization of his appearance like
that. Sarah Palin and Hilary Clinton are very different woman, but both were put into
boxes that the media could comprehend. Both of these archetypes are extremely
detrimental to women. The “bitch” archetype is very common, as our society often sees
what would be considered “assertiveness” in a man, as “aggressiveness” in a woman.
When a woman acts in what is perceived to be a more masculine way, they are punished
for it. The “ditz” archetype reinforces the idea that women can what they want just by
their looks, and that our opinions aren’t as valid. If a woman is beautiful, they often focus
on that and assume that she is not intelligent and strong as well. They also objectify you,
and being objectified makes it extremely hard to convince someone that you are the best
person to run the country. Their bad traits were emphasized and their policies ignored, because the media found what they looked like to be much more important.

Summary

The specific cases of media sexism that were just named are only a few of the many that the candidates face. There is so much subtle media bias besides the outright sexist comments that were primarily discussed. When a woman runs for election, she knows that all of these issues are going to be additional hurdles she will have to face that her male competitors won’t. It is so important that we are very supportive of all women in politics. Even if one disagrees with their politics, critique them for that, not their appearance. Sexism has been taught to all of us, and we must work to unlearn it. By noticing the bias and taking action against those who make sexist comments like those mentioned above, we can achieve change.

Sexism is prominent in all facets of our culture. Its existence in our political sphere is absolutely detrimental to many forms of advancement. We have learned that women are represented most clearly by other women, and the fact that there is only eighteen percent women in The U.S. Congress means that fifty percent of our country is not being correctly represented. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, The United States is ranked 90th globally for the number of women in legislature. Many American’s have this idea that the United States is number one, but many countries we consider to be less progressive than us are outranking The United States in such a simple achievement.
This isn’t a problem that will be simple to fix. Sexism is deeply entrenched in our media and subconscious beliefs, however, it’s clear that it’s time to take action. The issue of sexism in politics is a good place to begin to combat sexism in general. Jennifer Pozner explains why perfectly in the film *Miss Representation*, “The fact that the media are so limiting and so derogatory to the most powerful women in the country, then what does it say about the media’s ability to take any women seriously?” Media sends a message, and if we can get media to begin respecting strong, powerful, females, then likely that change will spread throughout all different areas of our lives. Sexism is in almost every field and area, but once we have a female as a president, it will be quite clear that statements like, “Women are worse leaders than men” are completely unfounded. Representation is so important, and if young girls have strong women in politics, a non-sexualized role, compared to just models and actors, who are heavily judged on their looks, I know our next generation will be stronger. As the late Nelson Mandela said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” The best way to create change is by teaching others of the problems that exist and what they can do to help. If we continue to call out sexism in the media, support female candidates, and demand equal treatment, the dream of a United States Congress composed of fifty percent women will soon be a reality.
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Time Speech Forensics

If I asked you all what time is it, you’d all say Around 6:40 PM on January 11th. But then, what if I told you, I somehow set all of your clocks back a few hours? Imagine how it would throw your life into chaos. You might need to be in a different speech room, you may be an hour late for a meeting, the possibilities are endless. Think about how much you rely on those few little numbers. However, for such an enormous part of lives, time is often misunderstood. Many people think of time as a strict constant all around us, but that couldn’t be more wrong. Today we will prove this, by looking at the history, culture, and the science of time.

Before discussing the idea of time, it’s important to understand where measurement of time began. Ancient Babylon was one of the first civilizations to measure time. They used intervals of the moon cycle to help bring about our modern day 30 month. Later as civilization advanced, it became necessary to create smaller time intervals. The first tool to measure this was the Sundial, it was simple, essentially a pole that measured the shadows. This invention further spurred interest in measuring time. The modern hour we know today was not created until 1330. Time, as we know it, has not been around that long.

Time was designed by human beings for our convenience. It’s not a natural constant. In June 2007 issue of Popular science, they explain how time is a common currency, just like money. We use money to make exchange of goods easier, but we could trade for example, two pair of shoes for one pair of pants. Time works the same way. We could measure the time it takes to microwave popcorn relative to amount of heartbeats. It’s just easier to have one consistent measurement throughout. Maybe the
phrase Time is Money has more truth than we thought.

And in the United States where money is so important, it follows time must be as well. The American approach to time is extremely strict and punctual. Robert Levine, a social psychologist, has studied time in cultures ever since he moved to Brazil. There he taught a class that ran from 10am to 12pm. Many students didn’t arrive until 10:30, nor did they leave until 12:45. In Brazilian culture, the time is seen as suggestion. This country is just one example of many with different time standards.

Even though time was constructed by humans, and is dependent on culture, scientists continually try to delve deeper into the nature of time. But, as we all know, scientists can get wordy and often end up making ideas even more confusing. Professor Alan Alda has realized this problem, and created The Center for Communicating Science. He started an ongoing contest in which participants are asked to answer the question “What is time?” in terms a 6th grader could understand. Luckily, there hasn’t been declared a winner yet, so I’ll give it a shot. Time is a measure of relativity. An example to illustrate relativity is seeing someone throw a ball inside a train. To the people inside the train, you would just see the speed of the ball, but if you’re outside the train, you see it as the speed of train plus the speed of the ball. This is called your frame of reference. Speed of light is always constant, so time is a measurement of relativity to that speed. The closer you get to that speed of light, time then moves at a different rate within that frame of reference. Don’t worry if this all seems a bit complicated to you, Marty McFly and two Doc Browns couldn’t get it either.

Once you realize time is no more than a creation to bring order to our lives, it seems silly
how much time we spend complaining about how much we have. As science continues to advance we will likely learn more about the true nature of time, but for now it is primarily dependent on culture. Hopefully now you all realize that having your clock set back a few hours doesn’t have to throw your life into chaos, after all, time is just another invention. However, it is an invention I am almost out of. Thank you.
4. Writer’s Choice

Writers and their Environments

“Your handwriting. The way you walk. Which china pattern you choose. It’s all giving you away. Everything you do shows your hand. Everything is a self portrait.” Chuck Palahniuk explains in his novel, Diary, how everything we do reflects every other aspect of our lives even if we might not realize it. In literature, the author’s environment and life experiences are always visible in their work. Throughout my studies this semester, I’ve seen this theme in every book. Three prominent influences are social and moral change, war, and fear. All of these climates affect a person in every aspect of their lives.

Soviet Russia and the Great Depression had similar trials for those living through it. There was a sense of losing everything you know, and a large class divide. Orwell criticized USSR blatantly in Animal Farm, and 1984. Orwell stated in “Why I Write”, “Every line of serious work that I have written is directly or indirectly against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism.” Socialism is often associated as one step before communism, so I was surprised to see he supported It. The book seems to be a direct criticism of big government. Orwell explains his true views as “I worked out an anarchistic theory that all government is evil, that punishment always does more harm than crime, and that people can be trusted to behave decently if you only will let them alone.” With this definition of democratic socialism in mind, it clearly agrees with Orwell’s hatred of ‘Big Brother.’ John Steinbeck was influenced by his political and social climate as well. The Great Depression was a time of change. The shows the moral struggle best in Grapes of Wrath, but it doesn’t end there. East of Eden deals with differences in values and how you should treat others. In the Great Depression, many people felt betrayed by those around them because it was every man for themselves.
Cathy in *East of Eden* clearly represents a selfish person who only helps herself. But for every bad person, there is good as well. Like the woman in *Grapes of Wrath* who lies about the price of candy so a father can buy it for his starving children, Adam and Samuel represents good and caring humans. John Steinbeck researched the Depression and met many suffering families. What he learned there shows in every part of his works.

The Great Wars have affected Americans more than most anything. World War II was one of the most horrifying times in the history of our world. Kurt Vonnegut served in the military and saw many deaths and bombing. This caused him to be very antifor the rest of his life. *Cat’s Cradle* follows the fictional life of the man who invented the atomic bomb. While it does not discuss the war, the apocalyptic tale that symbolizes Vonnegut’s fear that if we have no boundaries man will destroy itself. A scientist says directly after the bomb was created saying, “Now science has known sin.” to which the creator responds, “What is sin?” This shows how Vonnegut feels the creators of the Manhattan project didn’t think about the long term implications. William Golding was also a soldier and saw the same brutality. This provoked him to write *Lord of the Flies*. This novel uses an isolated island as a background to convey man’s primal brutal instincts. After seeing the country drop the atomic bomb, he feels we have returned to that cruelty. Simon, who sees the brutality and understands but thinks we can fight it could clearly represent Golding himself. He participated in the War, but saw the flaws in it. His exposure of this evil in his works is his best way of fighting it.

After wars, countries are often left in a state of disarray and citizens experience fear for the future. And what’s better for fighting fear than superheros? Alan Moore shows the magnitude of the fear in *Watchmen* by having even courageous superheros falter and make mistakes. The fear and suspense many Americans feel is represented quite literally by a ticking clock, showing how close we are to destruction. A Cold War
was more frightening for many than World War II because citizens were constantly on edge and didn’t know if there would be an attack. Moore criticizes government not keeping the citizen informed in *Watchmen* and *V for Vendetta*. The government's reliance on Jon and inability to prevent a Soviet attack shows the slipping faith many felt in the government at that time. Anthony Burgess felt the same fear. His response to the changing youth culture and environment was *A Clockwork Orange*. Burgess says he was inspired to write the novel by “His wife Lynne’s beating and subsequent miscarriage by a gang of drunk American servicemen during WWII.” Unfortunately, many great novels must be inspired by horrid events such as these. Seymour-Smith says of Burgess, “He believes over planning is fatal to creativity and regards his unconscious mind and the act of writing itself as indispensable guides.” He wrote this novel in three weeks, which shows the idea of what our government could become and what truly is evil was weighing heavily on everyone’s mind in this time is fear.

Analyzing the surroundings of authors is one of the best ways to get further insight into a novel. As we’ve proved here, there is always a correlation between the events in a novel and that of the real world. Social change, war, and fear are three events that clearly contributed to many of the novels I studied. Looking at novels as inseparable from when they were written gives us a better understanding and insight into the author's mind.