A Comparative Analysis of the Social-Economic Status of Successful Women in Business, Politics, and Media in the U.S.

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1. Research Proposal

This project is an attempt to analyze how women achieve success in spite of the historical disadvantages that they have faced. We will examine nine women of the most professionally accomplished women in the United States in business, politics and media. We will compare and contrast the lives of Meg Whitman, Sheryl Sandberg and Ursula Burns for our section on business; Hillary Clinton, Condoleezza Rice and Nancy Pelosi for the political sector; and Oprah Winfrey, Katie Couric and Gloria Steinem for the area of media. These women have been chosen based on their level of professional success. We will research and explore each woman’s background, challenges and successes. We will focus on their socioeconomic background, class and race. We will use Max Weber’s theory of Ideal Types to compare each of the nine women. We want to find out the common variables involved in the career journeys of the selected women. The goal of our research is to define what a successful woman is in the United States in the 21st century, and to determine how a select few of these women achieved this success. We hypothesize that it will take physical resources from a privileged background as well as personal determination for a female to achieve success.
2. Annotated Bibliography


Bernstein reviews Hillary Clinton’s life up until the 2008 election and discusses how her past has gotten her to where she is now. He highlights important experiences in Hillary’s life and how that has shaped the woman that she has become. This book is helpful to our case studies on female politicians; it attributes her success to her family, college and her marriage.


This article is about a study that was done on women in the United States Senate to explore whether their high power leadership role allows for them to no longer be affected by gender stereotypes. The findings show that female senators are still subject to following gender roles and fall into gender stereotyping. This is helpful for our research because it shows that it is possible to be a feminine leader and that the women that are successful do not have to fully compromise their gender identity to be successful.


Dalton’s article details a hypothetical situation that displays the importance of not only wealth, but race as well. The essay describes two different low-income families coming from different backgrounds; one that has family to support them financially and one that does not. This will support our thesis that community/family support and financial stability are necessary for success.


Gibson’s article researches the media coverage of Katie Couric’s debut as the first solo evening news anchor. She found that the media surrounding Couric’s debut undermined her voice of authority and re-established the role of the network evening news anchor as a male space. Gibson warns the reader of the hegemonic function of the mainstream press to “discipline” women seeking a news anchor job, which has been traditionally a male, by sexualizing Couric and by making condescending remarks based on her gender. This article provides excellent support on our section of women in media, by describing the
obstacles they must overcome to get the top positions, as well as insight into Katie Couric’s career for our case study on this influential woman.


The sections of this book that are of interest to our project are the chapters “Women and Institutional Politics” and “Women and Employment.” The authors provide relevant statistics for women in politics and business as well as the four general paths that women have tended to take to reach political office. These are: political family path, surrogate for male family member, political insider path and political outsider path. The chapter on women in employment describes the glass ceiling and equal employment policies.


This is a text about social stratification and inequality in both the United States and globally. The section of interest for the purposes of this paper is titled “Gender Inequalities,” with a focus on the United States. Kerbo discusses the inequalities between men and women in the areas of labor force participation and income, occupational segregation, as well as political authority. This work is helpful for our project because it provides a brief history of women and work as well as statistics and research to support our thesis.


This documentary not only provides us with interviews of multiple successful women we will be investigating for our paper, but also lots of statistics on women in business, politics and media that will be helpful in our research. Newsom investigates the media industry and its effects on women, including women that want to pursue a career in business or politics. She goes into detail about the stereotypes women face and how the invisible glass ceiling is a barrier to women who wish to pursue careers in the three areas mentioned above.

This article touches on a variety of topics that are of interest to us for our paper. It goes into detail on how women are treated in organizations and the stereotypes that go along with women in the business and political worlds. In addition, it compares how men experience success differently from women. This work is helpful for our project because it will help support our thesis that women must overcome a “glass ceiling” that men do not face when they are on their journey to success.


This book is an autobiography about Nancy Pelosi’s journey towards becoming the first female Speaker of the House. It is Ms. Pelosi’s advice to women of the nation on how to achieve success. This book highlights key ways in which she was able to achieve her high power political position today. This book will be helpful to our case study on powerful women politics.


This autobiography of Condoleezza Rice’s upbringing provides a wealth of information necessary to analyzing her past, and how it has helped her reach her present day success. The novel focuses mainly on her parents and community and the support they have given her throughout her lifetime. She explains how her parents helped her receive a proper education and helped her strive to be a successful woman. Rice also explains the racism she endured in her journey to success. This autobiography will help us narrow down what we believe to be important factors to what helps a woman become a “success” as well as our case study on powerful women in politics.


Ritzer explains German sociologist Max Weber’s theories on ideal types, multidimensional view of stratification, and different types of authority. Ritzer defines ideal types as “a concept constructed by a social scientist, on the basis of his or her interests and theoretical orientation, to capture the essential features of some social phenomenon.” We will apply this theory to find the ideal types of women in power. We will also use Weber’s multidimensional view of class, status and power to support the ways women come into power, and his theories of traditional, charismatic and rational-legal authority.

Wood discusses in this book how gender impacts all aspects of society. The book addresses how gender influences all of our decisions. There is one chapter on Gendered Organizational Communication and it highlights different gender roles and stereotypes in the workplace. This book will be helpful to our project because it identifies challenges that women have to face in a work environment that can be applied to our case studies on women in business.
3. Outline

I. Introduction
   A. Why we are choosing to do an analysis on powerful women in the 21st century
   B. Who are these women and what have they achieved
   C. Why we selected these women to represent their area of work

II. Methods

III. Historical Background
   A. Women in public life
      1. Early 1900s
         a. First time entering the workforce
         b. Industrialization
         c. The Great Depression
      2. WWII
         a. Men were away so women entered the workforce again
         b. Pushed back out once men returned from war
      3. 1960’s
         a. Equal Pay Act
         b. Civil Rights Movement
         c. Affirmative action policies
   B. Current challenges women face today

IV. Examples of Powerful Women and Their Journey to Success
   A. Business
      1. Meg Whitman
         a. Harvard MBA
         b. Former CEO of EBay
         c. Former candidate for CA governor
         d. Current CEO of Hewlett Packard
      2. Sheryl Sandberg
         a. COO of Facebook
         b. VP of Global Online Sales at Google (partial founder)
         c. BA in Economics and MBA from Harvard
      3. Ursula Burns
         a. CEO of Xerox
         b. BS in Mechanical Engineering from Polytechnic University of New York
         c. Masters in Mechanical engineering from Columbia University
      4. Comparison of all three women
   B. Politics
      1. Hillary Clinton
         a. 67th Secretary of State
         b. BA from Wellesley College, Yale Law Schools
         c. Former first lady
d. Former senator of New York
2. Condoleezza Rice
   a. 66th Secretary of State (first female)
   b. Professor of political economy at Stanford Graduate School of Business
   c. BA in Political Science from University of Denver, MA from Notre Dame, and PhD from University of Denver in International Studies
3. Nancy Pelosi
   a. BA from Trinity College
   b. 2007-2011 Speaker of the House
   c. 2002 elected the first woman leader of a major political party in Congress
   d. Represented California’s 8th district in the House of Representatives
4. Comparison of all three women

C. Media
1. Oprah Winfrey
   a. Degree from Tennessee State University
   b. Nominated for Best Supporting Actress in The Color Purple
   c. Host of the Oprah Winfrey show
   d. Co-founded Oxygen Media
2. Katie Couric
   a. Degree in American Studies from the University of Virginia
   b. Former co-anchor of the Today Show
   c. 2006 became the first woman to anchor an evening show solo on CBS
3. Gloria Steinem
   a. Graduated from Smith College where she studied politics
   b. Helped create New York Magazine
   c. Launched Ms. magazine
   d. Leader in the Women’s Rights Movement
4. Comparison of all three women

V. Comparison of Characteristics
   A. Weber’s Ideal Types
   B. Chart
   C. Analysis

VI. Conclusion
4. Introduction

The goal of this paper is to compare and discuss the factors that led to the success of selected accomplished women and factors leading to the breaking down of the glass ceiling among women in politics, media and business in the United States. We will attempt to conduct a comparative analysis of the similarities and differences in success of the selected women. We are going to compare these nine women; three women in business: Meg Whitman, Sheryl Sandberg and Ursula Burns; three women in politics: Hillary Clinton, Condoleezza Rice and Nancy Pelosi; three women in media: Oprah Winfrey, Katie Couric and Gloria Steinem. Webster’s Dictionary defines “success” as “the attainment of wealth, favor, or eminence” (Merriam-Webster). However, we define a successful woman as someone who has overcome the societal norm of male domination to become a leader in her perspective field. We believe that these women exemplify some of the key qualities of success.

To determine common characteristics, Max Weber’s Ideal Types will be used to concoct a formula to discover the traits of successful women in the 21st century. Weber’s Ideal Types is a sociological theory that is constructed based on observations of any social phenomenon. Ideal Types are a list of attributes both positive and negative that are used to compare other examples of the social phenomenon. Our social phenomenon is successful female leaders. While many have already heard of the success of these women, few know the details of their journey to their current status. We want to delve into the backgrounds of these women and compare and contrast class, race, education and unique challenges between them to show what it takes to be a successful woman in the 21st century.
Explanation of the Methodology

Max Weber’s Ideal Types theory was used to compare common characteristics of our female leaders. Ideal types are “constructed by a social scientist, on the basis of his or her interests and theoretical orientation, to capture the essential features of some social phenomenon” (Ritzer 119). To create an Ideal Type, a social scientist takes different elements from a subject to create a list of common characteristics to compare. These types are created from historical reality and from actual life but are not meant to be “mirror images” of reality, so they are derived inductively and developed based on observations. They can include both positive and negative characteristics and may not be the best possible way to reach the overall goal, but it is a common way to accomplish the task. Because society is constantly changing, ideal types are not concrete. As society changes, so do ideal types. For example, in the past it can be argued that in order to achieve success, a woman had to be married. However, through our research it is proven that in the 21st century being married is no longer an ideal type for a woman in a leadership role.

Weber’s Ideal Types helped to understand the goal of our research: to compare the commonalities and differences of significant woman leaders in the 21st century. Ideal Types are a method to find common elements in some phenomenon, so, through creating an Ideal Type from successful women in leadership roles, we were able to identify some of their common characteristics. We were also able to identify some of the differences in our nine women. The differences are: not all of the women used a manipulation of disadvantages, came from family money, are married, are generous, or are creative. These characteristics show to be helpful when climbing the corporate ladder, but are not necessary to becoming a successful woman.
Historical Background

The Early 1900s

Women began entering the workforce in the United States at the beginning of the 19th century. This was a time of industrialization, when factories were established, causing women to work outside the home. Middle class women were able to attend higher education with the founding of colleges such as Mount Holyoke, Bryn Mawr, and Wellesley (Shaw 398). The progression of the twentieth century led women into the public sphere.

The beginning of World War I in 1914 further accelerated the entry of white women into the workforce. Hesse-Biber and Carter state “the pressure of war production and the shortage of male industrial workers necessitated the hiring of women for what had been male-dominated occupations” (Hesse-Biber 423). Women were replacing men at jobs in the factories, offices, as well as other industries. During this time women were the backbone of the country, while the men were away at war. Because of this, they were earning higher wages than ever before, however this was short lived. After the war had ended and the men had returned, the men “were given priority in hiring, and although a number of women left the labor force voluntarily, many were forced out by layoffs” (Hesse-Biber 424). The women were then given the remaining jobs that were low paying, low-prestige and undervalued.

During the 1930’s, The Great Depression caused millions of people to lose their jobs. This further intensified the belief that women should not hold jobs in the workforce, because the general consensus was that it was taking away work from men. However, many young women and older women took jobs that were part-time, seasonal or marginal to help out their family in the dire economic times (Hesse-Biber 424).
World War II

Like World War I, the Second World War brought on a shift in the workforce in the United States. While the men were away, women entered the factories to help support the war effort. However, women had little opportunity to advance in these positions and were not paid the same wages as men (Hesse-Biber 424). This era marked a turning point in women’s participation in the labor force. Women proved that they were able to have a job as well as raise a family and run a household without a man present.

This success did not last long, just like the previous war, the end of World War II pushed women out of the workforce to make way for men. The ideology of women being homemakers was prevalent during this time, and “the conservative messages of the 1950s encouraged women to stay home and partake in the rapidly emerging consumer society” (Shaw 399). Women fought back to this standard. Women’s labor force participation continued to increase during this time, and “by the late 1960s, 40 percent of American women were in the labor force” (Hesse-Biber 425). This decade brought on many changes for women, not only culturally but with legislation as well.

The 1960’s and Beyond

The most important legislation made during this time was the Equal Pay Act of 1963. This act was created to protect “men and women who perform substantially equal work in the same establishment from sex-based wage discrimination” (Shaw 399). In essence, this law was written to give equal pay to women for equal work. The Equal Pay Act created another important piece of legislation that was passed during this time, called Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on race, religion, sex and national origin. This meant that employers could no longer justify keeping women out of the workforce based solely on their sex. Unfortunately, this law
had little influence until 1972. In this year the Equal Employment Opportunity
Commission began enforcing this law to ensure women’s equal representation in the
workforce (Shaw 399).

Another more disputed piece of legislation that has been enacted is affirmative
action policies. President Kennedy initiated these policies in the 1960s. Since then, the
workplace has been diversified through positive steps to increase the representation of
women. Even though these policies have created a lot of positive change, many people
misunderstood the meaning of affirmative action. These policies help qualified women
obtain the jobs that they deserve. Many believe that these policies were created to bring
white men down and to make it harder for them to get a job because of the feeling the
jobs are given to less qualified women, further continuing the hostile feelings toward
women in the workforce.

Women in the Workforce Today

Women have made vast improvements within the workforce as compared to the
countries first inception, or even 50 years ago. According to our research, women in the
2012 are still underrepresented in the areas of business, politics, and media. Women
currently account for less than four percent of Fortune 500 CEO’s, (“Women CEOs”),
less than seventeen percent of congress (“Current numbers”), thirty percent of news
directors in television and nineteen percent of television general managers (Papper).
Although the numbers have been steadily increasing, as one can see the representation of
women is still minimal. This under representation is in part due to stereotypes and the
invisible “glass ceiling” that women must face in the workplace. In her research, Judith
Oakley finds that women often are stuck in a behavioral double bind; “a situation where a
person cannot win no matter what she does” (Oakley 324). The typical double-bind for women in leadership roles consist of being authoritative and tough, but not so much that they can be construed as a “bitch,” and not being too feminine that they are seen as weak. Finding the balance between these two stereotypes has proved to be one of the toughest challenges for women in the workforce, and one that even the most successful women still struggle with.

Females are at a disadvantage beginning in the classroom. Kerbo explains that “women continue to be overrepresented in education, health, psychology and English” (Kerbo 320), which are all less prestigious than an engineering or business degree. Women are graduating from college and finding jobs on lower pay grades than men, which makes it more difficult and less likely for women to ascend to positions of power and authority.
Chart 1: Women’s Employment

As one can see from this graph from data reported by the Bureau of Labor statistics, women are heavily represented in less prestigious careers. Just as Kerbo proposed, college majors chosen by women filter them into low paying careers such as teaching and social work. This leads them to represent only 31.9% of lawyers, 24.2% of chief executives, and a mere 4.3% of aircraft engineers; all positions with high prestige.

Chart 2: Women and Men in Business
This chart from the economist shows in the bottom left corner women in the United States working in Fortune 500 top companies. Women make up less than twenty percent of CEO’s, top earners, executives, and board seats in the Fortune 500 companies. This is a huge discrepancy of representation considering that women make up about fifty percent of management and professionals in Fortune 500 companies.
Women in Business

Meg Whitman

http://technorati.com/politics/article/power-women-meg-whitman/

Background

Growing up in New York, Margaret Cushing Whitman was the youngest of three children. Her father worked on Wall Street and her mother served as a homemaker. Whitman describes herself as a tomboy, and she played many team sports as a child as well as in college. Whitman graduated high school after just three years, was a student at Princeton University, and eventually obtained a Harvard MBA. She is now married to a neurosurgeon named Griffith Harsh and they share two sons in their Altherton, California home (“Meg Whitman”).

Challenges

In an interview for Makers.com, Whitman describes some of the hardships that she faced trying to establish herself in a male-dominated field. She recalls that she would wear men style skirt suits with a bow tie in an attempt to fit in with her male colleagues, and would take risks in all of her business actions. Whitman also tells a story of an event titled “Allen and Co. Conference” that she once attended. She was approached at this
event, which is exclusive to Internet and media CEOs, by a man who asked her what her
husband did. She was embarrassed that this man was so quick to assume that because she
was a female, that she could not be the CEO of a major company (Whitman).

Successes

Soon after Harvard, Meg began a job in Cincinnati for the company Proctor &
Gamble. She served as the brand manager at this time, and was able to make a name for
herself in the business world. With her newfound success, Whitman moved to California
to start a job at a well-known business-consulting firm known as Bain & Company. After
this, she served as the Vice President of Strategic planning for the Walt Disney Company
as well as other high positions at Stride Rite, FTD and Hasbro. In 1998 Whitman made it
big when she became the CEO of eBay.

At this point in time, eBay was still a small company with big potential. Whitman
was new to this sort of venture, and as her biography states it “seemed like an odd fit for
the more traditional Whitman” (“Meg Whitman”). Under her authority, eBay grew into
the company that it is today. After leaving the company, she became the CEO of Hewlett-
Packard, and is currently still in this position at this time. Whitman credits her success to
her leadership style, which she extrapolates as leading according to her personality, and
what she thinks is necessary in certain circumstances. She explains she can’t change her
gender, and her leadership style should not be affected by this (Whitman).
Sheryl Sandberg

http://images.businessweek.com/ss/

Background

Sheryl Sandberg, the current Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, began her humble beginnings in Washington D.C. with her parents and 2 younger siblings. The family soon moved to North Miami Beach, where Sandberg grew up. She was the top of her class in high school, which led her to Harvard where she earned her B.A. in economics. In addition, she was awarded the John H. Williams Prize for graduating at the top of her class in her major. After completing her undergrad, Sandberg attended Harvard Business School and earned her MBA with highest distinction (Businessweek). She also eventually married and had two children.

Challenges

Sandberg describes some of her biggest struggles as a successful, high profile woman in an interview for Makers.com. She believes that there is “no work-life balance” (Sandberg) and that women feel guilty for working full time and having to take care of children, despite the fact that 70% of women in the workforce are mothers (Miss Representation). She also states men don’t feel guilty for working full time because they do not believe they have to care for children. As a mother and a woman, Sandberg feels the wrath of the media for not being a stay-at-home mom to care for her two children.
She states that people need “to be ambitious to be successful” (Sandberg), so she does not let the stereotype of being the primary caretaker hold her back from her career.

**Successes**

Soon after receiving her MBA, Sandberg landed the position of Chief of Staff to the United States Secretary of the Treasury under Clinton. She also served as the vice president of Global Online Sales and Operations at Google. In this role she “built and managed the online sales channels for advertising and publishing and operations for consumer products worldwide” (Newsroom). It wasn’t until late 2007 when the CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, met Sandberg at a Christmas party and was impressed with her accomplishments and intelligence. He hired her to be the Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, where she oversees “business operations including sales, marketing, business development, legal, human resources, public policy and communications” (Newsroom). The jump from Google, an established company with a high reputation, to the new and up and coming Facebook shows Sandberg’s risk-taking nature which has helped her climb the corporate ladder. This position has earned her the spot of number one on “Forbes Most Powerful Women in Business 2012.” The article credits Sandberg’s contribution to the companies $100 billion IPO and being named the first woman on the board of directors (Goudreau). Sandberg also serves on the board of the Walt Disney Company, ONE, Women for Women International, V-Day and the Center for Global Development (Newsroom).
Background

Ursula Burns was the child of a single mother. She grew up in a rough neighborhood in the New York housing projects, and was able to elevate her status in society with her incredible mathematical capabilities. Burns’ mother was an emotional support system and inspired her to achieve success. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in mechanical engineering from Polytechnic Institute of NYU and a Master of Science degree in mechanical engineering from Columbia University.

Challenges

Ursula Burns has a double minority status in the workforce as being a woman and an African American. Holding such a status, people often underestimated her skills and ability. People were often surprised because she was smarter than they assumed. Burns struggled balancing the CEO work life and her personal and family life. Despite these challenges Ursula is fearless, she states in a Makers.com interview “not a lot intimidates me” (Burns).
Successes

Ursula Burns is currently the CEO of a fortune 500 company, Xerox. Burns holding that position is historic for two reasons. First, she is the first Black Female CEO. The second reason her accomplishment is historic is because for the first time a female CEO has handed off her position to another female. Ursula Burns is also a Board of Director for the American Express Corporation.

Women in Politics

Hillary Clinton

http://electionsmeter.com/polls/hillary-clinton

Background

Hillary Clinton grew up in the upper middle class of Chicago. Her father was a very serious anti-democrat republican. Clinton says in an interview that her father would not even allow them to speak of democrats in their house (Clinton). As a result Clinton believed that she too held republican ideals. Clinton received her Bachelors degree from Wellesley College, which was an all girls school and then went on to get her Law degree
from Yale. Law school is where she met her husband, now former governor of Arkansas and former President of the United States, Bill Clinton. Besides being the First Lady, Hillary Clinton has had a groundbreaking career in politics.

**Challenges**

Beginning at a young age, there have been many challenges that Clinton has faced on her path to success. When she was in junior high her first ambition was to be an astronaut and travel into space. Hillary wrote to NASA asking about her ability to travel to space and they wrote back to her saying that they did not accept girls into their space program. Later, when Hillary was applying for colleges, she was limited to which colleges she was able to apply to. Hillary was involved in college republicans on Wellesley’s campus and was assigned to an internship at the House Republican Conference. She did not want to do the internship but was forced, so that she could decide what she really believed politically. As it turned out, because of this experience she aligned more with the Democratic Party (Clinton). Once Bill Clinton was in the presidential office he asked Hillary to work on healthcare policy. The public was concerned about a first lady that had that much power and how she would influence federal policy. While Hillary was running for president she encountered criticism from the media about being either too feminine or too masculine.

**Successes**

Hillary was first in the public eye as the first lady of Arkansas and then the first lady of the United States. While she supported her husband’s politics she herself always had a passion for politics. She was the first former first lady to be elected as a New York Senator. Hillary is also known as the first female presidential candidate. She was not chosen to be the democratic nominee but in the speech Hillary gave she said “Although
we weren’t able to shatter the highest hardest glass ceiling this time thanks to you it has about 18 million cracks in it” (Clinton). Then after President Obama was elected, he appointed her as the 67th Secretary of State.

Condoleezza Rice

http://www.biography.com/people/condoleezza-rice

**Background**

Rice did not have any siblings, and as a result her parents were committed to her excellence. Rice was able to excel in education because of this. Her parents supported her financially and mentally. In addition to becoming a member of the Alpha Chi Omega sorority, she received a BA in political science *cum laude* and Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Denver; MS from the University of Notre Dame; and her Ph.D. from the Graduate School of International Studies at the University of Denver. With these high honors, she was able to serve on the National Security Council as the Soviet and Eastern Europe Affairs advisor for President George H.W. Bush. She also served as Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs as well as a Special Assistant to the Director of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.
Challenges

Rice describes her father as a feminist (Rice), and helped her learn how important her education was to furthering her success. Her father focused on her academic education but also educated her on the struggles she would face as an African American woman in the political arena. Rice states that women “need to prepare to be criticized” (Rice). In an interview, Rice states;

I remember so many times during the campaign people asking if she is tough enough to be commander in chief, well I know plenty of men who are not tough enough to be commander and chief and nobody asks men that question (Miss Representation).

This quote shows the strength that Rice has developed in the political sector, which is dominated by white men. Rice notes that “Washington is still pretty male, and it was not unusual to go into a room and to be the only woman in the room” (Miss Representation). This is what helped Rice develop her thick skin and establish herself as an aggressive politician that is educated, and not afraid to disagree with her male colleagues. In an interview on Makers.com, Rice tells a story of her time at the Pentagon when she won a football pool, and was finally “in” with the boys. In addition to this, she describes how she purposely made the coffee extra strong and the men would comment on the strength of her brew (Rice). The way Condoleezza makes her coffee is an analogy to her personality; one that is strong and not afraid to overpower men.

Successes

Rice eventually became the 66th Secretary of State of the United States under the George W. Bush administration (being the first African American woman to achieve this position) and also served as the Presidents Security advisor during his first term (the first female to serve in this position as well). She is now a professor of political economy in
Nancy Pelosi

http://pelosi.house.gov/

Background

Nancy Pelosi was raised around politics, which is why she entered the political arena. Her family was surprised that she made that choice. It was not a time in which it was common that a woman was successful in politics. Nancy was raised in the upper middle class of Baltimore. Her father was the mayor of Baltimore for most of her childhood and she proclaims in an interview, “campaigning was their way of life” (Pelosi). Nancy was always engaged in elections growing up and she was taught that she had a responsibility to play a role in public service and a responsibility to their neighbors and community. Nancy got her BA from Trinity College. She married Paul Pelosi and they began their family. In six years she had five kids. Pelosi was busy with her family but maintained that everyone has civic duty and so she kept involved in San Francisco politics by volunteering.
**Challenges**

With five children the obvious assumption would be that Pelosi’s biggest challenge was balancing a career while raising her children. Her children and husband were supportive of her decision to enter the political arena. In an interview Pelosi describes being overlooked because she is female. Pelosi describes times when her team would be brainstorming ideas and she would share her idea and everyone would say “no, that won’t work” but then the man next to her would say the same idea and everyone would agree (Pelosi). Once in Congress Pelosi said the biggest hurdle was getting people to accept that she was also a member. In Pelosi’s autobiography she describes this challenge, “I constantly had conversations that went something like this:

‘I’m sorry, ma’am, this area is for members only.’

‘I am a member.’

‘Who are you?’

‘Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi from California.’

I’d stand there while they looked up my name, made calls. I know they were just doing their jobs, but it happened quite frequently.” (Pelosi and Hearth). Despite being faced with the challenges of being a woman in Congress, Nancy Pelosi was able to still be successful because she says “There is no secret sauce“ to success and that is important to not “let anyone shake your confidence about what you came here to do” (Pelosi).

**Successes**

Pelosi served as the first female Speaker of the House from 2007 to 2011. In November of 2002 she was elected the first woman to lead a major political party in congress and now represents California’s 8th District in the House of Representatives (“Nancy Pelosi”). Nancy describes her first meeting with the President as Speaker of the
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House. She says she felt closed in her chair and realized that on the chair with her were all the women who have fought for women’s rights throughout history, (Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Katie Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Alice Paul, Sojourner Truth) and they said to her at last we have a seat at the table (Pelosi).

Women in Media

Katie Couric

https://twitter.com/katiecouric

Background

Couric’s father was a journalist and PR executive. Because of this, Couric was destined for success after obtaining a degree in American Studies from the University of Virginia. Her first job was working as a desk assistant at ABC news in Washington. She began working for ABC, CNN, and NBC. In 1991 she was hired as the co-anchor of the Today show, where she conducted many sought after interviews with people in high positions of power. In 2006, Couric became the first woman to anchor an evening show alone on CBS (“Katie Couric”).
**Challenges**

After Couric anchored the evening news by herself for the first time, there was more talk of how she looked than there was about her broadcast (*Miss Representation*). In a Makers.com interview Couric states, “People remembered me more for the fun things than the hard hitting serious news” (Couric). Katie Couric isn’t afraid to report serious hard-hitting news but she is friendly and has a charming personality, so often people expect her to do soft news. When she was made an anchor on the Today Show she said that she didn’t just want to do cooking and fashion, she wanted the reporting to be 50/50 with Bryant Gumble and was asked to settle for 52/48. Couric fought for the equality to serve as an example for little girls (“Katie Couric”).

**Successes**

Katie Couric attributes her work in bringing awareness of colon cancer as one of her biggest accomplishments. She is most commonly known for hosting the Today Show. Couric is the first woman to anchor the evening news by herself. She also now has her own talk show called Katie.
Gloria Steinem

Background

Steinem is known as a radical women’s rights activist during the second wave of feminism and as a journalist. She was born in Toledo, Ohio and had a non-traditional upbringing. Steinem would spend part of the year on one side of the country in Michigan, and spend her summers in Florida or California. Because of this traveling, she did not go to school regularly until the time her parent’s divorced when she was around the age of eleven.

After this moment in her life, she lived with her mentally ill mother before attending Smith College. Steinem majored in government, where she became empowered to stand up for women’s rights. After obtaining her degree she became a freelance writer and helped develop *New York* Magazine. Steinem established herself as a feminist when she helped create *Ms.* magazine.

Recently, in 2000, Steinem finally married. She insisted her whole life that this is something that she would never do. After saying that the “patriarchal system values women as child bearers period” (*Miss Representation*), she proved herself unpredictable...
with this union. However, her husband passed away soon after their marriage in 2003 due to cancer.

**Challenges**

Because Steinem was a strong and committed woman regarding feminism and feminist ideals - a new concept at the time - she faced some harsh criticisms. Her biography states that her “glamorous image” was used against her as a feminist. A fellow feminist group called the Redstockings did not support her because of her image. She describes in an interview for Makers.com that she was frustrated as a freelance writer because she was always assigned to write about topics such as fashion and make up, and that she could not publish anything about the subject of feminism. To make up for this, she decided to speak about it. Steinem believed that “change starts with small groups” (Steinem).

**Successes**

Steinem’s willpower and strength led her to lead a very accomplished life. She is probably most well known for her investigative report titled “I Was a Playboy Bunny.” In this report she details her undercover role to discover what the conditions were to be a Playboy bunny in the 70s. This success led to her launching Ms. Magazine, which covered topics such as sexual harassment, gender, and women’s issues (“Gloria Steinem”). According to Steinem, in the 1970s, there wasn’t a specific word for sexual harassment; it was just called life (Steinem).

Currently, Steinem is on the Board of Directors of the Women’s Media Center and has written several bestselling books. Some of which include *Revolution from Within: A Book of Self-Esteem*, *Moving Beyond Words*, and *Marilyn: Norma Jean*. She
has also written a book that delves into age stereotypes and feminism, titled *Doing Sixty and Seventy* (“Gloria Steinem”).

**Oprah Winfrey**

[Image]

Background

Oprah Winfrey grew up as a child in a small farming town in Mississippi. She then moved to Nashville to live with her loving and supportive father. While still in high school, Oprah got her broadcasting start at a local radio. On a scholarship, Winfrey earned a degree from Tennessee State University (a historically black institution) and soon after moved to Baltimore to pursue her television-broadcasting career. After several talk show jobs, she was nominated for best supporting actress in *The Color Purple* and eventually became the host of her own talk show, The Oprah Winfrey Show. Through this opportunity she co-founded Oxygen media (“Oprah Winfrey” 1).

Challenges

Winfrey faced many hardships on her path to success. She grew up in poverty in what she calls apartheid Mississippi (Winfrey). The schools in her neighborhood were segregated. Growing up Winfrey had no running water, and no electricity. Winfrey was sexually abused during her time in Mississippi and moved to Tennessee to escape that
abuse. She also faced criticisms and opposition as a black woman attempting to enter media.

**Successes**

Despite her challenges Oprah Winfrey has accomplished more than just interviewing almost every celebrity, politician and social icon on the Oprah Winfrey Show. Oprah received a degree from Tennessee State University and to her, “Education was the road to freedom” (Forbes). Oprah was the youngest and first African American women to anchor the news on a Nashville TV station. After that she was on a series of television news shows including "Six O’clock News” and “People Are Talking in Baltimore” and “AM Chicago”. The Oprah Winfrey Show began in 1984 and continued until 2011. In 1988 Oprah started Harpo Studios and became the third woman to own her own studio ("Oprah Winfrey” 1). In 2000 Oprah launched O magazine and also co-founded Oxygen Media. She also promoted the National Child Protection Act, which was signed into law in 1993. Oprah says that her success is because she “made every decision flow from the truth of (herself)” (Forbes).

**Comparison of Characteristics**

To compare the commonalities of successful women leaders, we compared nine women who have had successful careers, Meg Whitman (MW), Sheryl Sandberg (SS) and Ursula Burns (UB) Hillary Clinton (HC), Condoleezza Rice (CR), Nancy Pelosi (NP), Oprah Winfrey (OW), Katie Couric (KC) and Gloria Steinem (GS). After watching interviews and reading a variety of biographies and autobiographies on each of the nine women a list of characteristics that aided in their success was created. The chart below lists all of the women and the characteristics determined to have helped them
achieve success. From that table a list of the characteristics that all nine women had was created to form the ideal type of woman leader. The ideal type of a successful female leader in 2012 would be college educated, have a supportive community, be a good communicator, be self aware, self regulated, motivated, have good social skills, be passionate, be a risk taker and be aggressive.

**Table 1: Comparison of Women’s Communities and Differences**

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</table>
CR: Condoleezza Rice; HC: Hillary Clinton; NP: Nancy Pelosi;
OW: Oprah Winfrey; KC: Katie Couric; GS: Gloria Steinem;
SS: Sheryl Sandberg; MW: Meg Whitman; UB: Ursula Burns

To further explain each category, here are our definitions of what each adjective entails to qualify a woman to have this quality:

*College Educated:* Has obtained a 4-year college degree.

*Manipulation of Disadvantages:* Uses characteristics that are considered “negative” (i.e. being a woman, being a minority, coming from a poor family, being a mother) to further their career by discussing the issue instead of avoiding it, and using it to their advantage.

*Supportive Community:* Coming from a community that helps a woman’s career by supporting her endeavors either financially or emotionally.

*Family Money:* Coming from a family that has already been established financially.

*Good Communicator:* We used our subjective opinion as sociology scholars to determine if the woman is charismatic and likeable when she speaks based on video interviews.

*Married:* Currently has a spouse.

*Generous:* Donates money and time to charity.

*Self-Awareness:* Realistic about abilities and shortcomings.

*Self-Regulation:* Keeping a balanced lifestyle between life and work.

*Motivated:* Not giving up despite the pressure of the workforce.

*Empathy:* Being understanding to those with less fortunate situations.

*Social Skills:* The ability to translate her message to her audience in a clear format.

*Passion:* Never giving up on her career, and putting as much effort into her career as possible.

*Creativity:* Being able to use non-traditional methods to achieve success.
**Risk Taker:** Doesn’t “play it safe” and takes risks both in her career and personal life.

**Aggressive:** Doesn’t give up, not passive with her endeavors and willing to stand up for her beliefs.

**Analysis of the Findings**

Of the nine women that we studied, Meg Whitman, Sheryl Sandberg and Ursula Burns, Hillary Clinton, Condoleezza Rice, Nancy Pelosi, Oprah Winfrey, Katie Couric and Gloria Steinem, there are common characteristics that aided in their success. Of these successful women one of the most evident characteristics that helped them achieve their goals that they all share is that they are all college educated. A college education has helped prepare all of these women to be successful in their varied careers. It has taught them what they needed to know in order to succeed. Each of the nine women also had some sort of family support system, that encouraged them and assisting them in achieving their goals. All nine women are extremely motivated and passionate about what they do. A common characteristic that six of the nine women were able to use to their advantage was that they came from families that were able to financially support them in addition to emotionally supporting the women. Of the three women who did not receive financial support from their family, two of which, Oprah Winfrey and Ursula Burns are both African American women and the only African American women that were studied. For these nine women their intelligence, family support and their personal drive and motivation has allowed them to achieve high levels of success.
Conclusion

In conclusion, through using Weber’s Ideal Types we were able to find that an ideal woman in power in the 21st century would be college educated, have a supportive community, be a good communicator, be self aware, self regulated, motivated, have good social skills, be passionate, be a risk taker and be aggressive. Although this formula is a rough outline, through further research it can be refined to become an even better predictor of the ideal types for women in leadership.

Our research can help understand why women are underrepresented in the areas of business, politics, and media, as well as the qualities a woman should possess if she wishes to achieve success in one of these fields. In addition, this study has displayed the range in which Weber’s Ideal Types theory can be applied. The Ideal Type of female leaders shows that to increase the representation of women in the areas of business, politics and media there needs to be more programs for females as they grow up that allows them to develop the emotional intelligence that will help them succeed as a leader. We learned that as females to be successful it is helpful to have family that is able to support you financially, however it is not necessary. To be successful it is more important to have determination, motivation and passion for your chosen career.
Works Cited


