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Him, Not Her: Why Working-class White Men Reluctant about Trump Still Made Him President of the United States

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Abstract

There are many hypotheses for why working-class white men supported Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton by such a large margin (71 percent to 23 percent), yet little systematic qualitative work has been done on how these men understood their votes. On the basis of interviews with 20 white, working-class men from rural Pennsylvania, the author finds that many of these men expressed concerns about both candidates, yet most who voted still chose Trump. Why? The men described the choice as one between a business-minded outsider and an entrenched politician, yet the decisive factor for most was simply that Clinton was more objectionable, often for reasons beyond her policies. This finding suggests that aversion to Clinton, rather than the appeal of Trump, might be a more complete explanation for Trump's margin of victory among white, working-class men.

Keywords

Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, white working class, 2016 presidential election, gender in politics, sexism

The morning after the 2016 American presidential election, *New York Times* data journalist Nate Cohn (2016) declared, "Donald J. Trump won the presidency by riding an enormous wave among white working-class voters."[1] CNN exit polls (CNN 2016) showed that the white working class[2]—whites with no college degree—went for Trump 66 percent to 29 percent, a gap that grows to 71 percent to 23 percent among non-college-educated white men.[3] Mitt Romney carried white working-class men 64 percent to 33 percent in 2012, a group John McCain won only 59 percent to 39 percent just eight years ago (Teixeira and Halpin 2012). Not only did Trump improve his party's performance among white, working-class men, he also made electoral inroads in small towns and rural areas (Shearer 2016), a phenomenon some observers dubbed the "revenge of the rural voter" (Evich 2016). Trump's success in white, working-class places is striking: of the 660 counties in America that are at least 85 percent white with below median incomes (places predominantly in the upper Rockies, Midwest, and Appalachia), Hillary Clinton won just 2 (Gest 2017). Her husband, by contrast, won nearly half of such counties just 20 years earlier.

Scholars and journalists have advanced many theories for why the white working class supported Donald Trump by

[1]Scholars have debated how decisive a role the white working class played in the election's outcome (see Kilibarda and Roithmayr 2016). Others have questioned, even if the role of the white working class was decisive, whether the Democratic Party should continue to covet white working-class support (Holland 2016). Yet the core idea that Clinton lost because of her inability to hold white working-class voters has persisted. Cohn (2017) underscored his original point, finding that one quarter of Obama's white working-class support defected to Trump or a third party in 2016.

[2]I acknowledge with Metzgar (2016) that "white working class" is an imperfect and unhelpfully large demographic designation, given that America is majority white, and almost three quarters of whites have less than a college degree. Nonetheless, "white working class" remains useful rhetorically, and a well-established literature finds that working-class status, defined as having less than a college degree, is a salient arbiter of social class (Massey 2007; Putnam 2015) and a primary cleavage for divergences in resources for children (McLanahan 2004) and family structure (Cherlin 2014).

[3]President Trump won non-college-educated white women 61 percent to 34 percent.

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such large margins: economic dislocation (Sides and Tesler 2016); their diminished fortunes relative to previous generations (Cherlin 2016); resentment of urban elites (Cramer 2016); cultural backlash about the end of white, Christian America (Jones 2016); the broken relationship between them and professional managerial elites (Williams 2017); the demise of American empire (Grandin 2016); the overturning of the racial hierarchy (Bouie 2016); racial attitudes (Tesler 2016) and racial prejudice (Enders and Smallpage 2016); white grievance at minority advancement (Hochschild 2016; Tesler and Sides 2016); and Trump's activation of authoritarian tendencies within the electorate (MacWilliams 2016). However, one of the most prominent explanations has been sexism (for a summary, see Beinart 2016; Bialik 2017). Previous academic work is generally inconclusive about the role of gender-based stereotypes in shaping voting preference (for a summary, see Ditonto 2016), although recent studies have shown that gender is often less important than other factors (Brooks 2013; Dolan 2014; Hayes 2011). And political scientists Hayes and Lawless (2016) argued in a recent book on women in politics that despite the conventional wisdom that women face many gender-based barriers to political office, today "candidate sex plays a minimal role in the vast majority of U.S. elections" (p. 7). Yet a postelection report from the Diane D. Blair Center of Southern Politics & Society finds that sexist views[4] are more likely among whites, men, and Republicans, and the authors estimate that "roughly 11 million white male Independents and Democrats feel enough animosity towards working women and feminists to make them unlikely to vote for one of them" (Maxwell and Shields 2017).

These findings pose a puzzle about what role gender played in the 2016 election, especially among white, working-class men, who went for Trump almost three to one and were pivotal in states with the closest voting margins. Did these men vote for Trump as an endorsement of—or out of indifference to—his sexist and misogynist views? Or could they simply not bring themselves to vote for Clinton? If the latter, how might we know if it was Clinton's gender, and not her record, that turned off these men? My goal in this study is to understand the process by which those who voted for Trump arrived at their decision, with attention to the role of gender. My conclusions are based on in-depth, semistructured interviews with 20 white, working-class men from rural Pennsylvania during the summer leading up to and the winter following the election. I identify four groups of men in this study: first-timers, those who were attracted enough to Trump and his message to vote for the first time; Republican base voters, who had varied opinions of Trump but voted for him from their prolife views or commitment to the Republican Party; conflicted voters, about half of the likely voters in this study, who struggled with their Election Day decision but mostly chose Trump; and nonvoters, who also had varying views of Trump and Clinton but who did not vote in 2016. I find that although some men admired Trump's arrogance and boldness, others saw him as flawed and even dangerous. Clinton fared no better: these men disliked her and viewed her as untrustworthy. Yet in this faceoff between two unpopular candidates, most of the men who voted chose Trump. Why? In examining the respondents' stated motives, many framed the decision as one between a political outsider with a business résumé who was promising to bring back much-needed jobs, against an entrenched politician who was ensnared in scandal. Clinton was, despite being the first female major party presidential nominee, ironically seen as the status quo option. But more than that, most men viewed Clinton as dishonest and untrustworthy to such a degree they concluded that Trump, despite his excesses, was the less objectionable choice. The overriding message about the 2016 election that came through in these interviews was clear: anyone but Clinton, even Trump.

Why did these men disapprove of Clinton to such a degree they were willing to vote for an opposing candidate with whom they had serious concerns? Some of these men were genuinely troubled by Clinton's record, particularly her handling of potentially classified information. Yet some found Clinton untrustworthy in ways that go beyond her policy positions or past actions, even as they overlooked concerns about Trump's dishonesty that were well established (Politifact 2017). Although explicit, *Mad Men*–style sexism is the exception in these interviews, the distrust of Clinton is unmistakable and fits a long-established pattern of gendered critique and sexist treatment of her. Many men insisted they would have considered other female candidates, just not Clinton. Although I cannot test those claims, if Clinton herself is singularly troubling to these men (perhaps because of nothing more than decades in the public eye), that would reconcile the previous literature that shows that gender is rarely a decisive factor in modern elections but was perhaps decisive in the 2016 contest. It is also in keeping with studies that find gender-based stereotypes matter in some contexts but not others (for a summary, see Ditonto 2016).

The reluctance about Trump among many of these men, even his voters, suggests that although Trump had a unique appeal to some voters, there were many others who would have considered a major party alternative had one been acceptable in their eyes. In fact, many of the Trump voters indicated they would have voted for Bernie Sanders or considered doing so. It was the complete unacceptability of Clinton that drove many of them to vote for Trump, albeit reluctantly. This casts doubt on explanations for Trump's large margins among working-class white men that rely primarily on Trump's appeal, whether his personality or his policies. These interviews suggest that had anyone but Clinton been the Democratic nominee, at least some of these Trump

[4]To measure sexism, Maxwell and Shields (2017) used the modern sexism scale, originally developed by Swim et al. (1995), designed to measure a respondent's attitudes about women's equality. For more, see Maxwell and Shields (2017).

voters would have been relieved to vote against him, and some nonvoters and third-party voters would have followed suit. Even a small number of defections could have proved decisive in closely contested states such as Pennsylvania, where the men in this study voted. As Rasmussen Reports (2016) suggested after the election, "Maybe it was lucky for Donald Trump that he was running against Hillary Clinton or he wouldn't be president-elect today."

Literature Review

Many feminist scholars have examined the impact of gender in American presidential elections, including the influence of masculine pop cultural portrayals of the presidency (Heldman 2007); the role of the news media in upholding gendered perceptions of the office (Bystrom 2010; Paxton and Hughes 2015; Woodall and Fridkin 2007); the act of painting the opposing party or candidate as feminine, and therefore, weak (Bose 2007; Ducat 2004); and the masculine nature of the executive branch itself (Brown 1998; Han 2007). A theme of this literature is the existence in executive branch leadership (within the government and other institutions) of what is variously called gender power or masculinism (Duerst-Lahti and Kelly 1995; King 1995; Stivers 2002), "a system of formal and informal power arrangements that privilege masculine character traits, customs, and operating procedures over feminine ones" (Dolan, Deckman, and Swers 2017:242–43). There is also the simple fact that the paucity of women in executive positions—most notably in the U.S. presidency—make them noticeably "the other" when seeking the highest office (Dolan et al. 2017).

Clinton's ascension to the Democratic nomination overcame many historical barriers, but Han (2007) argued that the presidential election itself remains the ultimate gendered barrier, what Duerst-Lahti (2007, 2010) called the quintessential "masculine space." Thomas and Schroedel (2007) argued that only an "exceptional" woman can win the American presidency, meaning "someone who is poised to run when the electoral context is most favorable and who can successfully, albeit gingerly, negotiate around women's issues and perceptions of women's abilities" (p. 44). Clinton is certainly exceptional: she is one of the relatively few women to achieve the types of political positions usually necessary for a successful presidential run (Han 2007; Hult 2007). Yet although Clinton began the 2016 race with "traditional" presidential credentials and a high level of name recognition (Ditonto 2016), she was also historically unpopular (Enten 2016) and faced concerns during the campaign about her trustworthiness (Chan 2016; Kristof 2016) that have followed her throughout her career (Bailey 2016; Campbell 1998; Gates 1996; Goldberg 2016). Although it is not inherently sexist to criticize a female candidate, "sexism does not always announce itself as such" (Wilz 2016:357). The concerns during the campaign about Clinton's honesty and even criminality again raise questions about the role of gender in the sphere of American presidential politics.

In *Racism without Racists*, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003) argued that the new dominant racial ideology in the post–civil rights era is color-blind racism, which he summarized in this way: "whites believe that racism is gone, that people of color do not do well because of cultural deficiencies, and that programs assisting people of color represent reverse racism" (Bonilla-Silva 2017:5). This ideology is widespread, supported by what Bonilla-Silva called frames, style, and racial stories. The gender corollary is what some have called modern sexism (Maxwell and Shields 2017; Swim et al. 1995), a subtle but powerful form of gendered disadvantage that rests on the supposition that discrimination against women has been overcome, which leads some to "feel antagonistic toward women who are making political and economic demands, and feel resentment about special favors for women, such as policies designed to help women in academics or work" (Swim et al. 1995:200). Modern sexism, like color-blind racism, does not reveal itself in overt statements of prejudice but in internalized attitudes that can affect behavior, even unknowingly. There is evidence in postelection polling that modern sexist beliefs among the 2016 electorate were sizable enough to have potentially swayed votes away from Clinton (Maxwell and Shields 2017). Certainly not all opposition to Clinton is grounded in sexism (Wilz 2016), but a thorough exploration of the role of gender in the 2016 campaign is imperative in any attempt to fully account for the results.

Data and Methods

In this article, I explore the 2016 election at the intersection of race, class, gender, and geography using in-depth interviews conducted during the summer leading up to and the winter following the election with 20 working-class white men from rural Pennsylvania. This data set is unique, although accidentally so. I was in the field talking to these men[5] for another project in the summer of 2016 as the country was on the verge of the Democratic and Republican party conventions. Politics and policy, although not part of the original project, entered naturally into some of my initial interviews. I did not know that when I returned to the field six months later, Mr. Trump would have gone from campaign curiosity to commander-in-chief. Having discussed the election only tangentially in my summer interviews, I revised my interview guide for my subsequent interviews to explicitly ask how my respondents voted and why. In 2017, I also recontacted all respondents from the summer of 2016 by text or through social media to learn how they voted and why. In total, I conducted interviews with 20 white, working-class men: 11 unique respondents in the summer of 2016 before the election and another 9 respondents between January and March 2017.

[5]These cases are part of a larger data set. For this analysis, I excluded nonwhite working-class men and white men with bachelor's degrees, who were also interviewed about the 2016 election.

For the broader project, I recruited a purposive sample of younger, white, working-class men from across several small towns and villages. I started by speaking with key informants and local organizations, as well as by cultivating original contacts from time spent in these communities. I did not select cases on the basis of any criteria related to voting or elections, which offers a heterogeneity of electoral outcomes, even for relatively small set of cases. The setting for this study is a several-county area in nonmetropolitan Pennsylvania, a state that went for Trump by fewer than 45,000 votes out of more than 6 million cast, or an average of fewer than 700 votes per county. Table 1 describes the basic demographics of the respondents. All respondents are white men. The modal level of highest educational attainment is a high school degree or equivalent, although most of the men have attempted some form of postsecondary education or training. The average age of the respondents in this study is 37 years. All men who worked for pay at the time of the interview were hourly employees; three men received disability benefits, a military pension, or both.

Using an approach called narrative interviewing, I began each interview with the broad invitation to "tell me the story of your life," and from there, I followed up with specific questions about the respondent's parents, growing up, education, employment, relationships, current situation, and future. I asked all respondents what advice they would give to our current political leaders. For the interviews conducted in January and March 2017, I asked respondents about their thoughts on the election, whom they voted for, and why. (I recontacted the respondents from the summer of 2016 in June 2017 with the same questions about the election.) Most interviews took place in the respondents' homes, although several interviews took place at local restaurants and, in a few cases, at the respondents' places of employment. Participants were offered $25 for their time, although some declined payment. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were uploaded into MAXQDA and analyzed, first using broad, inductive codes generated from the interview guide and subsequently using lexical searches for presidential candidates' names and other keywords. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for the respondents and identifying information has been omitted, masked, or altered.

Table 1. Sex, Race, and Highest Educational Attainment of Respondents.

	Total	Percentage of Cases
Sex		
Male	20	100
Female	0	0
Race		
White	20	100
Nonwhite	0	0
Highest educational attainment		
High school diploma or equivalent	7	35
Postsecondary credential (e.g., CDL)	5	25
Some college, no degree	6	30
Associate's degree	2	10
Total	20	100

Note: CDL = commercial driver's license.

Findings

Table 2 shows how these 20 men voted in the 2016 presidential election. Trump was by far the most common choice, garnering 9 votes (45 percent of all cases), but another 9 men in this study did not vote. Clinton received 1 vote (5 percent); Gary Johnson, the Libertarian candidate, also received 1 vote (5 percent). Among just the men who voted, Trump received 82 percent of the votes, with Clinton and Johnson receiving 9 percent each. The men in this study fall into four primary groups: first-timers, those who had never previously voted but who did so to support Trump; Republican base voters, those who had varied thoughts about Trump but were unlikely to have supported any Democratic candidate, Clinton or otherwise; conflicted voters, about half of likely voters, who struggled with the voting decision but ultimately broke mostly for Trump; and nonvoters, many of whom had opinions about the election and the candidates but who either never considered voting or did not follow through for a variety of reasons. It is clear from the interviews that many who voted were choosing between two candidates whom they found less than ideal, yet virtually all of them chose Trump. To answer why, first I briefly explore the first-timers and the Republican base. Then I turn to the conflicted voters, the group of most interest when seeking to understand why the white working class broke almost three to one for Trump. I conclude with brief treatment of the nonvoters.

First-timers

First-timers reported that Trump's candidacy motivated them to vote for the first time. Kyle, a 40-year-old general laborer, said his vote for Trump was the first time he had voted because "I really wanted Trump to win." When asked what attracted him to Trump, Kyle mentioned Trump's views on immigration, welfare, and abortion. Although Clinton was never an option, Kyle had this assessment: "Well, she seemed to lie a lot, didn't like her views on health care, didn't like how she was okay with full-term abortion, she just didn't seem trustworthy." Kyle insisted that Clinton's gender played no role in his dislike of her, noting that "she is no Margaret Thatcher." Likewise, Steve's vote for Trump was the first vote in his life. Steve, in his early 40s, earned his associate's degree in the 1990s and now works in management. Although Steve mentioned that he liked Trump's views on trade and immigration, he said no fewer than five times that Trump's main appeal was his status as an outsider:

Table 2. Respondents' Voting Behavior in the 2016 Presidential Election.

Candidate	Total	Percentage of Cases	Percentage of Voters
Donald Trump	9	45	82
Hillary Clinton	1	5	9
Gary Johnson	1	5	9
Did not vote	9	45	—
Total	20	100	100

> He was the reason I voted. For sure. I mean I didn't like her so I mean it made it even easier, but like you said my thing was finally getting someone who was not a politician in there. I don't think, some people are scared. This could be. Although he's already done, he needs to drop the Twitter account but just stupid things like that, maybe somebody more seasoned would know better or not than to do. But in general, I think we need a different outlook than a politician. Need somebody with totally different views on things to take a look at it. Maybe it can't be fixed at all but a different view on it. I think it means taking some, I'm all for it. Cause sooner or later you've got to bite the bullet sometimes.

Although Steve admitted that electing Trump "could be a disaster," he also said he would not have voted for a different Republican candidate had Trump not been the nominee.

The existence of two men among this relatively small set of cases who were compelled enough by Trump to vote for the first time shows that Trump had a unique appeal to at least some previously dormant but eligible voters. Kyle and Steve had never voted before and would not have voted had there been a different Republican nominee. Furthermore, Clinton was clearly unacceptable to these men, and it is highly unlikely either would have supported Sanders or a different Democrat. Both men mentioned the appeal of Trump's views on immigration, which is in keeping with theories about the election suggesting that Trump tapped into the intermingled issues of working-class economic insecurity and xenophobia, although it is noteworthy that both Kyle and Steve had secure, well-paying jobs for the area. Kyle mentioned abortion as another key issue, demonstrating that he might also be considered a "values voter," although his failure to vote before 2016 precludes him from being a reliable member of the Republican base. Additionally, it suggests that his aversion to abortion had never by itself been enough to get him to the polls. However, as with most Trump voters in this study, Kyle and Steve did not support Trump without qualification; it will be worthwhile to see if their support of Trump wanes and whether they will vote in the future if Trump is not on the ballot.

Republican Base

Republican base voters voted primarily according to their prolife and anti–same sex marriage values or commitment to the Republican Party, but not necessarily out of enthusiasm for Trump. Charles, a general contractor in his early 30s, admitted that Trump scared him, but Clinton was not an option because of her prochoice and antigun positions. He continued, "She is clearly not a Christian and her morals don't match up to mine as a God-fearing man." Brandon, who works part-time at a big-box store, also supported Trump out of his conservative and Christian views: "he [Trump] has conservative views and I am a conservative, number one. Well, I think what he's trying to say, he is pro-life. I'm pro-life. My Christian views, all those views that us Christians stand for, he believes in." Calling Jeb Bush and Ben Carson Christians, Brandon began as a Bush supporter then moved to Carson before supporting Trump. Although not always in Trump's camp, Brandon's commitments precluded him supporting any Democrat, although he also called Clinton's views "off-the-wall" and had deep concerns about her missing e-mails. Brandon minimized Trump's *Access Hollywood* comments, ranking them as not as bad as Clinton's actions:

> I can't trust her, so well Donald Trump said some, some room, locker-room talk. Whoopy ding dong, they didn't harm anyone, but you leaked out top secret information, and we have people dead in Benghazi. Locker-room talk is nothing compared to what she did. To me, what she did ranks higher than what he did.

Although Trump uniquely appealed to the first-timers, the Republican base voters seemed willing to support whoever emerged as the Republican nominee. This is clear in Brandon's movement from Bush to Carson to Trump. Yet although Trump was not the first choice of these men, some, like Brandon, were willing to fiercely defend Trump as a better choice than Clinton. Others were more reluctant to offer such a full-throated defense, opting for a "wait and see" approach. Motives varied among the Republican base voters: some held their prolife views most closely, while others put primacy on Republican economic and fiscal policy. These men are like the first-timers in that it is highly unlikely they would have considered any Democratic candidate, Clinton or otherwise, but they differ in that they had previously voted for Republican candidates and were not uniquely mobilized in the 2016 election by Trump. The first-timers and Republican base voters are the two group of men in this study who were safely non-Democratic, as opposed to the conflicted voters, who struggled with their Election Day choice.

Conflicted Voters

About half of the likely voters in this study were conflicted about their votes. Some men resolved this dilemma by not voting or voting for a third-party candidate, but most ultimately chose Trump. Although some of these men appreciated Trump's boldness, most also saw him as unpredictable and were wide eyed about the risks Trump posed. Trump's main appeal was his status as a political outsider. These men

saw Clinton, despite being the first female major party nominee, as the status quo option. Many men were troubled by the e-mail scandal, but criticism of Clinton often crossed from the policy to the personal. Below I highlight several cases of the conflicted group that draw out these themes.

Case One: Jake. Jake, who dropped out of art school, sat out the 2016 election rather than choose between Clinton and Trump. He voted for McCain in 2008 and could not recall if he voted in 2012, but he opted out in 2016: "I couldn't bring myself to pick. When it came down to it, I thought both candidates were so flawed that I just decided to opt out of it this year." When asked what he found problematic about Trump and Clinton, he explained:

> Um, Trump I just think he's a showman and celebrity and an antagonizer more than a bringer of peace. Um, Clinton I felt there were so many lies behind her candidacy that, I'd never be able to actually trust anything she was saying. It seemed like there was so much being brought up about her and the scandals that it just seemed like there's so much smoke there, there had to be fire somewhere. So, yeah.

Jake, who mentioned race relations in the country as his primary concern, still felt unsure enough about Clinton that he did not vote rather than vote against Trump.

Case Two: Scott. Scott, a military veteran in his late 30s, was the lone third-party voter in this study. He resolved his conflicted feelings about Clinton and Trump by voting for Gary Johnson, although Scott preferred Rand Paul in the Republican primaries. His distrust of Clinton stemmed from the 1990s, when he said "the Clintons" reduced the size of the military and cut spending on armor research. He blames the Bill Clinton–era military reductions for the fact that so many men had to do multiple tours after 9/11. Although Scott did not like Hillary Clinton, he said he would have voted for Sanders had he won the Democratic nomination. When asked what he liked about Sanders, Scott replied, "his ideas about health care and college and human rights." Scott had substantive critiques of Clinton on policy, but he also did not trust her because her past was "too big" and he was convinced she'd do whatever it took to hurt the military again: "I felt like she had been in the game and would play dirty to get her agenda across."

Case Three: Tom. Tom, a man in his mid-30s who has an associate's degree and runs a small business, voted for Obama in 2008 but switched to Trump in 2016. (He was unsure of his 2012 vote.) Tom saw Trump's erratic tendencies, but he rationalized that Trump would have many checks on his power: "And it's not like Trump is going to be able to get access to our nukes. I mean, I'm sure he could, but it's going to take like a hundred people that he has to walk through a certain door." Like others, Tom had no illusions about Trump's fitness for the job ("You know, he might not be the best president"), but he was also distrustful of Clinton and troubled by the e-mail scandal. He explains his rationale:

> So how do I either really pick? Uh, not to sound horribly bad, I mean, you know. Bill's ok president. Ok, and I think Hillary ran a lot of the roost it seemed like maybe. [Laughs] So they did ok then, but you know. You know that FBI scandal leaking paper Internet whatever it was with her computer thing really bothers me. And I know she's not responsible for all of it because obviously some other idiot sent that stuff to her on her private line or whatever. But I really, I think to myself like, like man if that was, that was me, I'd already be arrested and I'd be stamped a terrorist. You know what I mean? Like, like even though she's high up in the, in the government, and she's a special lady, you know, and all that and she was a first lady, an ex-first lady or whatever the heck they are. But I mean it really bothers with that. Donald Trump, you know he, he freaks me out a little bit, too, and it, and it makes me mad. I mean the guy was a TV actor. I mean and I know he made millions of dollars, and I don't really know how he made millions of dollars. So, but I thought like, I'm like ok, well everything in our world is now being ran like a business.

Tom thought the economy was getting better, but despite giving President Obama credit, he figured that Trump was a low-risk, high-reward candidate: "So I figure he can't mess that much up in his time, um, and maybe as his business sense he can get something more done business-oriented."

Case Four: Eric. Eric, who works in law enforcement, had the most to say about politics and the election. Soft-spoken, calm, and diplomatic, Eric seemed to really enjoy the political conversation. He stressed his nonpartisan nature, identifying as Republican but noting times when he did not support local or statewide Republican candidates. He supported Obama in 2008, saying that he was a great speaker who was "gonna bring change." He supported Obama again in 2012 with the justification that Obama needed more time. For Eric, Trump also represented novelty and change: "I was a Trump supporter, um, because I thought there should be change." Eric assumed that Clinton would win and was surprised when Trump took Pennsylvania. Yet he has concerns about Trump: "I agree with a lot of people that it's scary, and I, I hope he doesn't, you know, do anything to jeopardize the United States with other countries." Eric liked Trump's support of law enforcement, but it was not a decisive factor. For him, Clinton represented the status quo:

> No, I think it was just because, because he wasn't a politician. I thought it was time for a change, somebody that wasn't into politics and, um, I think politics can be dirty. I mean, and, and I guess it was just like, it's a Clinton. Not that Bill Clinton did a terrible job, it was just, I, I felt like, if Hillary was gonna be in there, nothing was gonna change. I thought everything would kinda stay the same, um, not that I feel like we should be getting all this stuff for free, it's just, and not that I know if anything's

> gonna change, it was just I thought it was time for a change, you know, and somebody that was non-politician should be, should be, um, given an opportunity. And I, I regret, I wish it wasn't Donald Trump, but he, he was the only one there. And that, that's where I was like, well, I guess I, I'm gonna vote for him because it's, it's totally opposite of what's ever been in there. And, uh, that's kinda where I was at. And, you know, some of Hillary's things I agree with them, when I was, I listened to all the debates, um, I liked some of the stuff. But, um, some of the things with, with, I just didn't believe her, you know.

Eric is not sure if he would have supported Sanders over Trump, but he stated that it was a possibility.

The fact that most voters in this study were conflicted about who to choose, although not generalizable, still allows the common-sense inference that there might be more ambivalence about Trump among his white, working-class voters than media dispatches and some scholarly work suggest. It also suggests the importance of voting narratives in arriving at a deeper understanding of the voting decision: two voters with the same demographic profile who both voted for Trump can have unique paths for how they got to that choice, as we see among these cases. An advantage of viewing the election through these decision-making narratives is that these self-reports capture the process that led up to the decision in the voting booth, including the feelings of conflict and tension, that are obscured in analyses that start with the fact of the vote and correlate that voting outcome with an array of demographic and public opinion variables to draw conclusions about voting motivations. Teasing out singular motives in a voting decision is tricky: all manner of factors and impulses are funneled into an essentially binary choice. Perhaps the explanations offered for the white, working-class support of Trump are true in the aggregate, but the way in which various fields interact in producing behavior is still individual and idiosyncratic.

Nonvoters

In contrast to cases such as Jake, the conflicted voter who chose to opt out in 2016, the nonvoters in this study are those who have never voted or who expressed no interest in voting in 2016. Some nonvoting respondents in this study had a lot to say about the election, while others said little. Some had voted before; some had never voted. Some did not vote because they said they did not have time or did not think their vote mattered. Others had more principled reasons, such as not wanting to be called for jury duty or finding the whole political system corrupt.

Although the nonvoters in this study are heterogeneous, some of the most anger at the political system and the most explicitly sexist language came from nonvoters. Jeremy, who receives disability benefits and last voted for George W. Bush, says he does not vote anymore because he hates politics. He had no love for Clinton ("Clinton doing shit") or Trump ("Quit turning the United States into racists"), but he sees the problem as bigger than just this election: "It's just, if you have enough money, you can become president and that is true. Doesn't matter how many bad things you do, you are just going to become president." Tony, who works an hourly administrative job and has never voted, called Trump "an ass" multiple times and did not trust the president's business dealings, but he also did not trust Clinton, although for less concrete reasons:

> Um . . . and I don't even know enough from what Hillary backs but there's, and I don't wanna even pay attention because there's something about that woman that I don't trust from when Bill Clinton was a president, there's something about her, the way she carried herself, her facial expressions, her eyes, there's something about her that I do not trust. And I . . . in my life very rarely have I been wrong.

Justin, a union member in his mid-20s, represents both threads. Calling the political system a joke, he said he has never voted for a politician in his life. Corruption triumphs, he said, and "twisted people with money run the show and you either work or mooch off." Looking at Clinton and Trump, he replied, "Are you kidding me? This is the best we have?" He was the only respondent in this study who was unsure about having a woman president, saying that "if she gets in, next it's gonna be the first homosexual president or first transgender." And yet he also had particular disdain for Clinton. Although he admitted he was undereducated about Clinton and thinks she had done good things to help kids get a fair education, he nonetheless had this final assessment: "I don't like how she looks, acts in public: her persona. To put it simply, she seems like a royal bitch."

Nonvoters, although not the focus of this study, were as numerous in this sample as Trump voters. The reasons for not voting were as individual and varied as the voting motivations. Although much has been made of Trump's ability to motivate many dormant voters with his racist, misogynist, and xenophobic dog whistles, the fact remains that millions of working-class and poor people—regardless of their political and social views—do not vote, even in high-profile presidential elections (File 2015). These nonvoters may share many traits with their voting peers, but there is also evidence they differ in important ways from those who vote (Johnson et al. 2014). There has been some discussion of Obama voters who did not turn out for Clinton, but any full accounting of the 2016 election ought to also include continued exploration of the millions who are disenfranchised or who voluntarily do not vote, especially the relatively disadvantaged.

Discussion and Conclusion

Why did working-class white men overwhelmingly support Trump over Clinton? First, I find that many men in the study had unfavorable views of both candidates, and about half of

the likely voters in the study were conflicted about their election day choice. Yet most of these likely voters still chose Trump. Although many of these men described the choice as one between a brash outsider and an entrenched politician, I find that most found Clinton more objectionable, largely because these men did not find her trustworthy, or in some cases, likable. The overwhelming distaste for Clinton is consistent with polling showing that most Trump supporters were more against Clinton than in favor of Trump (Pew Research Center 2016). It also fits with a recent in-depth survey of Trump voters that found that the most unifying factor across all types of Trump voter was dislike of Clinton, a view held by 9 in 10 respondents (Ekins 2017). This report on Trump voters also found that the animus toward Clinton after the 2016 election was greater among Trump voters than that directed toward President Obama after the 2012 election. Trump was unpopular, Obama was disliked, but Clinton was despised. The evidence here suggests that these men were more anti-Clinton than pro-Trump (and more anti-Clinton than anti-Obama), which raises the question of whether they might be swung away from Trump in 2020, especially given their reluctance toward him in 2016.

These findings also raise important questions about the role of sexism in the 2016 election. There have been many postelection treatments about the roles that economic anxiety, racial resentment, and other factors might have played in driving white, working-class support of Trump. There have also been ample critiques of the political strategies of the Clinton campaign and scrutiny of the impact of exogenous events such as the James Comey letter. Yet the potential role of sexism, in its overt and subtle forms, has been underappreciated as an explanation for degree of distrust and even hostility faced by Clinton during the campaign. Many questions along these lines remain worthwhile to explore. Was Clinton singularly troubling to the electorate in a way no other candidate—male or female, Republican or Democrat—would have been? What about the potential role of sexism in the opposition of her on the left, including those who supported Sanders but ultimately abstained, voted for Stein, or even swung to Trump? How might we tease apart the principled reasons for opposition to Clinton from motives that were more overtly or covertly sexist? What might these answers mean for future women candidates? And how might they reinforce or require revision of our existing theories about gender and American presidential elections?

One finding from this study that warrants further exploration is the "underdog effect," which came through in several interviews. Eric, who voted for Obama twice and then Trump, mentioned that he found himself rooting for Trump as the campaign went on and Trump kept defying the odds. As he explained,

> So, I found more like, "Come on, come on." I actually found myself going, "Oh my God, if he wins Florida, if he wins Ohio," and then he won. I think Florida was a little later on, but Ohio, I'm like, "Oh my gosh, he could actually win this election." And I had buddies texting me, goin', "Trump's gonna do it, Trump's gonna do it," you know. So, I found myself getting caught off of what you really stand for, to, to voting for this guy 'cause he's an underdog. And I just, it makes me wonder if that's what a lot of people saw that why, and that's why he got the vote, because they got tired of politics and thought, "Let's gets somebody in there that's, he's got money, he's a businessman, and, and, um, who care what he thinks about anything much?" It's, I don't know, makes me wonder.

Patrick, who was interviewed for this project but excluded from the 20 men examined in this article because he earned a bachelor's degree with his GI Bill, was also influenced by Trump's underdog status:

> In the end, I panicked. At the time I voted, Clinton was favored to win by 92 percent. I was just wanting to decrease the landslide because I still think she is every bit as bad as Trump. Given a do over, I would vote for Johnson, which is what I planned to do until the very second that I didn't.

I uncovered in these interviews a degree of ambivalence toward Trump that is noteworthy. Perhaps Trump's rise to the presidency, although a fulfillment of the worst strains in American history and culture (see Connolly and Blain 2016), provides a very public test of the limits of what some have called his toxic masculinity (Sexton 2016). The fact remains that although Trump won the electoral college, he lost the popular vote against an unpopular opponent. As of this writing, President Trump remains in office but is historically unpopular (Bycoffe 2017), and his base is shrinking (Silver 2017). Storm clouds over his presidency seem to gather by the day. If presidential elections are referendums on American manhood, as Katz (2016) argued, then Trump's election might be the cautionary tale. Trump's bluster, temperament, and judgment, which concerned many of the respondents in this study, have been on full display in the early months of the Trump presidency. Might some of these men, many of whom had misgivings about Trump, eventually have voter's remorse? This might prove especially true if Trump, as respondent Nick, a veteran, worried, "puts us into somewhere we don't wanna be." None of this, of course, will undo the 2016 election. But if President Trump runs again in 2020, he will no longer benefit as the outsider and will have a political record to defend. Will his bravado and brashness have worn thin if not accompanied by the victories he promised for America's "forgotten men and women"? Will these men give Trump more time, as Eric did when he voted for Obama in 2012, or will these men, once again, vote for change?

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