“Remember the Ladies” in the “Secret Garden”: Perceptions of Female Local Political Committee Members on the Recruitment of Female Candidates for Local Elected Office: A Descriptive Phenomenological Study

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Abstract
In the United States, female underrepresentation has been linked to fewer women running for and winning elected offices. The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to investigate female candidate recruitment by local political committees. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 25 female local political committee members from 20 committees in 17 municipalities across five counties in New York State. Public election data from these municipalities revealed low female candidacy rates and comparatively low levels of female representation. Phenomenological data found candidate recruitment to be gendered and indicated that the recruitment of women for local political office is difficult despite a high number of women on local political committees and in positions of committee leadership. The demands of traditional gender roles and weaknesses of capacity in the local political committee system were found to negatively affect female candidate recruitment. Reports of misogyny, an intersectionality of misogyny and racism, and an intersectionality of misogyny and ageism were linked to general committee activities, recruitment, campaigning, and post-election activities. The data suggest an “intersectionality barricade” to recruitment can emerge when multiple barriers to recruitment converge. Moreover, the foundation of a new theory, “gendered recruitment theory,” emerged from the findings. Recommendations include creating a female candidate campaign support clearinghouse, condensing and strengthening the local committee system, and maximizing female social networks.

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“Remember the Ladies” in the “Secret Garden”:
Perceptions of Female Local Political Committee Members
on the Recruitment of Female Candidates for Local Elected Office:
A Descriptive Phenomenological Study

By

Janette A. McCoyMcKay

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by
Dr. Anthony P. Chiarlitti

Committee Member
Dr. Janice Kelly

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College

August 2021
Dedication

The research, interviews, analysis, and writing is complete, and, yet I find this the hardest piece to write. There are so many people and events that helped to bring this dissertation to life, my fear is that I will not justly recognize them all. I will, however, do my best.

My faith played an intrinsic role in this process, faith in the fight for justice, faith in the potential of the democratic system, faith in the heavens, and, most importantly, faith in my family. I am extremely grateful for that faith as it has provided guidance in good times and hope in darker ones.

This dissertation is dedicated to the goddesses of yesterday, those of today, and those that are yet to come. For all the girls and women whose hopes and dreams were dashed but they persevered paving the way for the next generation. And for their male allies.

Sincere thanks to the brave women who spoke with me, candidly sharing their lived experiences with me. Hopefully, the completed dissertation honors their contribution to this process since it is purely because of their conversations that I am able to write this dedication.

Thanks to all my friends for your continued support including my friends and colleagues at SUNY Dutchess and St. John Fisher College! A big Team Synergy “high five” to my SJFC teammates! To the “mayor,” my dear friend Stephanie, I am so happy to have gone through this journey with you! Thank you to my chair, Dr. Chiarlitti,
committee member, Dr. Kelly, executive mentor, Dr. Rios, and all the supportive and helpful professors at SJFC, especially Dr. Wallis. A big shout out of gratitude goes out to the SJFC Library folks as well. Even in a global pandemic, the library folks never failed to assist.

To my sisters, nieces, cousins, and Aunt Dotty, you are all such strong women – you are an inspiration! To my nephews, thank you for being wonderful allies. To Marge, John, Harry, and Rosie, I truly believe you can see this accomplishment. Mom and Dad, I felt your presence every day, but, I do wish I could have shared a hug with you now and then throughout it.

To my children: I love you. I hope I have made you proud. You both inspire me every day to be a better person, a more just person, who continuously looks for ways to make this world a better place for you both. To my husband, my soulmate, my greatest ally, there is no one in this world that I would rather be sharing my life with. This accomplishment is just one of the many wonderful things our life together has brought to both of us. Your unending support and belief in me are my greatest strengths. You never doubted me even though I often doubted myself. Thank you for that! I love you.

To everyone who reads my dissertation: may you be motivated by justice to leave the world a better, a more just place than when you entered it. For, as Margaret Mead once said: *Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world.*

*Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*
Biographical Sketch

Janette A. McCoy-McKay is currently a member of Student Services in the Advising, Career, and Transfer Center at Duchess Community College (DCC), a State University of New York (SUNY) school located in Poughkeepsie, New York (NY). Ms. McCoy-McKay is also a part-time professor of History, Political Science, and Career and Life Planning. She has taught classes at DCC; SUNY Orange, in Middletown and Newburgh, NY; Mount St. Mary College, in Newburgh, NY; and Marist College, in Poughkeepsie, NY. Her positions in education follow a professional career in New York City municipal service. Janette McCoy-McKay’s civic engagement activities include membership on the Town of Blooming Grove (BG) Zoning Board of Appeals; former membership on the BG Conservation Action Commission, the Moodna Creek Watershed Intermunicipal Council, and the Washingtonville New York Rising Committee. Ms. McCoy-McKay is a board member of Vision Hudson Valley and the Greater Newburgh Symphony Orchestra. Janette McCoy-McKay studied Government and Politics at St. John’s University in Queens, NY, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts, a Master of Arts, and a Certificate in Public Administration. Her Master of Arts degree and Certificate in Public Administration were conferred in 1996. Ms. McCoy-McKay began her studies at St. John Fisher College (SJFC) in the summer of 2019 as a student in the SJFC Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Janette McCoy-McKay pursued her descriptive phenomenological research in female candidate recruitment under the direction of Dr. Anthony Chiarlitti and Dr. Janice Kelly and received her Ed.D. in the summer of 2021.
Abstract

In the United States, female underrepresentation has been linked to fewer women running for and winning elected offices. The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to investigate female candidate recruitment by local political committees. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 female local political committee members from 20 committees in 17 municipalities across five counties in New York State. Public election data from these municipalities revealed low female candidacy rates and comparatively low levels of female representation. Phenomenological data found candidate recruitment to be gendered and indicated that the recruitment of women for local political office is difficult despite a high number of women on local political committees and in positions of committee leadership. The demands of traditional gender roles and weaknesses of capacity in the local political committee system were found to negatively affect female candidate recruitment. Reports of misogyny, an intersectionality of misogyny and racism, and an intersectionality of misogyny and ageism were linked to general committee activities, recruitment, campaigning, and post-election activities. The data suggest an “intersectionality barricade” to recruitment can emerge when multiple barriers to recruitment converge. Moreover, the foundation of a new theory, “gendered recruitment theory,” emerged from the findings. Recommendations include creating a female candidate campaign support clearinghouse, condensing and strengthening the local committee system, and maximizing female social networks.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

On March 31, 1776, Abigail Adams penned a letter to her husband, John, as he and others prepared to carve out a new nation (Virginia, 2009), a nation based upon a promise of individual rights and self-determination (Virginia, 2009). Abigail implored John and his compatriots to “remember the ladies” in this promised quest for individual liberty, later memorialized in the Declaration of Independence (Marshall, 2004; Virginia, 2009).

In June 1780, the broadside, “Sentiments of an American Woman,” attributed to Philadelphia resident, Esther DeBerdt Reed (1780), called upon the patriotism of women to work for the “public good” (para. 1) to secure a “glorious Revolution” (para. 1) in support of General George Washington and the Continental Army. The piece inspired women of all financial means to donate to the patriot cause (Library of Congress [LOC], 2020). Volunteer women walked door to door, soliciting funds from other Philadelphia women (Arendt, 2014; LOC, 2020). On July 4, 1780, in a letter to General Washington, Reed (1780) reported that the Philadelphia campaign “had raised more than 300,000” (para. 1) Continental dollars from 1,400 local female residents (Arendt, 2014; LOC, 2020; Reed, 1780). That same year, an envoy of General Washington, François Jean De Beauvoir, the Marquis de Chastellux, visited Sarah Bache (Arendt, 2014). At a critical time in the War for Independence, Bache mobilized the women of Philadelphia to create uniform shirts for the Pennsylvania Continentals (Arendt, 2014; Yordy, 2021). As a result, fabric for 2,000 shirts was purchased, cut, sewn, and embroidered by the women
of Philadelphia and stockpiled by Bache. Each shirt bore the name of the woman who crafted it (Arendt, 2014).

Almost 7 decades later, in 1848, Seneca Falls, New York (NY) hosted the first women’s rights convention (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP], 2021a). Following the Civil War, in 1866, Elizabeth Cady Stanton became the first woman to run for Congress (CAWP, 2021a). Because she was a woman, Stanton was prohibited from voting in her own congressional race. She received just 24 of the 12,000 ballots cast (CAWP, 2021a). In 1872, 6 years later, Victoria Claflin Woodhull ran as the first woman candidate for the U.S. presidency (CAWP, 2021a).

It has been 245 years since Abigail Adams wrote her letter to John (Virginia, 2009). Throughout those years, women have performed countless acts of patriotism in service to this country: clothing, fundraising, and spying for General Washington’s Continental Army (Arendt, 2014; Killian, 2002); demanding worker rights in Lowell, Massachusetts textile mills (AFL-CIO, 2021); leading people out of bondage and to freedom while conducting the underground railroad (Goldfield, et al., 2011); tending and harvesting farmlands to feed the nation during the Great War (Smithsonian Libraries, 2021); defying racism by singing on the National Mall (Stamberg, 2014); producing massive quantities of critical munitions during World War II (Goldfield, et al., 2011); sharing the battered image of their 14-year-old son who was murdered by a racist mob (Time, 2021); refusing to change seats on a southern bus (Goldfield, et al., 2011); denouncing the lies of McCarthyism on the floor of Congress (U. S. Senate, n.d.-a.); providing the mathematical reasoning for NASA (NASA, 2021); reminding humanity that we are the stewards of earth, igniting the modern environmental movement
(Goldfield, et al., 2011); defending the first amendment by publishing the Pentagon Papers (NY Historical Society, 2021); protesting White supremacy in an American city only to be run down in that same city (Caron, 2017); bearing witness while videotaping the final 9 minutes and 29 seconds of a murdered man’s life (Hernandez, 2021); reminding congressional colleagues that the American system is based upon the rule of law and not fealty to misinformation (Peterson, 2021); testifying before Congress as a 107-year-old American survivor and witness to the racist destruction of her Tulsa hometown in 1921 (Summers, 2021). Whether acting independently or as a group, these are but a few of the crucial social, civic, and political contributions American women have made to this country. Yet, despite the promises of the country’s individual rights founding, these and many other pivotal patriotic and historic acts, and a 40-year history of higher female civic engagement on election day, resulting in higher female voter turnout (CAWP, 2021e), the spirit of Abigail Adams’s words remains elusive.

The United States has yet to achieve political gender parity (CAWP, 2021; Sharma, 2016). While women have made gains in winning elected office since Elizabeth Cady Stanton first ran for Congress, some elected offices remain out of reach, and others have a limited history of female representation (CAWP, 2021a). The United States has not elected a female president, and women remain a legislative and executive minority in federal, state, and local elected offices (CAWP, 2021b).

Even though there is clear history of women’s devotion to the American system, questions persist about a woman’s electability (Warner, 2020). The media describe women candidates as novel (Meeks, 2012, 2017; Shaw et al., 2018). A female candidate’s intent or dedication is often questioned as being driven by nefarious personal ambition
Sexist tropes are used to describe female elected officials, candidates, or potential women candidates (Levy, 2020; Parker, 2020). Dismissive and disrespectful statements are used to describe women candidates and women in elected office (Kelly, 2020; Kornfield, 2020; Summers, 2020).

These gender stereotypes can affect the perception of female electability (Brooks, 2011; Conroy et al., 2020; Dowling & Miller, 2015; Hardy et al., 2019; Meeks & Domke, 2016; Stout & Kline, 2011). And, since campaign outcomes are used as a guide for the next candidate recruitment cycle, reinforcing gender stereotypes has the potential of determining who will be a candidate in the next round of recruitment (Dowling & Miller, 2015). Indeed, women have been found to be less likely to be recruited to run for office than a man by political operatives—even in cases where a potential female candidate is more qualified than the male candidate (Fox & Lawless, 2010). While research indicates that women can win elected office once on the ballot (Aguiar & Redlin, 2014), getting on the ballot appears to be a hurdle for women (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, 2006).

**Problem Statement**

Female political underrepresentation occurs worldwide (Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU], 2021). While women account for almost half of the world’s population at 49.6%, women only hold 25.5% of the world’s national legislative seats (IPU, 2021). Of the 195 United Nations (UN) recognized countries, nine women are heads of state, and 13 are heads of government (UN Women, 2021).

The U.S. female population is higher than the world average at 50.8% (United States Census Bureau [USCB], 2021a) of the total population and the percentage of U.S. female legislators is above the world average, with women holding 26.5% (142) of the
total (535) U.S. Congressional seats (CAWP, 2021b). Female representation in the U.S. House of Representatives is at 27.1% with women holding 118 Congressional seats. In the U.S. Senate, 24 (24%) women represent their state as a member of the Senate (CAWP, 2021b). Compared to the rest of the world, the U.S. is ranked 67\textsuperscript{th} based upon its number of women in elected national office (IPU, 2021).

On the U.S. state executive level, eight states (16\%) have female governors and 18 (36\%) have female lieutenant governors (CAWP, 2021b). Nationwide, on the state legislative level, women hold 2,259 (30.6\%) seats, while men hold 5,124 (69.4\%) (National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2021). Female representation in the upper state houses is less than the overall average at 28.3\% (NCSL, 2021).

The NYS Legislature has a gender disparity slightly less than that of the national average (NCSL, 2021). Women hold 34.3\% of the state’s legislative seats although women account for more than 53\% of the NYS population (CAWP, 2021b); NCSL, 2021). In NYS’s upper legislative chamber, the NYS Senate, women account for 18 (28.5\%) of the 63 Senate seats. NYS is ranked 16\textsuperscript{th} in the nation for its rate of women in elected representation (CAWP, 2021). NYS has never elected a female governor (CAWP, 2021b).

\textit{Fighting for a Seat at the Table: Descriptive and Substantive Representation}

Descriptive and substantive are used to describe types of representation. Descriptive representation is representation that more proportionately reflects the demographic makeup of a group in the societal population. Pitkin (1967) defined descriptive representation as a “mirror of the electorate” (p. 81). Descriptive
representation has also been defined as representation by groups with a shared history or experience (Celis & Childs, 2008; Mansbridge, 1999).

While women make up slightly more than half of the U.S. population (50.8%) (USCB, 2021a), elected representation in the U.S. remains predominantly male (CAWP, 2021b). Men hold 84% of state gubernatorial leadership, 73% of Congressional seats, and 69.2% of state legislative seats (CAWP, 2021b). This results in female underrepresentation and a lack of descriptive representation (CAWP, 2021b; Pitkin, 1967).

Phillips (1998) maintained that a governing system marked by female underrepresentation cannot be just. In the American system, lack of descriptive representation has been found to affect the American electorate by undermining the entire system (Aguiar & Redlin, 2014; Cowell-Meyers & Langbein, 2009; Giles-Sims et al., 2012; Mansbridge, 1999; Sanbonmatsu, 2006). The female electorate indicates a mistrust of legislative action created by legislatures with female underrepresentation threatening the democratic legitimacy of those legislatures (Aguiar & Redlin, 2014; Celis & Childs, 2008; Mansbridge, 1999; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). Further, increased female descriptive representation strengthens societal perceptions of female electability and weakens the perception that politics and representation is primarily an activity for men (Sapiro, 1981). Moreover, the American public has indicated a “preference for higher levels” (Dolan & Sanbonmatsu, 2009, p. 409) of female representation than the country has experienced.

Critics of descriptive representation claim that actions encouraging descriptive representation will have a negative political effect if small population, micro groups are able to enact substantive representation (Mansbridge, 1999). This criticism does not
apply to female descriptive representation or the substantive representation that would flow from it. Women in the US do not constitute a micro group as indicated by the U.S. population gender breakdown. In real numbers, according to the 2019 Census estimates, female population outpaces male population by 5.6 million (USCB, 2021a).

Mansbridge (1999) defined substantive representation as the laws, policies, and procedures that result from descriptive representation. In legislatures with growing female representation, legislative outcome differences were observed (Aguiar & Redlin, 2014; Burrell, 1997; Celis, 2008; Cowell-Meyers & Langbein, 2009; Fox, 2011; Giles-Sims et al., 2012; Reingold & Smith, 2012; Swers, 2001). Increased female legislative representation resulted in an increase in legislative discussion and some support for family-friendly social policies (Aguiar & Redlin, 2014; Burrell, 1997; Celis, 2008; Cowell-Meyers & Langbein, 2009; Fox, 2011; Giles-Sims et al., 2012; Reingold & Smith, 2012; Swers, 2001). Other research was less conclusive and unable to fully establish a positive correlation between descriptive and substantive representation (Childs & Krook, 2009; Cowell-Meyers & Langbein, 2009).

**Descriptive Representation and COVID-19.** The COVID-19 crisis is a contemporaneous example of the importance of both descriptive and substantive representation of women. As the COVID-19 virus raged across the US in 2020, the U.S. frontline battle against the virus was primarily waged by women (Day & Christnaght, 2019). “Women account for three-quarters of full-time, year-round health care workers in the US” (Day & Christnaght, 2019, p. 3). Further, more than 85% of the 3.6 million nurses and nursing aides are women (Day & Christnaght, 2019). Approximately, one-third or 250,000 of the “physicians and surgeons working full-time, year-round” (Day &
Christnaght, 2019, p. 2) in the US are women. In 31 U.S. states (62%), the chief public health official is a woman (Dittmar, 2020a, 2020b). In the earliest days of the pandemic, female elected officials in the US, especially mayors and governors, made difficult, critical decisions while providing leadership for their municipalities (Funk, 2020). Much of this early pandemic response, especially from female mayors, created a pandemic response action plan for other leaders to follow or at least reference (Funk, 2020).

**Women in Leadership – Substantive Representation During COVID 19.**

Rosenthal (1998) reported that women are integrated leaders who work better collaboratively. “Women are more likely to be disposed to the application and practice of integrative leadership by cultural norms and socialization” (Rosenthal, 1998, p. 24). Cities and states in the US were not the only municipalities positively affected by female leadership during the COVID-19 crisis. On the world stage, the leaders of Taiwan, Germany, and New Zealand, all women, delivered effective early leadership during the first wave of the pandemic (Fincher, 2020). New Zealand acted early with a full pandemic response, which, at least initially, resulted in a low rate of infection (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security [GIWPS], 2020). Germany undertook the most comprehensive testing in Europe (GIWPS, 2020). Elsewhere in Europe, the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Iceland, at least early on, had “lower death rates from coronavirus compared to the rest of Europe” (Fincher, 2020, p. 1) during the first wave of the pandemic. These countries were all led by female prime ministers (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2020). Further, European countries with more effective early responses to COVID-19 tended, historically, to have better rates
of descriptive representation of women in leadership or legislative roles (Aldrich & Lotito, 2020).

**State and Local Elected Office, the Candidate, and the Local Political Party**

In many ways, local and state government is the most responsive and closest to the citizenry. The local municipal office is the protector of what is commonly known as quality-of-life issues.

Municipal governments—those defined as cities, towns, boroughs (except in Alaska), villages, and townships—are generally organized around a population center.

Municipalities generally take responsibility for parks and recreation services, police and fire departments, housing services, emergency medical services, municipal courts, transportation services (including public transportation), and public works (streets, sewers, snow removal, signage, and so forth) (The White House, n.d., para. 9, 10).

While local governments act as guardians of quality-of-life issues, “state legislatures increasingly hold the keys to the civil rights of America’s citizens. Voting, reproductive freedoms, economic rights, the right to carry firearms, and other individual rights” (Gaskins, 2012, para. 1) are squarely within the legislative power of American states. Beyond the critical responsibilities of local municipalities and state legislatures to the citizenry, election to local office is often the stepping-stone to higher elected office at the state or federal level (Sanbonmatsu, 2006). Of the 101 women elected to serve in the 116th U.S. Congress, 58 (57%) previously held a lower elective office (CAWP, 2020c).
Local political party committees play a central role in determining who runs for local elected office because they act as the gatekeepers of early campaign activities: petitioning, endorsements, fundraising, and campaigning (Bowman & Boynton, 1966; Bowman & Kearney, 2011; Dittmar, 2015; Gallagher & Marsh, 1998; Pecorella & Stonecash, 2006; Seligman, 1961). Political party activity remains vital to a successful candidate campaign (Bowman & Kearney, 2011; Pecorella & Stonecash, 2006). Political parties are involved in “nominations and elections: recruiting candidates for office” (Lowi et al., 2019, p. 330) and various other political activities supporting endorsed candidates.

From the time that a candidate for local office is identified or solicited for recruitment until election day, the local political party committee is often involved in the process (Bowman & Kearney, 2011; Lowi et al., 2019; Pecorella & Stonecash, 2006; Seligman, 1961). Given that local political committees play a role in determining who appears on the election ballot, the local committees steer the public toward who will represent the community. Too often, the choice for communities does not include a woman. Nationwide, in 2018, less than half (46%) of statewide legislative races had a female candidate on the ballot on either the Republican or Democratic line (NCSL, 2018). This held true even with higher rates of female political engagement. Eligible female voters, since 1980, consistently have voted in presidential elections at a higher rate than eligible male voters (CAWPe, 2021).

The Secret Garden of Political Recruitment

On the local political committee level, the “secret garden” of political candidate recruitment is affected by the norms, values, customs, processes, practices, and social
capital of the local political committee members (Adams & Smrek, 2018; Gallagher & Marsh, 1988; Kenny & Mackay, 2009; Kenny, 2014). Research from the mid-20th century revealed historically gendered recruitment within local political organizations (Snowiss, 1966; Welch, 1978) and from within selected networks (Bowman & Boynton, 1966). Recruitment was guided by male social capital networks (Snowiss, 1966) and candidate recruitment efforts were disproportionately focused on male organizations (Jacob, 1962; Seligman, 1961; Snowiss, 1966; Welch, 1978).

Political committee members are the “informants and gatekeepers at the local level” (Fox & Lawless, 2010, p. 313). Committees recruit candidates and are responsible for many early campaign activities including petitioning to run for office, endorsements, fundraising, and campaigning (Bowman & Kearney, 2011; Lowi et al., 2019; Pecorella & Stonecash, 2006; Seligman, 1961). Candidates, both male and female, list party elite support as an important consideration in a candidate’s decision to run for office (Bowman & Boynton, 1966; Broockman, 2014; Bucchianeri, 2018; Butler & Preece, 2016; Fox, 2011; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Frederick, 2014; Gallagher & Marsh, 1988; Miller & Stokes, 1963; Pettey, 2018; Sanbonmatsu, 2006). Female candidates have strongly indicated that support from local political elites, including political committee members, was crucial to their decision to run for office (Butler & Preece, 2016; Fox, 2011; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Frederick, 2014; Pettey, 2018; Sanbonmatsu, 2002, 2006). Female candidates have acknowledged a perceived requirement to work harder at campaigning than their male opponents (Herrick, 2016; Miller, 2015); therefore, it makes sense that these female candidates would seek out support for their candidacy from local political committees. Yet, despite the role that local political committees play in the recruitment
process of local political candidates, there remains a gap in academic research about that role (Fox, 2011; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013; Kjaer, 2019; Seligman, 1961).

**Political Party Committees in NYS**

The importance of political parties in the American system is evidenced by the discussion of them in some of America’s founding discourse. Discussions of the prevalence of political parties appear in the Federalist Papers and in President George Washington’s Farewell Address (LOC, 2021). In NYS, election law determines which political organizations are official parties in the state. According to the NYS Board of Elections (BOE) website, and in accordance with NYS election law, official parties in NYS:

- Must have had a candidate on the ballot in the last presidential election who garnered at least 130,000 votes or 2% of the total votes cast (whichever is greater)
- **AND** it must have had a candidate on the ballot in the last gubernatorial election who garnered at least 130,000 votes or 2% of the total votes cast (whichever is greater). These two thresholds run independently of each other. There are currently four parties in New York State as so defined:
  - Democratic
  - Republican
  - Conservative
  - Working Families (NYS BOE, 2021, para. 6).

The designation as an official party recognized by NYS allows each of these parties to have their party line on the election ballot. Further, as official parties
recognized by NYS, the parties can fundraise, financially support candidates for office, and organize themselves to conduct party business in accordance with NYS election law (NYS BOE, 2021). Further, the parties are permitted to craft bylaws on the state and county level to define party activity and rules.

**NYS Political Committee Membership.** In NYS, the Democratic and Republican parties can have committees responsible for geographic areas: the state party committee, county committees, and local municipal committees (NYS BOE, 2021). Membership eligibility to these committees is determined by political party voter enrollment in either the Democratic or Republican party within the geographic boundaries of the NYS assembly district in which the voter resides. Every 2 years, hopeful county committee members petition to join the county committee by petitioning to represent an election district in their respective assembly district (NYS BOE, 2021). Two seats are available for every election district for each party. Democrats file petitions to join the Democratic county committee on even years, and Republicans file petitions to join the Republican county committee on odd years. If successful, the petitioner becomes a county committee member representing the election district in the assembly district on the respective party’s county and local municipal committee for a period of 2 years (NYS BOE, 2021). County and local committee membership does not afford remuneration and thus the position is essentially an unpaid elected position.

**NYS Local Committee Membership.** Assembly districts are often drawn outside the boundaries of one local municipality. Because petitioners seek membership in election districts within assembly districts, and the lines of assembly districts often cross multiple communities, a member may be a representative for an election district outside
of the municipality where they live (NYS BOE, 2021). A practical application of this rule permits a voter in the assembly district where they reside to become a county committee member by representing an election district in one of multiple municipalities within the assembly district regardless of whether the member lives within the boundaries of that election district or municipality.

**Getting on the Ballot: Endorsements and Rules of Petitioning**

Among the pre-election campaign activities often coordinated by the local political committee is the endorsement process and the process of submitting the legal paperwork for a candidate’s name to appear on an election ballot. That process is commonly referred to as the *petitioning process* to *get on the ballot* and is governed by the regulations specific to each state. It is just one of many early campaign activities that has specific norms and processes. In NYS, effective or ineffective management of that process can either assist or derail a candidacy, which illustrates the importance of the local committee’s commitment to a potential candidate. Without the support of the local party committees, successfully maneuvering through the petitioning process, while not impossible, is extremely difficult (Bowman & Kearney, 2011; Pecorella & Stonecash, 2006). Further, if the petitioning process is not performed correctly, the candidate may be prohibited by law to appear on the election day ballot effectively ending the individual’s candidacy (NYS BOE, 2021).

**Theoretical Rationale**

This female political candidate recruitment study examined the culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices affecting the formal and informal recruitment of local political committees. Feminist institutionalist theory (FIT) provided the preferred
framework to examine those recruitment activities. FIT investigates the formal and informal customs, culture, norms, values, rules, regulations, processes, and practices of an organization and how and to what extent these activities are gendered to affect general and individual candidate recruitment (Adams & Smrek, 2018; Kenny & Mackay, 2009).

FIT is a merged theory that combines two independent theories. FIT combines post-modern third wave feminist theory with new institutionalist theory (Kenny, 2007). While both independent root theories could be used for a recruitment study, FIT allows for an investigation of how power structures are renewed and change over time, which is essential for a political recruitment study since women’s agency in the political process has changed over time (Kenny, 2014). Candidate selection processes are often set by formal political rules, however, relationships relied upon earlier, during initial potential candidate identification and party selection, vary and lead to certain levels of female underrepresentation and “male overrepresentation” (Adams & Smrek, 2018, p. 271). A gendered application of social capital that Bjanegård (2013) called *homosocial capital*. FIT provides an effective framework to study the informal nature of candidate recruitment and to identify variations in how gender affects actual recruitment outcomes (Kenny, 2014). If customs, culture, norms, values, practices, and processes of political parties are gendered, fewer women may be recruited as candidates (Adams & Smrek, 2018; Lowndes, 2020; Sanbonmatsu, 2006). Moreover, if the customs, culture, norms, values, rules, processes, and practices of local political committees are gendered, either purposely or unintentionally, FIT provides the explanation as to how that disenfranchisement affects women candidates (Adams & Smrek, 2018; Sanbonmatsu, 2006).
Merging the study of gender and institutions began to take shape in the 1980s and 1990s (Kenny, 2007). March and Olsen (1984) reintroduced institutions as critical social structures that foster relationships and provide societal underpinnings. New institutionalist theory emerged to explore the impact of formal and informal institutional rules, regulations, and rituals that affect institutions from creation to institutional change (Mackay et al., 2010). Meanwhile, Acker (1996) found that despite institutional advances for women, institutions remained male focused and dominated. Institutions were then found to be gendered instruments that create and perpetuate formal and informal rules that shape political interactions resulting in different outcomes for women and men (Kenny, 2014). Even neutral rules and activities can be found to be influenced or affected by gendered behavior, resulting in gendered activities and a gendered outcome (Lowndes, 2020). Similarly, third-wave feminist theory introduces a gendered approach to investigating power relationships, combining the social justice activism of second wave feminism with a framework for political, social, cultural, and economic study (Kenny, 2007; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy [SEP], 2013).

Lovenduski (1998) indicated that there was an opportunity for feminist theorists to coordinate with political scientists studying institutions to bring further depth and understanding to both disciplines. The need for feminist institutionalism evolved from a “growing recognition that new and innovative methods of analysis are needed in order to understand better the gender dynamics of institutions, and institutional change” (Kenny, 2007, p. 95). In March 2003, Mackay and Meier proposed FIT to the European Consortium for Political Research Joint Sessions of Workshops in Edinburgh, Scotland (Mackay & Meier, 2003). Their paper was presented as part of a workshop for changing
constitutions, building institutions, and redefining gender relations (Mackay & Meier, 2003). In 2006, the Feminist Institutionalism International Network (FIIN) was launched. FIIN is a worldwide “international collaboration developing a distinctive approach to the study of gender and politics” (University of Edinburgh, School of Social & Political Science, Politics & International Relations, 2021).

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore female recruitment practices of local political party committees. This study examined the lived recruitment experiences of female members of local political committees located in a NYS five-county judicial district. The study also examined the descriptive data of the participants, participant committee municipalities, and the research context.

**Research Questions**

This study explored the local political committee member composition, gatekeeper activity, and the committees’ capacities to identify a gender diverse candidate pool to recruit candidates. This study sought answers to the following critical research questions about NYS local political committees:

1. Do female local political committee members perceive that local political committee candidate recruitment is gendered or gender neutral?

2. What committee culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices, if any, do female political committee members perceive affect the local political committees’ ability to recruit female candidates?
Potential Significance of the Study

This descriptive phenomenological study examined female recruitment practices of local political party committees. The population chosen for this study was from local political committees located in a five-county judicial district within NYS. The sample chosen were female local political Democratic and Republican party committee members representing the NYS judicial district.

This study used archival, public, demographic, and election data to provide descriptive background data. This descriptive data was supplemented with semi-structured interviews to determine the methods of female candidate recruitments. Female local Democratic and Republican political party committee members from the judicial district were interviewed.

This study adds to the body of literature on the political recruitment practices of political parties by investigating recruitment at the local level in a diverse area. Local-level recruitment is viewed as an essential area of research that requires additional investigation (Fox & Lawless, 2010, 2011; Frederick, 2014; Gallagher & Marsh, 1988; Preece et al., 2016; Sanbonmatsu, 2006). Researchers have noted a lack of nationwide local-level party research because of the burdensome nature of investigating across the entire country (Fox & Lawless, 2010, 2011). The investigation of local political party recruitment in this judicial district will hopefully provide a microcosm of the recruitment activities of a larger population. The information learned will add to the body of information lacking in this area of research.
Definitions of Terms

*Affirmative recruitment* – part of the framework of an emerging theory, gendered recruitment theory, that arose from the findings of this study. Affirmative recruitment activities are described as the gender-neutral activities undertaken when recruiting candidates. Examples of such activities include candidate searches that seek out civic-minded individuals with community involvement, vetting processes, and committee interviews. While similar activities may overlap gendered recruitment, affirmative recruitment was described by the participants as being marked by a gender-blind approach to the activities.

*Broadside* – used here to describe a sizable sheet of paper printed on one or both sides and folded, similar to a poster (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

*Cold War era* – 1947–1991; from the time following World War II to the fall of the former Soviet Union.


*Constituent* – individual who lives within the representative district of an elected official.

*Country total* – the UN recognizes 195 countries; of these, 193 are permanent members of the UN and two, the State of Palestine and the Holy See, are nonvoting permanent members.

*Descriptive representation* – representation that is appropriately reflective of the demographic composition of an area.

*Exit poll* – survey taken immediately after individuals have voted.
First-wave feminism – the era of suffragette political and social activity from the 19th century through early 20th century.

Fourth-wave feminism – feminist political and social activity beginning in 2010 to the present.

GOTV – common acronym used by political operatives to describe a myriad of activities associated with Getting Out The Vote.

Gender neutral – suitable for, applicable to either sex.

Gender quotas – reform measure aimed at increasing female candidates.

Gendered recruitment theory – emerging from the findings of this study is the foundation of a theory that attempts to explain why there is gender disparity in the recruitment of candidates for political office on the local and state level. The theory explains that there is a myriad of recruitment activities that are employed during the recruitment process, which, individually or combined, can serve as a barrier to recruitment of women. Further, when combined in all or in part, these barriers could create, what the researcher has identified as, an intersectionality barricade. The framework for this theory includes four recruitment forms: affirmative recruitment, sorority recruitment, Madonna recruitment, and negative recruitment. Because of the nature of sorority, Madonna, and negative recruitment, this theory may also be applicable to any marginalized group and even in this study could be applied to the findings that discuss the intersectionality of misogyny and racism, and misogyny and ageism.

Getting on the ballot – colloquial term used by political actors to describe the activities of a candidate’s campaign that are required to successfully appear on a political party’s election day ballot.
*Gubernatorial* – used to describe an action or policy relating to a governor.

*Head of government* – the term used to describe the person who is the chief executive of the nation-state. Depending upon the type of government, it may or may not be the same as the head of state. The Prime Minister is the Head of Government for the United Kingdom, but Queen Elizabeth is the Head of State. The President of the US is both Head of Government and Head of State for the US.

*Head of state* – the term used to describe the person who embodies the nation-state, the personification of the nation-state to the world. Depending upon the type of government, it may or may not be the same as the head of government. Queen Elizabeth is the Head of State for the United Kingdom, but the Prime Minister is the Head of Government. The President of the US is both Head of State and the Head of Government for the US.

*Human capital* – pertains to the knowledge, talent, and abilities of individuals.

*Integrative leadership* – shared guidance to address complex and significant issues.

*Intersectionality barricade* – barriers to recruitment, identified in the findings of this research, that emerge during the recruitment process, which either individually or when combined, either in full or in part, can create barriers to entry that a potential candidate cannot get over or bypass.

*Local political committees* – the local political organization of the larger political, county, and state party, outside of New York City (NYC). In NYS, each political party has a county and/or regional political organization for the party. In NYS, local political committees can follow municipal boundaries within each NYS assembly district.
Local political committee members – individuals who live within the assembly district where the local committee is housed, are registered as a voter in that party, and have petitioned to become a committee member to represent an election district in the assembly district or who were appointed to the local committee by an affirmative vote of the county party to an election district within an assembly district.

Madonna recruitment – part of the framework of an emerging theory, gendered recruitment theory, that arose from the findings of this study. Describes the recruitment activities undertaken by male political committee members and male elected officials as they enlist women to run for office. Madonna recruitment is described as biased but not overtly misogynistic in nature. Madonna recruitment describes the male recruitment of women based primarily or solely on gender with an exaggerated expectation of female electability grounded in the glorification of male perceptions of femininity.

Many hats – colloquial term used to collectively describe the many responsibilities and roles that committee members or candidates cited as demanded/expected of them.

Misogyny – dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women (“Misogyny,” 2021).

Modern nation-state – an independent polity that is ruled in the name of a community of citizens who identify themselves as a nation (“Modern nation-state,” 2021).

Negative recruitment – part of the framework of an emerging theory, gendered recruitment theory, that arose from the findings of this study. Negative recruitment
describes the gendered female candidate recruitment activities that were seen by the study participants as being adverse, misogynistic, ageist, and/or racist.

*On the ballot* – colloquial term used to describe an individual whose name will appear on an election ballot for consideration for election.

*Party elites* – elected officials who are registered in their respective party as well as committee members especially those who hold hierarchical positions within that party, such as chair, vice-chair, or other officer positions, on the local, county, and state levels.

*Party endorsement* – provides candidates with the ability to call upon their political party members for assistance in a multitude of areas including fundraising, campaigning, and general election support.

*Party gatekeeper* – political members who identify, recruit, support, or discourage candidates for membership or election.

*Petitioning* – colloquial term used by political actors to describe the primary activity required of a candidate’s campaign to successfully appear on a political party’s ballot line for election.

*Petitioning process in NYS* – among other powers and responsibilities, U.S. state governments regulate elections in their states (The White House, n.d.). The NYS Legislature creates election policies and enacts laws that are carried out through procedures put into place by the NYS BOE (NYS BOE, 2021). Official NYS political party recognition permits a political party to appear on the NYS election ballot. For a candidate’s name to appear as the political party candidate on a NYS recognized party ballot line, the candidate must submit petitions to their county BOE (NYS BOE, 2021). Those petitions must include a definitive number of signatures from registered voters of
the stated party. The signatures of the registered voters on the petition attest to their support for the petitioning candidate. Depending upon the position sought, the voter signatures required can be in the hundreds, thousands, or more, or less. Petitioning rules are defined within NYS election law (NYS BOE, 2021). A violation of those rules are grounds for petition signatures, or the entire petition, to be invalidated. The technicalities and nuances of the petitioning process provide numerous opportunities to err, invalidating the petitions. If the requisite number of petition signatures are not submitted to the respective BOE, the candidate is prohibited from getting on the ballot line of the respective political party the candidate hopes to represent (NYS BOE, 2021).

*Political party* – a group of persons organized to acquire and exercise electoral power (Duverger, n.d.).

*Political parties recognized in NYS* – NYS has four official political parties: Democratic, Republican, Conservative, and Working Families. To be an official party in NYS, a political organization

   Must have had a candidate on the ballot in the last presidential election who garnered at least 130,000 votes or 2% of the total votes cast (whichever is greater) **AND** it must have had a candidate on the ballot in the last gubernatorial election who garnered at least 130,000 votes or 2% of the total votes cast (whichever is greater). These two thresholds run independently of each other (NYS BOE, 2021, para. 6).).

The political party order in this definition is listed on the NYS BOE (2021) webpage and mimics the order on the ballot according to gubernatorial vote totals.

*Polling* – an opinion survey of a specific sample of people.
Post-modern era – the period of time from the mid to late 20th century.

Post-war era – for the US, the years following World War II that also include the Cold War era of 1945–1980.

Second-wave feminism – arose in the 1960s and 1970s and adds an element of political activism to the feminist culture.

Secret garden – phrase used by Gallagher and Marsh (1988) to describe the activities, often hidden from view, that are undertaken to recruit candidates for political office.

Self-view – tangential to a potential candidate’s self-image, the candidate self-view is specifically linked to the candidate’s view of their capacity to be a candidate and to run a campaign successfully.

Sorority recruitment – part of the framework of an emerging theory, gendered recruitment theory, that emerged from the findings of this study. Sorority recruitment describes gendered interactions between potential female candidates and female recruiters. At its core, the essence of this theme illustrates the empathetic and protective—but gendered—approach female committee members experience when recruiting potential female candidates. Sorority recruitment was described by the participants as being marked by a concern with a potential candidate’s caretaker concerns and candidate vision.

Substantive representation – representation that reflects the interests of a demographic group.

Third-wave feminism – broadened feminist theory to acknowledge that race, ethnicity, class, religion, gender, and nationality affect the lives of women throughout the
world and began in the early 1990s until 2010 when the rise of the fourth-wave feminism begins (Ossining Public Library, 2021).

*Vote choice* – the political candidate chosen by a voting constituent.

*Women’s issues* – matters that have been historically identified as of concern to women, such as childcare, eldercare, gender equity, work flexibility, reproductive rights, healthcare, pay equality, wage equity, and extension of social welfare funding (Burrell, 1997; Fox, 2011; Gerrity et al., 2007; Swers, 2002).

**Chapter Summary**

While women make up more than half of the U.S. population, are electable candidates, dedicated to the American system, and are proven to be effective leaders, they still do not appear on election ballots as often as men. Political parties are organizations with established customs, norms, and values (Adams & Smrek, 2018; Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2014, 2016; Lovenduski, 2011), and the local political committees of these parties, the committee members, and political elites are a critical recruitment tool of candidates (Bowman & Boynton, 1966; Broockman, 2014; Bucchianeri, 2018; Butler & Preece, 2016; Fox, 2011; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Frederick, 2014; Miller & Stokes, 1963; Pettey, 2018; Sanbonmatsu, 2006; Seligman, 1961). The activities of political parties affect who becomes a candidate for office (Bowman & Kearney, 2011; Bucchianeri, 2018; Butler & Preece, 2016; Fox, 2011; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Lowi et al., 2019; Pecorella & Stonecash, 2006; Seligman, 1961), and female candidates have stated that support from local political committees is an essential piece of the decision to run for office (Broockman, 2014; Bucchianeri, 2018; Butler & Preece, 2016; Fox, 2011; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Frederick, 2014; Pettey, 2018; Sanbonmatsu, 2006). Given that fewer
women run for office, research about the recruitment of women by local committees is needed. This study used descriptive data and semi-structured interviews of female local political committee members of a judicial district in NYS to investigate female candidate recruitment on the local political party level.

Chapter one, the introduction, discusses the background information pertaining to the general subject of underrepresentation and the study, including the problem statement, theoretical rationale, statement of purpose, research questions, potential significance of the study, and a listing of the definitions of the study’s terms. Chapter two, the review of the literature, explored the history of the study of political committees and recruitment in the US since the mid-century, provided a background of recruitment and the initial seminal studies in the field and then addressed the research pertaining to political committee recruitment of women. Chapter three, research design methodology, discussed the general perspective, research study design, context, and participants, the instruments used in data collection and the procedures for data collection and analysis employed in this study. Chapter four, the results, presented the information collected from publicly available data sources and 25 semi-structured interviews with female members of local political committees across five counties in NYS to examine the recruitment practices of women for political office by local political committees. Chapter five, the discussion, presented seven primary findings of the study, implications and significance of those findings, the emergence of a theory, the connections of the findings to the literature, limitations of the study and recommendations.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

Political parties are engrained in American democracy. While political party organizational power has certainly waned since the days of ward politics and Tammany Hall, its activities remain important to the success of candidates (Bowman & Kearney, 2011; Lowi et al., 2019; Pecorella & Stonecash, 2006). Political committees remain a primary agent of political recruitment (Broockman, 2014; Butler & Preece, 2016; Crowder-Meyer, 2013; Fox & Lawless, 2010, 2011; Sanbonmatsu, 2002).

Further, party elites often seek out like-minded candidates so that successful candidates will support polices that align with those same party elites (Broockman, 2014).

**Political Committee Candidate Recruitment**

Political candidates understand the importance of support from local committees. Candidates acknowledge the importance of political committees and party elites in the recruitment process (Bowman & Boynton, 1966; Broockman, 2014; Butler & Preece, 2016; Crowder-Meyer, 2013; Fox & Lawless, 2010, 2011; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). Candidates also acknowledge the support and assistance of local committees and party elites as important to the success of their candidacy (Bowman & Boynton, 1966; Broockman, 2014; Butler & Preece, 2016; Crowder-Meyer, 2013; Fox & Lawless, 2010, 2011; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). Local political committees and party elites provide needed encouragement to candidates who report that the support they received from these political operatives was a crucial component to the decision to run for office (Bowman & Boynton, 1966; Broockman, 2014; Bucchianeri, 2018; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Miller & Stokes, 1963; Pettey, 2018; Sanbonmatsu, 2006). As a result, the methods and practices of political elites and committee recruitment continue to be important areas of research (Bowman & Boynton, 1966; Broockman, 2014; Butler & Preece, 2016; Crowder-Meyer, 2013; Fox & Lawless, 2010, 2011; Sanbonmatsu, 2002).

**Post-Modern Political Committee Composition and Recruitment**

**Political Committee and Recruitment Activity.** The post-World War II civil rights movements and second-wave feminism led to a realignment of segments of the American political party system (Bowman & Kearney, 2016; Pecorella & Stonecash, 2006; Seligman, 1961). Post-modern research focused on the political activities of these
realigned parties, finding that political parties actively participated in candidate recruitment, campaign-related activities, and general campaign support (Bowman & Boynton, 1966; Burrell, 1986; Jacob, 1962; Seligman, 1961; Snowiss, 1966; Welch, 1978; Werner, 1968). Seligman (1961) studied the candidacy process and found that political recruiters are the primary actors in candidate recruitment.

Post-modern research revealed recruitment within local political organizations was gendered (Snowiss, 1968; Welch, 1978) within select networks (Bowman & Boynton, 1966). Recruitment was guided by male social capital networks (Snowiss, 1966) and candidate recruitment efforts were disproportionately focused upon male organizations (Jacob, 1962; Seligman, 1961; Snowiss, 1966; Welch, 1978). Bowman and Boynton (1966) reported that local political committee members shared common traits, experiences, education, and occupations. Further, they reported that local political committee members were often initiated into politics through the influence of a male family member (Bowman & Boynton, 1966). Bowman and Boynton concluded that the multitiered, layered social and familial networks of local political committees impacted the committee’s recruitment habits.

Civil rights era research revealed that the recruitment norms, values, and traditions were impacted by the social capital networks of the recruiters and candidates (Bowman & Boynton, 1968; Jacob, 1962; Seligman, 1961; Snowiss, 1966). Seligman (1961) concluded that “party interrelationships are a significant factor in the mechanisms of candidate entre” (p. 77). The civil rights movement and second-wave feminism era recruitment efforts often yielded candidates from within the same social or professional circles (Bowman & Boynton, 1966; Jacob, 1962; Seligman, 1961; Snowiss, 1966; Welch,
Candidates shared membership in the same social organizations as their recruiters (Jacob, 1962; Seligman, 1961; Snowiss, 1966; Welch, 1978). Other candidates were recruited from specific, select professions, which often were the same as their recruiters (Bowman & Boynton, 1966; Jacob, 1962; Seligman, 1961; Snowiss, 1966; Welch, 1978; Werner, 1968). Although familial links or social capital networks provided committee access and a recruitment path for some candidates, the lack of access to those same networks served as a deterrent for other potential candidates including women (Bowman & Boynton, 1966; Jacob, 1962; Seligman, 1961; Snowiss, 1966; Welch, 1978; Werner, 1968).

**Post-Modern Female Candidate Recruitment.** Lack of effective recruitment activities, vocal political, and public support of otherwise strong female candidates, and a lack of access to social capital were found to result in low numbers of female candidates (Jacob, 1962; Seligman, 1961; Welch, 1978; Werner, 1968). In separate research conducted by Werner (1968) and Welch (1978), potential female candidates during and after second-wave feminism identified their concerns about the recruitment process and becoming a candidate. Women identified several barriers to potential candidacy, including fear of lack of support by political elites and the public and a general disdain for the political process, in addition to the responsibility of being a primary caregiver (Welch, 1978; Werner, 1968).

**Candidate Recruitment in the 21st Century**

As the 1980s era of second-wave feminism yielded to third-wave feminism, pundits celebrated the appointment, nomination, and election of women (CAWP, 2021a). Sandra Day O’Connor’s appointment in 1981 as the first female justice to the Supreme
Court (Supreme Court of the US, 2021) was soon followed by the 1984 nomination of Geraldine Ferraro as the first female vice-presidential candidate of a major party (History, Art & Archives, 2021). In 1992, at the dawn of third-wave feminism, the November congressional election results were heralded as the “year of the women” (US Senate, n.d.-b) in female political ascendency; 54 women were elected to Congress that year—10% of the total representatives in Congress (U.S. House of Representatives, n.d.; CAWP, 2021d).

**Female Candidate Recruitment.** Consistent with the post-modern 20th century research, more recent studies suggest that even when social network barriers are broken, women are recruited less often than men (Fox & Lawless, 2010). This causes potential female candidates to be more skeptical about recruitment efforts (Butler & Preece, 2016). As a result, less women are recruited by political gatekeepers (Sanbonmatsu, 2002). Skepticism and suspicion of poor, ineffective, or inconsistent recruitment has lowered “women’s political ambition to hold elective office” (Fox & Lawless, 2004, p. 264). Further, Sanbonmatsu’s (2002) study on female political party recruitment to state legislatures examined how political parties shape “women’s representation across the U.S.” (p. 791). Sanbonmatsu (2002) concluded that a woman was less likely to be recruited to run for office if party elites were facilitating the recruitment.

**Gendered Recruitment by Political Elites.** Studies that have examined political committee recruitment processes indicate a difference in the recruitment of men and women candidates (Broockman, 2014; Butler & Preece, 2016; Crowder-Meyer, 2013; Fox & Lawless, 2010, 2011; Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Thomsen, 2019). While both male and female candidates required encouragement and recruitment from multiple sources to run
for office, women were recruited less often and less intensely than men (Broockman, 2014; Butler & Preece, 2016; Crowder-Meyer, 2013; Fox & Lawless, 2010, 2011; Sanbonmatsu, 2002).

One Fox and Lawless (2010) study of over 2,000 potential candidates found that more than political activism or qualifications, the gender of the potential candidate determined whether political gatekeepers recruited that candidate to run for political office. Regardless of political party involvement or qualifications, women were recruited less often and less intensely by political gatekeepers—even when the female potential candidate was as qualified, or more qualified, than the male candidate (Fox & Lawless, 2010). Even political activism did not increase a woman’s chances of being recruited for candidacy by political elites (Fox & Lawless, 2010). Research by Fox and Lawless (2010) revealed that women who were political volunteers or supporters were still recruited less often than a man of equal qualifications.

Crowder-Meyer (2013) surveyed over 5,000 U.S. political party leaders and supplemented the survey with interviews from county party leaders across eight states. The researcher found that party leader gender affects whether women or men are recruited. Broockman’s (2014) quantitative study concluded that party gatekeepers play a key role in the level of female representation. Broockman’s research concluded that gatekeepers “shape the candidate pool” (p. 104) and, in doing so, help or hinder the number of female candidacies. By determining who can get on the ballot, political gatekeepers essentially determine the chances of a woman’s election to office (Broockman, 2014). Other research found similar results when investigating the actions of political elites (Karpowitz et al., 2017).
**Female Responses to Gendered Recruitment.** Recognizing and citing differences in recruitment norms, women candidates have reported skepticism of political elite support (Broockman, 2014; Butler & Preece, 2016). Concern about political elite support and gatekeeper recruitment activity has limited the number of women willing to run for office (Broockman, 2014; Butler & Preece, 2016; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). Butler and Preece (2016) reported on 3,640 general election candidates. The researchers determined that potential female candidates were skeptical about the type and amount of support they would receive from party elites (Butler & Preece, 2016). This skepticism inhibited women from running for office, and it may be the result of gatekeeper activity that historically has not favored women (Butler & Preece, 2016).

**Gendered Differences Between Democrat and Republican Recruitment.**

Gendered differences exist between Democratic and Republican party committee elites (Bucchianeri, 2018; Dolan & Lynch, 2014; Hennings & Urbatsch, 2016; Miller, 2015; Preece et al., 2016; Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009; Stout & Kline, 2011). Republican women were “half as likely to respond” (Preece et al., 2016, p. 565) to political recruitment as Republican men, even if the recruitment was from Republican political elites. The difference in successful Republican female recruitment has led, at least in part, to less women in elective office and more specifically, less Republican women in elective office (Bucchianeri, 2018; Hennings & Urbatsch, 2016). This partisan gender divide is further exaggerated by the emergence of organizations that aid female candidates, most of which are progressive in nature and therefore, tend to support Democratic female candidates (Bucchianeri, 2018; Fox & Lawless, 2010). To increase female representation,
more women must be recruited by both major parties (Bucchianeri, 2018; Hennings & Urbatsch, 2015, 2016).

**Republican Party Female Recruitment.** While female underrepresentation is an issue for both major parties, Republican party female recruitment has lagged more than Democratic recruitment (Bucchianeri, 2018; Crowder-Meyer, 2013; Fox & Lawless, 2014; Hennings & Urbatsch, 2015, 2016; Meeks, 2017; Meeks & Domke, 2016; Thomsen & King, 2020). Of the 142 Congresswomen in the 117th Congress, 39 (27%) are Republican, 7.3% of the total U.S. Congressional delegation (CAWP, 2021b). On the gubernatorial level, three Republican women serve as U.S. governors and five lieutenant governors (CAWP, 2021b). Of the total 7,383 U.S. state legislative seats, 674 or 9.1% of those seats are held by Republican women (CAWP, 2021b).

Bucchianeri (2018) found party-specific support failings. Using a multiyear analysis, the study revealed that Republican women candidates receive less elite support than Democratic women. This lack of elite Republican party support may explain the low rate of Republican female candidate success in contested races in comparison to Democratic women who ran in similar races (Bucchianeri, 2018).

Republican party elites were less likely to recruit Republican women than Republican men for office (Bucchianeri, 2018; Hennings & Urbatsch, 2015, 2016; Preece et al., 2016). The Hennings and Urbatsch 2016 study of lieutenant governors lends support to this finding. In states where the lieutenant governor requires a primary election, Republican party elites were less likely to recruit a woman for the office (Hennings & Urbatsch, 2016). Conversely, a study by Preece et al. (2016) found that Republican women did not respond positively to recruitment efforts when offered. Preece
et al. (2016) concluded that differences in a “gendered response to party recruitment is an important factor in the underrepresentation of women, especially Republican women” (p. 575).

**Party Differences at the Ballot Box.** Further, Republican female candidates appear to face a greater gender bias from voters and party elites than do Democratic women candidates (Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009; Thomsen, 2019). While female Democratic candidate campaigns can heavily focus on issues typically associated with women and Democratic values, Republican female candidates are expected to both embrace issues typically associated with women while maintaining the party’s positions on traditionally masculine positions of military and crime prevention (Meeks & Domke, 2016).

**Women as Candidates**

The electorate evaluates male and female candidates differently (Calfano & Djupe, 2011; Courtemanche & Green, 2020; Dowling & Miller, 2015; Hardy et al., 2019; Herrick, 2016; Meeks & Domke, 2016; Stout & Kline, 2011). Female candidates recognize these differences and believe that to win elections they must work harder than their male counterparts (Miller, 2015). Further, women believe that they must have increased “personal initiative” (Frederick, 2014, p. 318) and meet electorate expectations on issue messaging (Brooks, 2011; Calfano & Djupe, 2011; Herrick, 2016).

**Perceptions of Gender Differences**

**Gender and Vote Choice.** Gender affects vote choice, the extent to which is disputed in the research. Sanbonmatsu and Dolan (2009) concluded that constituents consider gender when deciding who to vote for, and it is often a deciding factor in vote
choice. Other research indicates that when voters are presented with actual candidates, rather than hypotheticals, party affiliation has more of an impact on vote choice than gender (Dolan & Lynch, 2014). Voters remain cognizant of gender before and after voting. Pre-election polling versus election day data indicate a reluctance of voters to openly declare support for a female candidate (Stout & Kline, 2011).

**Gendered Campaign Issues.** Ballot races that include at least one female candidate broaden the scope of issues that are discussed during the campaign. When a female candidate is on the ballot, social welfare issues that traditionally are identified as women’s issues are more likely to be discussed during the campaign than if only men were candidates (Hardy et al., 2019; Herrick, 2016). Women’s issues have been identified as childcare, eldercare, gender equity, work flexibility, reproductive rights, healthcare, pay equality, wage equity, and extension of social welfare funding (Burrell, 1997; Fox, 2011; Gerrity et al., 2007; Swers, 2002).

Other issues are invariably affected by gender. Hardy et al. (2019) found that regardless of party, female veteran status benefited the candidate. Calfano and Djupe’s (2011) research, however, found a gendered response to the use of religious messaging. While male candidate’s religious messaging positively aided the candidate, a woman’s candidacy did not benefit from the same or similar religious messaging (Calfano & Djupe, 2011). Further, while candidates who revealed emotion during a campaign were generally not viewed negatively by the electorate, the female electorate negatively responded to female candidates overly showing emotion, especially crying (Brooks, 2011). Courtemanche and Green (2020) found that wrongdoing by female candidates bore more negative responses comparative to male candidates. Finally, in a male versus
female candidate option in an election, the communication from the campaigns often begin with stereotyped bell whistles even where they were not already in play, thereby reducing the election support for the woman in the race (Bauer, 2015).

**How Women Candidates Campaign**

The perceived expectations of party elites and the public affect female candidate recruitment efforts. Frederick’s (2014) study of 46 personal interviews of Texas Democratic women candidates confirmed a commonly held assumption that a successful female candidacy required “significant personal initiative” (Frederick, 2014, p. 318). Further, researchers have found that women candidates believe that there are certain expectations on campaigning, messaging, and issues that are required of them to win elections that are not required of male candidates (Brooks, 2011; Calfano & Djupe, 2011; Herrick, 2016). Such perceptions have campaign decision consequences. Because female candidates believe that they must work harder and are expected to work harder than male candidates, they may be less likely to run for office (Herrick, 2016).

These perceptions impact actual campaign activity decisions. Based on an 18-state candidate survey, Miller (2015) found that female legislative candidates tended to work longer hours, were more strategic than their male opponents, and believed that they were required to work harder than their male counterparts to win elections. These beliefs and results held true regardless of candidate incumbency (Miller, 2015).

**Candidate Recruitment and the Media**

Media coverage affects voter intention perception and the recruitment of women. Media coverage of female candidates is gendered (Meeks, 2012; Shoaf & Parsons, 2016; Turcotte & Paul, 2015). Public perception is affected by media coverage; therefore, that
same media coverage can shape voter intention (Dowling & Miller, 2015, Shaw et al., 2018). Further, the impact of media coverage is not stagnant. Gendered coverage reaches into the current election and beyond to the next election. Since campaign outcomes are used as a guide for the next candidate recruitment cycle, gendered media coverage has the potential of determining who will be the candidate in the next round of recruitment, a woman or a man (Dowling & Miller, 2015).

Candidate media coverage research has revealed gender stereotypes in campaign reporting (Meeks, 2012, 2017; Turcotte & Paul, 2015; Shoaf & Parsons, 2016). Candidacy narratives often introduce a candidate as novel and identify issues as inherently feminine or masculine in the public sphere (Meeks, 2012, 2017; Shaw et al., 2018), the sum of which perpetuates the gendered nature of press coverage (Meeks, 2012, 2017; Shaw et al., 2018).

Turcotte and Paul (2015) examined “the influence of candidate gender, journalist gender, and voter gender on the presidential debate agenda” (p. 773). The gender of both the journalist in a debate or a voter at a town hall, influenced the question content (Turcotte & Paul, 2015). Town hall questions asked by the general public were more likely to be focused on social issues that are traditionally considered women’s issues (Turcotte & Paul, 2015). These social issues represented 23.5% of questions at a media-monitored debate but accounted for 35% of the questions asked by voters at a general town hall (Turcotte & Paul, 2015).

Gender bias does not stop at the candidate. Female debate moderators were responsible for only 21.3% of 1,590 presidential, vice presidential, and primary debate questions from 1960–2012 (Turcotte & Paul, 2015). This starkly lower percentage of
questions asked by female moderators indicated that “presidential debates remain largely male oriented” (Turcotte & Paul, 2015, p. 781). Further, debate “press coverage reflects or propagates this masculine focus” (Turcotte & Paul, 2015, p. 781).

The 2020 presidential debate coverage breakdown fared better for female moderators. During the 2020 presidential election, two presidential debates and one vice presidential debate were held (The Commission on Presidential Debates [TCPD], 2020). Two debates had female moderators, Kirsten Welker and Susan Page, and the third was moderated by Christopher Wallace (TCPD, 2020). A fourth debate in a town hall style, moderated by Steve Scully, was canceled (TCPD, 2020).

**Perceptions of Female Electability**

Female candidates were found to be just as electable as male candidates (Aguiar & Redlin, 2014). How female candidates are perceived by the electorate and party elites affects female candidate recruitment efforts (Crowder-Meyer, 2013; Dowling & Miller, 2015; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Hennings & Urbatsch, 2015; Sanbonmatsu, 2002, 2006; Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009). Gender stereotyping can affect this perception (Brooks, 2011; Dowling & Miller, 2015; Hardy et al., 2019; Meeks & Domke, 2016; Stout & Kline, 2011). Gendered issues that are typically identified as masculine or feminine affect female candidate electability (Calfano & Djupe, 2011; Dowling & Miller, 2015; Hardy et al., 2019; Herrick, 2016; Meeks & Domke, 2016; Stout & Kline, 2011). The electorate, especially individual campaign finance donors, believe in the viability of a female candidate (Crespin & Deitz, 2010). Crespin and Deitz (2010) found that female candidates were able to amass a sizable campaign finance advantage when they worked
with female donor networks, especially those women who were vying for a congressional seat.

**Mitigation of Female Underrepresentation**

Methods to mitigate female underrepresentation vary (Hannagan et al., 2010; Pettey, 2018; Stiles & Schwab, 2009). These methods include traditional democratic means, such as increasing female candidacies through female candidate financial support and training as well as monitoring the natural impact of changing population trends (Hannagan et al., 2010; Stiles & Schwab, 2009). Other methods are legislatively driven, such as term limits (Pettey, 2018). Further, internationally, countries have incorporated gender quotas to address female underrepresentation. “The global spread of gender quotas can be traced back to the Fourth UN World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995” (Kenny & Verge, 2016, p. 352). The conference suggested that countries consider initiatives that would increase the agency of women in governmental positions. Gender quotas were considered a means to address this issue.

Pettey (2018) analyzed 10 years of U.S. election statistics and found that women were more likely to run in open seats with no incumbent. Extrapolating from that research, Pettey (2018) deduced that term limits would increase the number of female candidates and therefore a potentially higher number of women would eventually be in the legislature. Stiles and Schwab (2018) looked at population trends in rural, suburban, and metropolitan areas. They found that female candidates fared better in metropolitan and suburban areas (Stiles & Schwab, 2009). Further, the study posited that the rise of suburban legislative districts and the decline of rural districts resulted in more female-
friendly districts, and if the trend continued, women were more likely to win an increasing number of legislative seats (Stiles & Schwab, 2009).

In the US, mitigation has resulted from independent organizations outside traditional recruitment that focus on recruiting, training, and encouraging women to run for office. Calls to independent organizations even reached into academia (Burrell, 2012). Burrell suggested that women trained in political science should bring that knowledge to action; either to train women to engage in the political sphere or become candidates themselves (Burrell, 2012).

Chapter Summary

This review of the literature explored the history of the study of political committees and recruitment in the US since the mid-century. This review provided a background of recruitment and the initial seminal studies in the field. The review then addressed the research pertaining to political committee recruitment of women, the differences in recruiting women and men and political committee differences between the Republican and Democratic parties. The review continued and ended with women as candidates, perceptions of gender differences between men and women, and how those issues have affected women’s potential recruitment, how women function as candidates, how they campaign, and the treatment of women in the media. Finally, the literature review examined perceptions of female electability and the intersectionality of that perception with female candidate recruitment by local political committees. The research literature was compiled by reviewing seminal studies and by continuing to review articles until saturation.
Gender stereotypes still exist and affect political decisions as the electorate evaluates candidates for elected office (Calfano & Djupe, 2011; Hardy et al, 2019; Herrick, 2016; Meeks & Domke, 2016; Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009; Stout & Kline, 2011). Research has found that the influence of the voters’ political parties is more likely to affect voter choice (Dolan & Lynch, 2014; Stout & Kline, 2011). Further, female representation on the state legislative level has been found to affect legislative policies that are important to women (Calfano & Djupe, 2011; Cowell-Meyers & Langbein, 2009; Hardy et al., 2019; Herrick, 2016; Meeks & Domke, 2016). Effective communication and messaging are critical tools of every campaign (Meeks, 2012, 2017; Dowling & Miller, 2015; Shoaf & Parsons, 2016; Shaw et al., 2018; Turcotte & Paul, 2015), and gendered press coverage and debate formats include gendered coding for both issues and for identifying a women’s candidacy as a novelty (Dowling & Miller, 2015; Meeks, 2012; Schoaf & Parsons, 2016; Shaw et al., 2018; Turcotte & Paul, 2015).

A means to increase female representation is to have more women run for office (Bucchianeri, 2018; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Sanbonmatsu, 2006). Attempts to mitigate female underrepresentation have gone beyond recruitment (Pettey, 2018; Stiles & Schwab, 2009); however, recruitment by political parties and political elites play a pivotal role in determining who eventually gets on the ballot (Broockman, 2014; Butler & Preece, 2016; Dolan & Lynch, 2014; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Sanbonmatsu, 2006; Sanbonmatsu & Lynch, 2009). Consequently, it is important to investigate the gatekeeper activity of the political elites (Broockman, 2014; Butler & Preece, 2016; Fox & Lawless, 2010). Other gatekeepers include political action committees (PAC) that support women, like EMILY’s List, which requires that the candidate be a pro-choice Democrat with a
chance of winning the election (Hannagan et al., 2010). Since research has shown that support from such organizations definitively affects election success, other similar mechanisms are needed (Hannagan et al., 2010). It is the hope of this researcher that the culmination of this study will provide information that can aid in the successful recruitment of more women with the intention of reducing female underrepresentation.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

General Perspective

Female political underrepresentation occurs worldwide (IPU, 2021). Of the 195 countries recognized by the UN, nine women serve as heads of state and 13 serve as heads of government (UN Women, 2021). While women account for almost half of the world’s population at 49.6%, women hold 25.5% of the world’s legislative seats (IPU, 2021).

The U.S. female population (50.8%) is greater than the world average (USCB, 2021a); however, women only hold 26.5% (142) of the total U.S. congressional seats (535) (CAWP, 2021b). On the U.S. state legislative level, women hold 30.6% of the nation’s state legislative seats (NCSL, 2020). In NYS, women account for more than 53% of the population and hold 32.3% of the state’s legislative seats (NCSL, 2021). On the U.S. state executive level, eight (16%) states have female governors and 18 (36%) have female lieutenant governors (CAWP, 2020b). NYS has never elected a female governor (CAWP, 2021b).

Election to a local or state legislative office is a stepping-stone to higher state and federal office (Sanbonmatsu, 2006). Of the 101 women elected to serve in the 116th U.S. Congress, 58 (57%) previously held a lower elective office (CAWP, 2020c). Consequently, a means to increase female representation requires an increase in the number of women elected to local office (Sanbonmatsu, 2006). Nationwide, in 2018, less
than half (46%) of the statewide legislative races had a female candidate on either the
Republican or Democratic ballot lines (NCSL, 2018).

Studies indicate that support from local political committee members plays a key role in a woman’s decision to run for office (Butler & Preece, 2016; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Frederick, 2014; Sanbonmatsu, 2002, 2006). Further, academic research identifies the recruitment activities of local political gatekeepers as a topic for additional study (Fox & Lawless, 2010; Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, Sanbonmatsu, 2002, 2006). This study examined the female recruitment activities of local political party committee members, the political elites, “political informants, and gatekeepers at the local level” (Fox & Lawless, 2010, p. 313). The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to chronicle the lived experiences of female local political party committee members as they recruited female candidates to run for election. The lens of feminist institutionalism allowed the researcher to create a holistic account of the impact of committee demographic composition, social capital, gatekeeper activity, and political affiliation in female candidate recruitment. Feminist institutionalism provided a mechanism to explore the norms, values, customs, processes, and practices as well as the formal and informal rules and regulations of local level female candidate recruitment. This study sought answers to two research questions about political committee female candidate recruitment:

1. Do female local political committee members perceive that local political committee candidate recruitment is gendered or gender neutral?
2. What committee culture, customs, norms, values, processes, or practices, if any, do female political party committee members perceive affect the local political committees’ ability to recruit female candidates?

**Overall Research Study Design**

This study used a descriptive phenomenological design with descriptive data and semi-structured interviews. Phenomenological research is a design that evolves from “philosophy and psychology” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13). The philosopher, Edmund Gustav Husserl (1859-1938), is the father of the phenomenological design (SEP, 2020). Husserl’s first phenomenological work was published in 1900 (SEP, 2020). Over the next 20 years, Husserl refined his method to a transcendental phenomenological design that was marked by an intentionality of “consciousness and experience” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 30). Phenomenological design was expanded by Husserl and Heidegger to include the entire composition of human life (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), and then it was expanded by Merleau-Ponty and Sartre to “take account of the body and human action” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 30). Duquesne University then furthered the phenomenological approach for qualitative inquiry (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). By the mid-1970s, the method’s expansion permitted intentionality of consciousness to identify concurrent themes of a lived experience (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; SEP, 2020).

A descriptive phenomenological design was effective for this study because it allowed the researcher to investigate the lived experiences of female political committee members. The design provided the researcher with insight into the phenomenon of female candidate recruitment through the words of female political committee members who
were involved in candidate recruitment (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Descriptive municipal and participant data was compiled to supplement the phenomenological data obtained through the interviews.

Descriptive data provided an overview of the experienced realities and results of female candidate recruitment. The interviews described the recruiting process in terms of the “conditions, situations, or context” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 78) to explain the exploration of the norms, values, customs, processes, and practices of female candidate recruitment. Combining interview data with descriptive, publicly available government data provided important background information regarding the committee members; the committees; general recruitment activities; and committee norms, values, culture, practices, and processes.

Frederick (2014) used a phenomenological design with interviews in his qualitative study of Democratic female candidates. Crowder-Meyer performed 25 interviews of county party leaders from eight states as the qualitative portion of a mixed-methods study to determine that political party elites play a “significant role in the candidate recruitment process” (Crowder-Meyer, 2013, p. 391). A descriptive phenomenological design allowed the researcher to learn about the phenomenon of female candidate recruitment by examining lived experiences of the female Democratic and Republican committee members who were involved in female candidate recruitment.

**Research Context**

This descriptive phenomenological study sought to identify the nature and methods of female candidate recruitment by local political committees. In NYS, voters enrolled in a political party must file petitions to become county committee members.
Potential committee members petition to represent an election district within their assembly district for a term of 2 years. If successful, the petitioners become official committee members representing the voters of their parties in the petitioned election district within their assembly district. The population chosen for this study were female local political committee members that represent an election district in a NYS five-county judicial district.

At the time of this study, these five counties, together, were a racially ethnically, religiously, politically, and economically diverse geographic area with a combined population of approximately 2.4 million people (USCB, 2021b). The judicial district was home to several cities as well as suburb, rural, and agricultural areas (USCB, 2021b). Women made up 51% of the total population of the five counties (USCB, 2021b). The district was 39.7% diverse (USCB, 2021b) with a median household income in the counties ranging from of $41,000 to $100,000 (USCB, 2021b). Voter registrations as of winter 2020, indicate that Democratic registrations (565,164) outpaced Republican voter registration across these five counties (314,474) (NYS BOE, 2021).

**Research Participants**

The study participant population consisted of female local political committee members of the Democratic and Republican political party committees in the judicial district within NYS. Committee members, by law, had to be eligible to vote, and thus had to be 18 years of age or older. There were no other demographic barriers to committee membership. Committee members are unpaid; the position offers no compensation.

Information pertaining to political committee membership was available for public view on county and local political committee websites. The information available
included committee membership and email contact information. The committee members whose emails were publicly available were emailed a request to participate in this study. Stratified referential sampling was used to supplement committee member outreach when the initial email did not result in the desired number of committee members willing to be interviewed to achieve saturation. The committee members were asked to suggest and refer other female committee members throughout the judicial district who were willing to be interviewed. There were 25 female committee members from the judicial district who were interviewed. Committee members from each of the two major political parties, Democrat and Republican, were interviewed. Committee members from each of the five counties were interviewed.

**Instruments Used in Data Collection**

This study used archival, demographic, and election data to create a descriptive backdrop of local political party recruitment activity. The instruments used for this study were the judicial district county BOE websites, local political committee websites, local committee and county political organization websites, government websites, archival documents, the meeting platform Zoom, and Rev.com.

The interviews were audio and video recorded, notes were taken during the interviews, and post-interview notes were compiled. The Zoom platform was the method of interview in deference to COVID-19 restrictions. Zoom and Rev.com transcription services were used.

**Procedures for Data Collection**

After the researcher’s methodology was approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher gathered available population email
addresses that were accessible through the local political committee’s website. Once the email addresses were collected, an email requesting participation was sent to 152 potential participants with two attachments consisting of a letter of general information and an invitation to participate in the study (Appendix A) and a consent document (Appendix B). Reminder emails were sent to those potential participants who had not yet responded. Throughout the email process, committee member respondents were asked to refer and recommend other committee members for interviews.

While awaiting interview request responses, the researcher collected, collated, and analyzed the publicly available data. As the email responses were received and additional potential participants were identified via referential sampling, the researcher maintained a list of respondents. Each respondent met the criteria of being a current or former committee member of a local political committee in the judicial district of NYS. Email recruitment yielded 19 respondents. Of those respondents 18 were interviewed. Referential sampling resulted in an additional seven committee members, all of whom were interviewed, for a total of 25 participants. Of the 25 participants, 23 were existing members of a local political committee and two of the participants were former committee members of a local political committee. One email respondent had initially agreed to be interviewed but did not respond to follow-up emails to schedule an interview. The interviews were conducted over a 2-month period in the winter of 2020/2021.

At the start of each interview, each participant was reminded that their participation and comments would be kept confidential; that all documentation would be kept in a secure computer, in a locked cabinet, and in a secure manner; and that at any
time during the interview, the participant could refuse to answer a question or stop the interview in its entirety. All participants were reminded that they could review the study when it was complete. In one case, a participant requested a copy of the Zoom transcript, which was provided the same day as the interview. No compensation was offered or provided to the participants.

Each interview was broken into two segments. The initial questions were foundational in seeking demographic and member specific information. These questions sought to supplement the publicly available descriptive data obtained by the researcher. The second portion of the interview asked questions specific to the committee member’s perception of female candidate recruitment.

The participant foundational questions are listed. Question 9 was asked as a follow-up question after the interviews were conducted, and it was asked via email.

1. How long have you been on the committee?
2. Do you, or have you ever, served in a leadership capacity?
3. Are you a member of the county executive committee?
   a. If so, do you, or have you ever served in a leadership capacity?
4. What motivated you to join the committee?
5. Have you ever been a candidate for elected office?
   a. If so, when, for what, and how were you recruited?
6. What is your profession?
7. What is your marital status?
8. Do you have children?
9. What is the gender makeup of your committee?
The open-ended questions pertaining to recruitment were purposefully left unstructured to encourage generous discussion of the perceptions and lived experiences of recruitment. With the use of the participants’ own words describing their lived experiences, the researcher was able to create a textural and structural description of the lived experiences as described by Moustakas (1994). Once the foundational questions were completed, the remainder of the semi-structured interviews were crafted in accordance with Moustakas’s (1994) model and were limited to five open-ended questions.

1. On the town political committee level, what has been your experience with recruitment of candidates for elected office?
2. On the town political committee level, what has been your experience with recruitment of female candidates for elected office?
3. At the county executive political committee level, what has been your experience with recruitment of candidates for elected office?
4. At the county executive political committee level, what has been your experience with recruitment of female candidates for elected office?
5. Is there any other information or story, that you have not already shared, regarding female candidate recruitment for elected office that you wish to talk about?

The flow of the interview responses determined the follow-up probing questions that delved deeper into the lived experiences of the participants.
Procedures for Data Analysis

The publicly available information provided a basis of information for the interview results. Each of the 25 interviews was recorded and transcribed by a transcription service. The interview data was coded by the researcher (Saldaña, 2016). The researcher coded each interview using line-by-line coding so that the essence of the participant experiences could be revealed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Working inductively, patterns, themes, categories, and subcategories emerged (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Later, working deductively, the researcher was able to determine if additional information was required to be gathered (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Coding identified common themes and trends in the interview responses, which created a thematic storyline of local political committee female candidate recruitment. A code book was maintained to note both the a priori and emergent codes. The coded responses reflected the research questions and highlighted the information being sought as to how committees reached out to potential candidates, from what community groups did the candidates usually emerge, did committees seek out candidates that were not directly related to the committee, and were all committee members encouraged to recruit candidates by other committee members. Some a priori codes included gender, recruitment, leadership, support, network, committee health, welcoming, and unwelcoming.

To instill trustworthiness, the researcher heuristically coded and continued to recode throughout the process (Saldaña, 2016). After the interview, while coding, recoding, and after transcription of the interview, the researcher reflected on the day’s work, creating a journal with “copious analytic memos” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 38). The
researcher also checked and rechecked the video and reviewed the interpretation with the participants when needed for accurate member checking.

“Qualitative research is interpretative research” requiring reflexivity for trustworthiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 183). At the time of the interviews, the researcher was a political scientist who had studied and taught political science for over 20 years. The researcher has been active in politics for 6 years. Overall, these elements of combined experiences provided a rich resource to draw upon while completing this study, but they required reflexivity to instill trustworthiness. The researcher assisted on numerous campaigns, served on a non-partisan zoning board of appeals member, and had served on a non-partisan town advisory committee, a non-partisan intermunicipal council, and a non-partisan village committee. The researcher also ran for local office in 2014, 2016, and 2017. At the time of the interviews, the researcher had served as a town and county Democratic political committee member, was the chair of a Democratic town committee, and was a judicial district Democratic delegate for the assembly district. As a judicial district delegate, the researcher did not have any authority or influence on county or delegate peers, and she was not an officer of the county committee. Therefore, to maintain trustworthiness, and because of the researcher’s leadership position in the town Democratic committee, no interviews were conducted with members of that town Democratic committee.

Summary

While women make up over half of the U.S. population, women still do not appear on an election ballot as often as men. This study investigated the lived experiences of female political committee members of a NYS judicial district as they recruited
candidates. The descriptive phenomenological design of this study enabled the researcher to describe and chronicle the lived experiences of female political committee candidate members. The population of this study was female Democratic and Republican local political committee members in a NYS judicial district. The sample was 25 female committee members from the judicial district. Publicly available data was used to establish a general description of the population. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken. The participants were those committee members who indicated an interest in being interviewed for the study in response to an introductory request for participation or referred to the study by an interviewed colleague. Email addresses, readily available on the Internet, were used to contact the female committee members. Emails were sent to 152 committee members. Of the 152 emails, 19 committee members responded that they were willing to be interviewed. Of those 19 respondents, 18 were interviewed. Referential sampling was also used to achieve saturation. The referential sampling yielded seven committee members who were willing to be interviewed. All committee members referred for an interview were interviewed. A total of 25 committee members were interviewed. The participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary, that the responses were going to be kept confidential, and they were apprised of the trustworthiness assigned to the study. The participants were provided a consent form that clearly listed their participatory rights. A priori, emergent, elemental, and affective coding helped to develop a thematic storyline of the phenomenon of female candidate recruitment using the lived experiences of female political committee members. Member checking and reflexivity provided the trustworthiness in this study. Researcher-only solo coding was used (Saldaña, 2016).
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This descriptive phenomenological study examined the perceptions of the female members of local political committees as they recruited female candidates to run for elected office. It explored NYS local political committee members’ perceptions of their individual and their committees’ collective capacities to identify and recruit a gender-diverse candidate pool within its established culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices. The population chosen for this study was female members of NYS local political committees within counties in a chosen judicial district in NYS.

Eligible committee membership is determined by NYS election law. NYS election law permits two representatives per election district for each of the NYS-authorized political parties. According to the county NYS BOE, there are approximately 2,000 total election districts in the judicial district. As a result, there were a potential of about 8,000 local political committee members of the Democratic and Republican town political committees in the judicial district, although the political committee members stated that not all member seats were filled.

Political committee members become official voting members through petitions submitted to their BOE, or by appointment in accordance with county party bylaws. NYS BOE websites list committee members who joined their committees via the petitioning process. The websites do not, however, list information about the committee members
who joined a political committee via the appointment process. Stratified purposeful sampling was used to ensure that female political committee members from each of the counties of the judicial district were interviewed. Referential sampling was used to identify additional interviewees. Via email, 152 female committee members of the judicial district were contacted requesting participation in the study, of which 18 female committee members were interviewed. Another seven female committee members were referred to the researcher for an interview.

A total of 25 female political committee members were interviewed. These 25 women represent political committees located in 17 municipalities. Female committee members from each of the counties of the judicial district were interviewed. Both Democratic and Republican women were interviewed.

This study used archival, public, election, and census demographic data to provide descriptive background data. This descriptive data supplements the 25 semi-structured personal interviews to determine the different methods of female candidate recruitment. This study adds to the body of literature on political recruitment practices of political parties by investigating recruitment at the local level in a diverse area. Local-level recruitment is viewed as an essential area of research that requires additional investigation (Fox & Lawless, 2010, 2011; Frederick, 2014; Gallagher & Marsh, 1988; Preece et al., 2016; Sanbonmatsu, 2006). Researchers have noted a lack of nationwide local-level party research because of the burdensome nature of investigating across the entire country (Fox & Lawless, 2010, 2011). The investigation of local political party recruitment in the judicial district will hopefully provide a microcosm of the recruitment
activities of a larger population. The information learned will add to the body of information lacking in this area of research.

**Research Questions**

The study sought answers to the following critical research questions about NYS political committee female candidate recruitment:

1. Do female local political committee members perceive that local political committee candidate recruitment is gendered or gender neutral?
2. What committee culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices, if any, do female political committee members perceive affect the local political committees’ ability to recruit female candidates?

**Data Analysis and Findings**

**Research Context: County Executive and Legislative Gender Information**

The judicial district in this study encompassed the five NYS counties. Each of the counties are led by a county executive and a county legislature. County executive and county legislative gender information is based upon available data in the spring of 2021. Throughout the 20th century, the counties individually voted for changes to their county charter to establish an office of the county executive. Since their charter change, the counties collectively have elected 29 county executives to office. Of the county executives elected to office, three (10%) were women. The county with the longest established office of the county executive has never elected a female county executive.

There is a legislative body in each of the counties within the judicial district. At the time of the interviews, these counties were represented by approximately 97
legislators in the five separate legislative bodies. Women held 24 (24.7%) of the 97 legislative seats across these five counties. Female representation in one of the county legislatures was an outlier accounting for nine (37.5%) of the 24 female-held legislative seats. In contrast to the other counties, this county has a female majority legislature with female legislators accounting for 52.9% of the county legislative seats. In the other four counties of the judicial district women make up, on average, 18% of the county legislative seats.

**Participant Municipalities’ Governments and Demographic Data**

The female local political committee members interviewed for this study, at the time of the interviews, were members of 20 committees within 17 municipalities across the five counties of the judicial district. Each of the 17 municipalities were governed by an elected board or council led by an elected supervisor, mayor, or president. For the purposes of this study and to maintain a level of consistency, only background data on the participant municipal boards are included in this descriptive municipal data. Municipal board composition was obtained by viewing the online municipal websites and the counties’ BOE websites and is reflective of the spring 2021 municipal board membership.

**Participant Municipalities’ Board Composition.** Each of the participant municipalities, at the time of this study, had a governing board membership of between four and eight elected members. Including leadership, 91 elected board officials governed these 17 municipalities. Of these 91 board members, 18 (19.8%) members were women; 12 (13.2%) of the board members were people of color; and seven (7.7%) of the board
members were women of color. There was no female board representation in five (29.4%) municipalities; one (5.9%) municipality had more female representation than male; eight (47%) of the 17 municipalities had a person of color on their board; and six (35.3%) municipalities had at least one woman of color on their board.

**Participant Municipalities’ Board Leadership.** Of the 17 municipalities, one (5.9%) municipality had elected a person of color to lead its governing board and one (5.9%) other municipality elected a woman as the leader of its governing board. Table 4.1 illustrates the participant municipalities’ board gender and racial composition.
Table 4.1

Participant Municipalities’ by Total Board Members with Gender and Racial Composition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of board members</th>
<th>Board member gender</th>
<th>Leader gender</th>
<th>Leader person of color</th>
<th>Board members people of color</th>
<th>Board members women of color</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1(W)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Female Candidates in Participant Local Municipalities. Examination of female rates of candidacy amongst the participant municipalities was foundational to this study because it relates to both the descriptive data and interview results. Rates of female leadership on the municipal level are dependent upon women running for office. If women are not on the ballot for the local municipal boards, they will not be elected to
serve in those capacities. The lack of female candidates, therefore, contributes to the underrepresentation of women at the local municipal board level and, in many ways, relates to the activities of the respective Democratic and Republican committees.

Municipal board terms vary within and across the participant municipalities, therefore, to properly examine patterns of female candidacies, three election cycles were examined. During the municipal election cycles of 2015, 2017, and 2019, 269 candidates ran for a municipal board office on either the Democratic or Republican party line. Of those 269, 56 (20.8%) were female candidates. Further, during those years, four (7.8%) female candidates campaigned for a municipal board leadership position: mayor, supervisor, or president. In 2015, 101 candidates ran for a municipal board position. Of those 101 candidates, 18 (17.8%) were women. Two female candidates (11.8%) ran for a supervisor, mayor, or president position in one of the 17 municipalities. In 2017, 91 candidates ran for a municipal board position; 20 (21.9%) of those candidates were women. One female candidate (5.9%) ran for a leadership position in one of the 17 municipalities. In 2019, 77 candidates ran for a municipal board position; 18 (23.4%) of those candidates were women. One female candidate (5.9%) ran for a leadership position in one of the 17 municipalities. Table 4.2 depicts the 2015, 2017, 2019, candidacy rates for the 17 municipalities.
### Table 4.2

*2015, 2017, 2019 Candidacy Rates for Participant Municipalities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total candidates</th>
<th>Female candidates</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Female candidacies for leadership positions of supervisor, mayor, or president</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant Municipality Population and Income Data.** The combined population of these 17 municipalities was 455,441. Women accounted for 51% of the population at 231,086 (USCB, 2021b). There is a range of populations among these municipalities. They range from populations of just below 5,000 to over 90,000 (USCB, 2021b). Female population rates for each of the municipalities ranged from a low of 42.1% to a high of 55.1%. The median household income in 2019 dollars for these 17 municipalities ranged from a low of $41,000 to a high of $140,000 (USCB, 202b). Population and median household income totals are rounded to maintain the anonymity of the municipality and to prevent the inadvertent identification of the respective female political member participant of this study.

**Participant Municipality Information Compared to Municipal Population Data.** When the municipality information was sorted by the highest female percent of population, it appeared that a municipality with a female population above 50% may have been a predictor, but not a determinant, of the potential for a greater number of female board representation. Of the 18 female board members, 14 (77.8%) came from
municipalities with a female population above 50%. The sole municipality with a female in its leadership position had the largest percentage of female population. One of the municipalities with a percent population of 51.8%, however, was an outlier, as it did not have any female representation on its board. Table 4.3 illustrates the participant municipalities’ board composition sorted by percent of female population.

Table 4.3

*Participant Municipalities’ Board Composition Sorted by Female Population*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent (%) of female population</th>
<th>Median household income (USD)</th>
<th>Total number of board members</th>
<th>Board member gender</th>
<th>Leader gender</th>
<th>Leader person of color</th>
<th>Board members people of color</th>
<th>Board members women of color</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female M</td>
<td>Male F</td>
<td>Female M</td>
<td>Male F</td>
<td>Female M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3 4 M</td>
<td>1 4 M</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>55,000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1 7 M</td>
<td>0 1 M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0 5 M</td>
<td>0 0 M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 4 M</td>
<td>0 1 M</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 4 M</td>
<td>0 1 M</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>85,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 4 M</td>
<td>0 0 M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 4 M</td>
<td>0 0 M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>95,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1 5 M</td>
<td>0 0 M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>95,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0 5 M</td>
<td>0 1 M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0 5 M</td>
<td>0 0 M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0 6 M</td>
<td>0 0 M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>105,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 3 M</td>
<td>0 0 M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>105,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 3 M</td>
<td>0 0 M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>120,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0 5 M</td>
<td>0 0 M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>125,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 4 M</td>
<td>0 1 M</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>130,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 3 M</td>
<td>0 2 M</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>140,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3 2 W</td>
<td>0 1 W</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>73 1/(W)</td>
<td>12 1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>80.2 5.9</td>
<td>5.9 13.2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A female population above 50% may also have been a predictor of greater board diversity. Of the 12 persons of color elected to boards of these municipalities, eight (66.7%) were in municipalities with a female population above 50%, and four (57.1%) of the seven women of color were also board members of the municipalities with a female population above 50%.

**Participant Municipality Information Compared to Municipal Median Household Income Data.** Within this grouping of municipalities, it appears that median household income may not have been indicative of stronger female board representation. Interestingly, the two highest and two lowest median income municipalities accounted for a half of the women and the majority of persons of color sitting on the municipal boards; nine (50%) of the 18 female board members and eight (66.7%) of the 12 people of color elected to these municipal boards represented the highest and lowest median income municipalities. Further, the two municipalities where a woman and a person of color were in positions of leadership were within this group of four municipalities. The sole municipality with a women leader had the highest municipal median household income and the municipality with a person of color in the leadership position had the lowest median household income. Table 4.4 illustrates the participant municipalities’ board composition sorted by median household income.
Table 4.4

Participant Municipalities’ Board Composition Sorted by Median Household Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Median household income</th>
<th>Total number of board members</th>
<th>Board member gender</th>
<th>Leader gender</th>
<th>Leader person of color</th>
<th>Board members people of color</th>
<th>Board members women of color</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40,000</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55,000</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75,000</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80,000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>85,000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>95,000</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>95,000</td>
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<td>105,000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>W</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1(W)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phenomenological Data

The remainder of this chapter presents and discusses the findings of the semi-structured interviews with 25 female local political committee members. Polkinghorne (1989) suggested from five to 25 interviewees, depending upon the size of the population, to achieve a full narrative of the experience.
The participants then discussed their lived experiences of candidate recruitment including the recruitment of women for elected office. The lived experiences of the participants are shared through interview excerpts that fully expand on the essence illustrated in the prose (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With the use of the participants’ own words describing their lived experiences, the researcher was able to create a textural and structural description of the lived experiences as described by Moustakas (1994). Once the foundational questions were completed, the remainder of the semi-structured interviews were crafted in accordance with Moustakas’s model (1994) and were limited to five open-ended questions.

**Participant Data**

The participant data was obtained at the beginning of the interviews as part of the foundational questions (Appendix C). Together, the 25 participants represented 20 committees in 17 municipalities across 5 counties. Of the 25 participants, 23 (92%) were existing committee members and two (8%) had left their committee positions at the time of the interview; eight (32%) of the participants self-identified as women of color. Table 4.5 illustrates the relationship between the research questions and the interview questions.
### Table 4.5

**Relationship Between Interview Questions and Research Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
<th>RQ1</th>
<th>RQ2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do female local political committee members perceive that local political committee candidate recruitment is gendered or gender neutral?</td>
<td></td>
<td>What committee culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices, if any, do female political committee members perceive affect the local political committees’ ability to recruit female candidates?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been your experience with recruitment of candidates for elected office, on the town committee level?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been your experience with the recruitment of female candidates on the town political committee level?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been your experience with recruitment of candidates for elected office at the county committee level?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been your experience with the recruitment of female candidates at the county committee level?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there any other information or story that you have not already shared regarding female candidate recruitment for elected office that you wish to talk about?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Gender Composition of the Local Political Committee

Nineteen (95%) of the participant committees were reported as at least half or majority female. Ten (50%) of the 20 local political committees had a virtually even level of male and female participation on the committee. Eight (40%) of the committees were reported to be majority female. One committee (5%) was reported as comprised solely of women. One (5%) committee of the 20 was reported as majority male.
**Participant Leadership Data**

There were, at the time of their interviews, 18 (72%) participants who held or had previously held positions of leadership on their respective town or county committees. The participant group included 15 (60%) existing members and former members of the local political committee leadership nine (36%) of the participants were chairs of their local committee; one (4%) participant was a vice chair, and one (4%) participant was a recording secretary. The former leaders included participants that had served as chair, vice chair, and recording secretary of their local committee.

Of the 25 participants, 20 (80%) were also members of their respective county executive committee, 13 (52%) of whom served or previously served in leadership positions. The participants included three chairs, one vice chair, and one officer of the county executive committee, as well as two past chairs, five past vice chairs, and one past officer of the county executive committee. Further, four (16%) of the participants had been appointed by their respective county executive committee to a BOE commissioner position, and one (4%) participant was a state party committee member. Table 4.6 illustrates the leadership data of the participants.

**Participant Demographic Data**

The average participant age was 58, the median age was 58, the mode age was 46; 19 (76%) participants reported that they were married, and 15 (60%) reported that they also had children. Of the 25 participants, eight (32%) identified themselves as women of color.
Of the 25 participants, 13 (52%) were employed in the public sector in either public services, social work, or education, 10 (40%) participants were employed in the private sector, two (8%) were employed in the not-for-profit sector, and six (24%) participants reported that they worked in the legal profession as a lawyer or legal assistant. Table 4.7 illustrates the participant career sectors and professions.

Participants as Elected Officials. Of the 25 committee members, 16 (64%) had run for office, six (24%) were elected officials, two (8%) had previously been elected to public office, six (24%) participant committee members declared they were running for office in the 2021 election cycle, and four (16%) were appointed to political position in public service. Table 4.8 illustrates the participants who had been candidates for office or had been elected to an office.

Participant Motivation. The average number of years that the participants were on a local political committee was 16.8, the median was 15.0 years, and the mode was 4 years. The participants reported three main motivations for joining the political committees: civic duty, issue concerns, and family influence. The participants noted that their secondary reasons for joining the committee included a desire to serve the community, union membership, and issues of a local or national origin. Concerns with a local issue was the single greatest motivator with 10 (40%) participants citing those concerns as the reason why they joined a committee. Further, of those 10 members, eight (80%) stated that their local issue was related to a land use or environmental issue, 16 (64%) participants stated that their motivation to join the town committee was also issue driven, six (24%) committee members stated that they were concerned with national
leadership and were motivated to join their town political committee during or following the 2016 presidential election cycle, and two (8%) of the committee members stated that they joined to assist themselves in maintaining their public sector positions. Table 4.9 illustrates the committee members’ motivation.
Table 4.6

Participant Committee Membership and Leadership Data

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Table 4.7

Participant Demographic Data

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<td>Woman of diversity</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.8

**Participants’ Elected Official and Candidate Data**

| Participant (P) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Municipality (M)| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 2 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 6 | 13 | 17 | 5 | 16 | 2 |
| Present or formerly elected | X | X | X |   | X |   | X |   | X |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Present or formerly a candidate | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |

### Table 4.9

**Participant Motivation Data**

| Participant (P) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Municipality (M)| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 2 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 6 | 13 | 17 | 5 | 16 | 2 |
| Initial reason for joining committee | F | C | C | C | I | F | I | F | I | F | I | I | I | I | F | I | I | I | I | I | I | I | I |
| Initial motivation | U | U | U | S | L | S | L | S | N | S | L | S | N | N | L | C | L | L | N | N | L | L | J | J |
| Secondary motivation | CS | CS | CS | C | LU | LU | LD | C | P | C | LD | LD | LU | S | LU | LU | LD | LD | LU | LU | LU | LU | LU | LU |

Findings – Participant Qualitative Data

The result of the coding process led to the creation of a holistic account of the perceptions of female political committee members of the judicial district as they recruited female candidates for elected office.

Research Question 1

Data were collected to answer Research Question 1: *Do female local political committee members perceive that local political committee candidate recruitment is gender neutral or gendered?*

The perceptions of the interviewees resulted in gender-neutral and gendered themes. Gender-neutral themes emerged from the participants’ perceptions of the recruitment activities that were undertaken regardless of the candidate’s gender. Gendered themes emerged from the participants’ perceptions of candidate recruitment activities that differed or were undertaken based upon the gender of the potential candidate being recruited. Four themes about female candidate recruitment emerged from the codes and the categories expressed by the participants in response to Research Question 1. The gender-neutral theme is labeled as affirmative recruitment. The gendered recruitment themes are labeled sorority recruitment, Madonna recruitment, and negative recruitment. The theme labels are defined below.

Affirmative recruitment describes the lived experiences of the participants as they experienced the gender-neutral activities that the committee members perceived were undertaken when recruiting candidates. While similar activities may be undertaken during gendered recruitment, affirmative recruitment is marked by a gender-blind approach to the activities.
Sorority recruitment describes the lived experiences of the participants during gendered interactions with women they were recruiting for political office. At its core, the essence of this theme illustrates the empathetic, and protective—but gendered—approach female committee members experience when recruiting potential female candidates. Sorority recruitment has been subcategorized into caretaker and candidate vision.

Madonna recruitment describes the lived experiences of the participants as they encountered gendered female candidate recruitment activities that were heavily influenced by male political elites: male political committee members and male elected officials. Madonna recruitment was reported as biased but not overtly misogynistic or otherwise adverse in nature. Madonna recruitment describes the participants’ perceptions of male recruitment of women based primarily or solely on gender with an exaggerated expectation of female electability grounded in the glorification of male perceptions of femininity.

Negative recruitment describes the lived experiences of the participants as they encountered gendered female candidate recruitment activities that were adverse, ageist, racist, or misogynistic. Table 4.10 displays the themes, categories, subcategories, and codes that emerged for Research Question 1.
Table 4.10

*Research Question 1: Emergent Themes, Categories, Subcategories, and Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender-neutral</td>
<td>Affirmative recruitment</td>
<td>Best candidate</td>
<td>Vetting, community &amp; civic minded, issue driven, pay your dues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recruitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorority</td>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>Motivation, vision, self-view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madonna</td>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>Caretaker</td>
<td>Childcare, eldercare, generational, traditional family roles, burn out, impact on family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>Targeted misogyny,</td>
<td>Candidate recruitment, gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sexist tropes, &amp; gendered messaging</td>
<td>campaigning, social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intersectionality</td>
<td>Misogyny &amp; race, misogyny &amp; ageism, harassment, safety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gender-Neutral Recruitment: Affirmative.** In accordance with Research Question 1, the participants reported affirmative recruitment activities. The participants described affirmative recruitment as activities undertaken by the committee that involved identifying a formidable candidate regardless of gender. That selection was effectuated through vetting, which included identifying potential candidates who were involved in their community and were civically minded. The participants reported that candidates may be driven by a concern for local issues and they may have been active in the community or on the political committee for some time. The codes of best candidate, vetting, community/civic engagement, issue driven, and pay your dues emerged to create the theme of affirmative recruitment. Table 4.11 depicts the affirmative subcategory and participant responses.
Table 4.11

Affirmative Recruitment Theme Codes by Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Best candidate</th>
<th>Vetting</th>
<th>Community/civic involvement</th>
<th>Issue driven</th>
<th>Pay your dues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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**Affirmative Recruitment: Civic and Community Involvement.** The essence of civic or community involvement emerged as a majority subcategory of the affirmative recruitment; 19 (76%) of the participants cited civic or community involvement as central to the affirmative theme. The themes of affirmative recruitment were interrelated. In seeking out civically minded potential candidates, the committee members cited
relationships that were often forged to vet those candidates, that potential candidates were often issue driven, and at times required to “pay their dues.” P18, a town chair and county officer, described the nature of affirmative recruitment and its connection to community and civic engagement:

Affirmative recruitment has gone on most often at the hyper local level. And that is [how] it’s somewhat self-selecting in that, if a person is motivated to become involved in a community, that person may be noticed by the party or other elected officials [for recruitment]. (P18)

P8, a committee member and county chair, agreed with the community involvement as she discussed her town committee’s gender-neutral recruitment objectives when identifying candidates:

[The] best candidate [for recruitment] should be someone that’s already doing some type of community service or some type of involvement. Whether it be a parent group or church group, whatever the group is, you know they’re volunteering their time already, and they have a camaraderie amongst other neighbors. (P8)

P15, a town committee member and county elected official, also supported reaching out to people in the community for candidates, especially those who may be issue driven:

“We work with the [people in the community]. We talk to them. People realize that to effect change, they need to be in power to affect that change.”

In discussing affirmative recruitment, P10 noted that effective local candidate recruitment emerged from community networks and not from independent training groups. P10 noted that candidates were encouraged to attend trainings with those tertiary,
independent groups after they were already recruited. Two participants, P5 and P13, discussed their participation in independent campaign training organizations, while a candidate noted that they attended those trainings only after they had already declared their candidacy.

Three participants who were county chairs, or were former county chairs, cited the importance of strong town committees and town committee networks as an outgrowth of the community and civic involvement discussions. P9, a committee chair and former county chair, discussed the community relationship building that is often required of successful recruiting: “We cultivate candidates all the time. And then it comes to a matter [of getting them to consider the question] ‘Are you willing to run?’”

P17, a committee member and former county chair, agreed, adding that the committee people use their own social network to seek out candidates: “I think so much [of recruitment] is just socializing and meeting people and seeing if they are interested, and getting your tentacles out there.” P12, a committee member and county chair, shared her experiences and shared the importance of committee outreach in yielding strong candidates: “If you have a diverse committee, you will get better candidates.”

**Affirmative Recruitment: Vetting.** In the process of discussing affirmative recruitment, the code of vetting candidates emerged from 12 (48%) of the participants. P1, a town chair and former county vice chair, commented on the importance of vetting candidates: “It has to be a decent person, somebody who I’d be proud to [run on our party line].”
P16 commented on the importance of vetting and thoughtful recruiting:

Of these [potential candidates you think] who would make a good candidate? And then you take it beyond that point because you want it to go well if they get elected [and you think] “who would make a good legislator?” . . . Running isn’t for everybody. And being in office isn’t for everybody. (P16)

P17 commented on the successful vetting process: “We’ve really managed to have ethical, good candidates run.”

**Affirmative Recruitment: Pay Your Dues.** During the interview process, the code of pay your dues also emerged for five (20%) participants. The essence of that code, however, seemed to have a divergent meaning for participants. P12 explained the benefit of volunteering on a campaign or with other committee activities:

You get elected by people who know you . . . it’s about relationships, you make, especially in local office and . . . you make them [by] doing either [political] committee work or on-the-ground volunteer work, but you’re learning the skills you’re going to need as the candidate, so it’s not that you’re paying your dues, it’s that you’re learning the skills that you need to [become] a better candidate. (P12)

Three participants noted that committee membership was viewed as a pay your dues requirement for recruitment. P25 reported:

[An elected official] encouraged me to join the committee. So, yeah, I mean it was not mandatory; but yeah, if I wanted to, you know, strive to run for [a specific elected office] one day, I mean I knew that . . . these are the steps that I would have to take by joining the committee. (P25)
P3 did not report any perceptions of affirmative recruitment. P3’s interview and their perceptions were an outlier.

**Gendered Recruitment: Sorority.** In accordance with Research Question 1, the participants reported sorority recruitment activities. The participant interviews resulted in the emergence of the gendered recruitment theme of sorority. The participants perceived sorority recruitment as the gendered responses, and the resultant activities undertaken by female committee members when recruiting potential female candidates. Sorority recruitment was subcategorized into caretaker and candidate vision.

The essence of the caretaker subcategory summarized the traditional gender role dialogues that the participants stated emerge when recruiting female candidates. The essence of the candidate vision subcategory summarizes the potential candidate’s self-view, vision, and motivation that the participants stated emerged when recruiting female candidates.

**Sorority Recruitment: Caretaker.** In accordance with Research Question 1, this subcategory lists the caretaker concerns that were perceived by the participants as they recruited women to run for political office. The committee members cite these experiences as affecting both their decision to recruit women as well as the success of that recruitment. Within the subcategory of caretaker, the three themes of caretaker roles, traditional family roles, and impact on the family were each noted by 16 (64%) participants. The participants cited the importance of these themes to the caretaker subcategory. Table 4.12 illustrates the participant responses to the sorority category with the caretaker subcategory.
Table 4.12

Sorority Recruitment Theme – Caretaker Subcategory and Codes by Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Caretaker roles: Childcare/eldercare</th>
<th>Traditional family roles</th>
<th>Impact on family</th>
<th>Burned out</th>
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The participants shared their experiences with caretaker concerns and sorority recruitment. P13 stated that recruitment, generally, “is a hard ask.” P21, a committee chair and former county vice chair seemed to agree, citing the general difficulty in recruiting women:

There are women who just have too much going on in their lives, or whatever, I feel it [is] almost easier to [recruit] men [to run for office]. We have gotten women, but it is easier to get a man [to run]. (P21)
P1, expounded on this subject, reporting on the general difficulties in overcoming the concerns of potential female candidates and that the concerns are more widespread than isolated:

It would be rare to ask a woman [with young kids] to [run for office], because they wouldn’t do it, for the most part. There are exceptions. Somebody has a really supportive family. Somebody has some money who can afford a nanny. But as woke as we might want to be, we still live in a very traditional area. (P1)

P2, a committee member and committee chair, recalled a recruitment experience:

I had a female candidate that was on the fence. This happens a lot with female potential candidates [with] a family. [This woman asked:] “I have young children. I don’t know how much time this is going to be. That would be an issue. What is it going to take away from my responsibilities at home? How much time is it going to take away from my family?” (P2)

P13 explained how recruiting women may require a longer recruitment process for women with caretaking concerns:

I know this young woman in my town. She never considered running; she’s got small children, she’s involved in a lot of things locally, she said “No.” [to running for office] But, I think I put it in her head, that “you’d make a great candidate, that’s something you could consider in 10, 3, or 5 years.” She could learn what she needs to learn. (P13)

P9, a committee member, former candidate, and committee chair, discussed a secondary layer of caretaker concerns—the impact of generational caretaking on the
decision to run for office, indicating that the caretaker concerns span beyond childrearing years:

So, I know [a woman] she’s fantastic and would make a wonderful town supervisor, and I’ve told her that, but [she] will not run because she has to take care of her grandkids . . . [care for] grandchildren have been . . . a big [reason] for women not running. (P9)

The participants cited their lived experiences with female elected officials facing caretaker concerns. P1 provided an example of a woman who had recently served on the local town board:

The one woman we had on the town board . . . she had to quit. She couldn’t run again. She said, “I couldn’t do it, because I have a job, I have kids.” She had a husband who was supportive; I guess maybe not supportive enough. (P1)

P7, who decided not to seek reelection this year, cited the concerns of a candidate’s caretaking responsibilities on successful recruitment, who was inspired by her own experiences as a recruiter, a candidate, and an elected official: “Childcare just becomes an issue because you’re trying to take care and improve your community for your children. But while you’re doing that, who’s watching your children?! ” The essence of the caretaker subcategory appeared to be affected by the subcategory of the vision of sorority recruitment.

**Sorority Recruitment: Vision Subcategory.** In accordance with answering Research Question 1, this subcategory describes the participant perceptions of female candidate motivation, vision, and self-view. There were 14 (56%) participants who reported that the potential candidate’s self-view and motivation was central to the vision
subcategory. Motivation, which serves as the foundation of a candidate’s vision of their own candidacy, was impacted by a potential candidate’s self-view. Self-view refers to the potential candidate’s view of themself as a candidate. While it is tangential to a potential candidate’s self-image, the candidate self-view is specifically linked to the candidate’s view of their capacity to run a campaign successfully.

The participants perceived and reported that women are often motivated by a desire to serve their community, are less likely to view a run for office as a career move, and are comparatively more concerned about their ability to be successful and effective. The participants also reported that women tend to be, comparatively, more concerned about the demands of campaigning and the elected position, if elected, than their male counterparts. Finally, the female political committee members stated that potential female candidates often do not maximize their networks and social capital. Table 4.13 illustrates the sorority recruitment theme with the vision subcategory.
Table 4.13

**Sorority Recruitment Theme – Vision Subcategory Codes by Participant**

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<th>Participant</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
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*Sorority Recruitment: Vision Subcategory – Motivation.* P12 spoke about her experience with candidate motivation: “People want to be elected officials for a couple of reasons, one is because they like the power, one is because they want to serve. Women want to serve.” P15, reported similarly, citing issue driven motivation:

> I haven’t run across any woman that has looked at [running for elected office] as a career position. It’s issue driven. Female motivation [is] to make a difference in their community. It’s a motivation to make sure the services that the town or their community provides are available. (P15)

P7 and P17 personified these statements. P7 noted: “You have individuals like myself—who was just like, “oh my God, this is a really crappy sidewalk here and I can’t push my
baby carriage.” [And I decide] “I’m going to run!” P17 agreed, noting her own motivation and vision of a candidacy: “My first love is town [government]. [It’s] your quality of life—your garbage being picked up, your playgrounds, your recreation department, and you’re planning how your town is [getting all that done].”

P15 explained that women’s self-view of their capacity to effectively campaign and serve in the position if elected affects their decision to run for office: “So [women are] committed to a lot and just feel between [those commitments] and their regular full-time job, they don’t have the time that they would want to dedicate to the position.”

**Sorority Recruitment: Male versus Female Candidate Self-View.** Several participants reported differences in male and female potential candidates’ self-view. P9 discussed a female candidate’s vision and self-view and how that affects the ability to recruit female candidates. P9 compared the vision and self-view of male and female potential candidates:

> These men who run, they feel like they can do the job, they can do the campaigning and the women are like, “I don’t know, I don’t have the experience.” Women want to have the experience before they walk into a job where these men are like, “yeah, I can do it . . . . And women are afraid to fail, that would be horrific [in their minds]. (P9)

P12 also saw differences in the candidate self-view of women versus men. She stated that: “Women need to be asked [to campaign and serve] and told they have the skills to serve.” She added that: “Sometimes men need to be asked.” P17 also commented on the differences in the self-view and candidate vision between men and women.
I think women put more expectations on themselves [when deciding to run for office] and take it very, very seriously like: “I’ve got to work really hard.” and “Do I have the time?” I think they really consider all the pluses and minuses, the men, I think, are more confident because they assume they’re going to win. . . . The women really almost second guess themselves and take—even if they’re misdirected—they take the campaign work load a lot more serious. . . . And that’s obviously not true for everyone, but that’s what we’ve seen quite often. (P17)

P12 commented on the general nature of confidence: “Part of [being willing to run for office] is knowing how to project confidence. Which is a skill that needs to be worked on.” P9 commented on the nature of confidence: “Men show an incredible amount of confidence, they just do. Some of them, every once in a while, [may be] kind of indecisive by their nature, but all of them are like gung-ho, ready to do this.”

**Sorority Recruitment: Vision Subcategory – Siloed Networks.** The participants commented on the perceptions of the siloed nature of female networks. They noted that potential candidates are unable to identify and quantify the assistance they could receive in a run for political office, which ultimately affects a female candidate’s self-view and vision. The siloed nature of women’s networking, the participants stated, has a multilayered effect, impacting the effectiveness of potential candidates and the political committees.

P12 and P7 concluded that women’s networks were siloed and, as a result, women lacked network leveraging. The participants reported that this affects a potential female candidate’s self-view when evaluating a run for office, especially compared with their male counterparts. P12 shared:
A lawyer once told me a story about [how] she was talking to her next-door neighbor in suburban NJ over the fence, and they were talking about their daughters baking cookies or something, and it turned out her neighbor was . . . looking to hire counsel. [But] they didn’t have that [type of] relationship. Their relationship was about their daughters and cookies, so neither of them knew what each of the other one did professionally until they had this conversation. To her, it was an eye-opening moment about how [women] need to look at the people we know and see what [relationships we already have— like men often do]. (P12)

P7, concurred:

The social networks available to women are siloed, we [women] don’t exploit our relationships enough. I feel like [men] do that really well. When you’re volunteering and your kids are out with your elderly parents and socializing there, there’s power in that because of the relationship building. (P7)

P1 noted the general frustration she experienced when trying to persuade women to run for office due, in large part, to women’s self-view, but she also offered a networking solution to assist her own future recruitment to mitigate that frustration:

I would love to get more women, but my goal is to get a candidate. All things being equal, I’d rather have a woman, but I’m not going to wait, I’d be waiting forever. Because I can’t get women to step up and, I can’t figure a way to change that. Part of it is [the result of] systemic misogyny in society, in general, of course. They don’t feel that they can do it, or they’re used to being the workers and not the leaders. . . . I think we have to use the women who have been
successful to show the other women that they can be successful, success breeds success. (P1)

P24 shared her decision regarding recent personal recruitment. P24’s recollection illustrates the conflict that emerges that involves the potential candidate’s motivation, vision, and candidate self-view while recognizing their networks and as they decide whether or not to run for office:

After I was recruited, I ultimately decided not to run because I came to the realization that I could get more done [for my community] working [at my job] with a not-for-profit than I would on a town board [where] I would just be frustrated a lot. (P24)

The participants noted that the motivation, vision, and self-view of potential candidates often affected whether they eventually become a candidate. While the essence of sorority recruitment involves the empathic perceptions of recruitment by female committee members, the essence of Madonna recruitment as perceived by female committee members, involves a glorified vision of female candidacies by male political elites.

**Gendered Recruitment: Madonna Recruitment.** In accordance with answering Research Question 1, Madonna recruitment was described as the lived experiences of the participants as they witnessed gendered female candidate recruitment that was heavily influenced by male political elites. Madonna recruitment is gendered often with gendered expectations. Table 4.14 depicts the participant responses to the Madonna recruitment theme codes. The participants recalled experiences where male political elites sought out female candidates specifically because they were women. Of the 25 participants, 16
(64%) noted the role of male political elites in the female candidate recruitment process. P24 shared a gendered recruitment experience in a recent state race: [Our male town committee chair] said “We need to find a woman” to run for this seat.

P4, who was running for election this cycle, stated that she was recruited solely by male political elites, several of whom were her junior in political experience but who felt empowered to recruit her. P1 reported on another occasion where male political elites sought out a specific woman:

So, [male elected official] died. At his funeral, [male political elites] showed up looking to speak with [his wife]. They all went into a back room at the funeral parlor and convinced her to run to finish out [male elected official]’s term. They wanted to hold the seat [for the political party] and she had a recognizable name. They didn’t even wait until after the funeral. (P1)
Table 4.14
*Madonna Recruitment Theme Codes by Participant*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Male political elite recruitment of women</th>
<th>Unrealistic/fantasy</th>
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P19, a committee member and recent candidate, reported on gendered male political elite recruitment that seemed marked by potential female candidates needing to meet ever-increasing benchmarks of perceived femininity:

I think sometimes there’s this idea that [male recruiters] want a woman, but then they want a young woman, and then they want a young woman with kids. [For one state campaign] they wanted this picture of a young working woman with
kids who was going to be a candidate. And it was all [these men doing the recruiting], and I was like “I don’t think they have any freaking clue like how hard that would actually be to pull off.” I felt that they were looking for a picture . . . a fantasy. (P19)

P1 had witnessed the similar recruitment of a young woman:

[The male political elites] were trying to recruit this woman [with small children and were convinced she would agree to run]. I told them “forget it . . . it’s not going to happen. You are not going to convince a young working woman with three little kids, all under the age of 5 [to campaign non-stop for 6 months so that she can] leave them to go to Albany, a 100 miles away, 3 days a week.” And, I was right. She said no. And, by then, it was so late in the process, they ended up recruiting a man to run. (P1)

P24 recalled her own recruitment experience:

I got a call from [several male political elites] trying to convince me to run. [One of the political elite males was also an elected official] called several times, telling me that we could campaign together, fundraise together, that campaigning would be difficult but not horrible, and that a successful campaign was likely. I later spoke to [a female elected official in a similar seat] who candidly told me that [the male elected official] was not being completely honest with me. That it would be much more difficult to win the race and require significantly more campaign effort and work than I was being told. [The female elected official] was honest, but negative, about the prospects of winning the race. I decided not to run. (P24)
The participant reports of Madonna recruitment were described as gendered but not overtly adverse. Negative recruitment, however, was described as ageist, misogynistic, racist, or a combination of these adverse activities by the participants.

**Gendered Recruitment: Negative.** In accordance with answering Research Question 1, negative recruitment marked by ageism, racism, misogyny, or other overall adverse activity was described. The participants reported negative recruitment activities perpetrated by both men and women. They described these adverse activities as occurring when recruiting or generally interacting with female political committee members. Of the 25 participants, 24 (96%) noted the influence of good old boys’ networks on adverse recruitment or misogynistic interactions. Further, 21 (84%) participants noted they had experienced sexism and gendered messaging, and 20 (80%) reported they had experienced misogynistic interactions, all of which impacted female political recruitment. The participants also noted the use of social media as a tool of misogyny as well as an intersectionality between misogyny and racism and misogyny and ageism, all of which has had an impact on female candidate recruitment. Table 4.15 illustrates the responses to the theme of negative recruitment.
Table 4.15

Negative Recruitment Theme Subcategories and Codes by Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Misogynistic</th>
<th>Exclusionary</th>
<th>Old boys network</th>
<th>Intersectionality between race and misogyny</th>
<th>Sexism &amp; gendered messaging</th>
<th>Intersectionality between sexism &amp; racism</th>
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Negative Recruitment: Targeted Misogyny in Candidate Recruitment. The participants reported overt misogyny in recruitment. They stated that their committee simply did not recruit women. P25, a town committee member, stated: “[The committee] is a boys club. I don’t really think that they really care so much about having women out there and that doesn’t seem to faze them. They always tend to go towards [the guy].” P6, who was member of another town political committee, agreed: “[The committee] should recruit women but they don’t.” P3 also stated that her committee does not recruit women.

P19 commented on the adverse ageist treatment of potential female candidates by male political elites as they searched for a younger, more “Madonna-like” candidate:

[The male political elites] ignored women [for recruitment] who were at a stage where they could probably devote a lot more time to a [state representative] campaign. Women who [were] established, in their 50s, with their kids grown, and you just kind of think “why aren’t you contacting any of these other women? You know they’re showing up to committee meetings and they’re doing [political] committee stuff and why aren’t the [male political elites] reaching out to them?” (P 19)

P3 discussed a male elected official who involved himself in her committee’s recruitment and appeared to use a female candidacy for his own benefit:

So, [he views himself as the kingmaker and] decides that he should put a young lady up [against a local male candidate, he didn’t sanction, forcing] a primary. In the meantime, nobody helped [her], no one, to really show her the ropes or what to do. And of course, she lost badly. Again, it was [the elected official’s] candidate [and he didn’t help her]. (P3)
P2 reported gendered adverse advice and a misogynistic response to a female candidate:

I ran a fantastic candidate . . . . She put her heart out there . . . but she lost.

Towards the end of the campaign, she was told [by a male political elite] . . . to spend about $3,000 on a [campaign] mailer . . . she didn't have the money. But she [listened to him and] did it. When she lost, she . . . apologized to the [male political elite, for not winning, and he] said to her, “What did you think, you were going to win?” Why would you tell [a candidate] to put out money if you didn’t believe in her? You’re an authority and you [have] knowledge! How cruel can you be? How unsympathetic? I’m almost positive it was said [to her] because [she] was a woman. . . . They would’ve never said that to a man! Never! They would’ve patted him on the back and said, “You did a good job . . . . Maybe we’ll try to do it next time. You did good,” which is what I said to her, “You did fuckin’ good.” That [situation] pissed me off. (P2)

Several participants noted the effect of societal misogyny on the overall ability to recruit women to run for public office. P4 commented on the effect of societal misogyny on the campaigning by women, even caveating her own experience while doing so:

It’s difficult [as a woman] to be received as a person who is able to hold a job such as a supervisor, or a county legislator. . . . It is difficult to run as a woman to be in charge of some [elected] offices. It is difficult, but I’m not whining about it. (P4)

Other participants noted misogyny in some committee activity. P18 shared that even committee actions that appeared women friendly, actually were not: “[The woman’s
group] was given lip service once it was created. Like ‘we created the [women’s]
committee and now we’re done.’”

**Negative Recruitment: Sexist Tropes and Gendered Messaging.** The participants reported on the negative use of both gendered messaging and sexist tropes, especially via technology. P10, a town and county chair, reported pervasive misogyny that used sexist tropes to demean her leadership:

Someone told me the other day that I have a reputation of being unapologetic. And I said, “that’s really interesting, you know, what does that mean?” [They answered:] “Oh well, you know, there are [opposite political party people] who say you snarl at them.” Like, I’ve never snarled at anyone. I am tough, yes. Will, I come back at you if you’re characterizing me unfairly? Absolutely. But I said to the person: “that’s really interesting, do you think that a man would be characterized as unapologetic? Do you think that people would have a tough time dealing with [a man] who challenges them?” We [women] always have to break through those layers in order to be heard. . . . I don’t apologize for speaking my mind, saying my truth, and standing up for others who can’t. (P10)

P4, a committee member, a former elected official, and a former candidate for office, noted the difficulty of a gendered political race, gendered issue messaging, and the political loss that the participant linked to the messaging:

Look, they went after me [during my town supervisor race] about the fact that I had to raise the budget [when I served as mayor]. And [that] I don't know how to run a business . . . did they go after me as a woman? I don’t know. No matter
what type of skin you put forward on your persona. Shit hurts sometimes. . . . I
lost that [supervisor] race by seven votes out of 2,200. (P4)

P3 stated that gendered issue messaging was used to damage the reputation of and
ultimately unseat an incumbent woman: “The bail reform issue hurt her race, because [the
candidate’s] position was misrepresented [by her opponent’s campaign], and people
didn’t understand the issue.” P1 also commented sexist tropes used in the opponent’s
issue messaging and negative TV advertising. P1 concluded that this impacted the race in
that:

[Her opponent] ran on an alleged law and order issue. [His TV ads showcased]
the two big top sheriffs [implying that the male candidate was] going to keep us
safe and she’s not because she wanted bail reform . . . so they wanted us to
subconsciously conflate gender and strength, and I think that helped him win.

*Negative Recruitment: Misogynistic and Adverse Social Media Impacts.* Other
participants noted the use of sexist tropes, misogynistic social media posts, and the use of
technology to harass. P10, a town committee member, commented on the impact of
gendered, hostile social media:

I’ve been attacked on social media for my looks, my weight; you know that
doesn’t happen to men, it just doesn’t. . . . So, think about a woman going out
trying to run for office and being attacked on her looks or her weight; [being told]
go eat another sandwich—that’s one comment . . . That’s a rough place to be. . . .
My younger sister will call me up crying [because of] everything she sees on
Facebook [about me]. . . . I think that it’s very difficult for anyone to withstand
[the negativity], but for women, they look at it as . . . not wanting to put their families through that. (P10)

P9 reported ongoing misogynistic bullying activity by one of the male committee members, a former county political official, that had included social media, text messages, and emails: “It just doesn’t seem to stop. . . . It gets really, really, nasty. There was a lot of bullying, and I think some of it had to do with me being a woman and being in a leadership position.”

**Negative Recruitment: Perceptions of Elected Officials.** The participants who were elected officials at the time of the interview or who had been elected officials shared their misogynistic experiences. These interactions were between the participant and other candidates or elected peers, before and after being seated for office. The participants’ reported, and the research has shown, that prior candidate, election, and elected official’s experiences affect future local political committee recruitment.

P7, a committee member, candidate, and elected council woman who was not seeking reelection expressed concern about the misogyny she had experienced as an elected official:

Yeah, you know when in meetings . . . when you’re introducing legislation. There were several heated meetings where I very transparently and pointedly said: “just last meeting, you treated the same issue when the male colleague [spoke of this legislation] so different than now when it’s me.” And the only difference between the two of us—we hold the same position—is our gender. (P7)

P15 shared a misogynistic encounter with a fellow elected official when she brought up the issue of White privilege in a public meeting.
I was like, “this is about White privilege. . . . And if you don’t know exactly what White privilege is, or if you don’t know enough about it, please read up on it.”

And he went nuts on me, started screaming [in a public meeting]. (P15)

**Negative Recruitment: Intersectionality of Misogyny and Race.** The participants reported on their experiences on the intersectionality of misogyny and racial bias while campaigning door-to-door, as a candidate, or as an elected official. Of the eight participants who self-reported as a women-of-diversity, seven (87.5%) reported racist encounters at some point during the recruitment and/or campaign process. P20 reported on implicit racism while campaigning: “[Some people] won’t be racist to your face but will say something racist in the background.” P2, a more than 20-year resident of her town shared her experience of bias at the door, recalling what she was told while campaigning: “‘You’re not from here. You’ve moved into our town.’ It’s almost like you have to be born and raised here in order to run here in this particular town.”

P11, a committee member, candidate, and former elected official, described racial bias at the door that almost kept her from a future successful electoral run:

Because of racial bias at the door, during [my] first run [for town council], I almost didn’t run the second time, because of how I felt that people at the door treated me. . . . I definitely faced some pressure, some discrimination. . . . And, definitely, I felt it [from] men at the door . . . [but] I had one woman tell me [at the door when I was campaigning] that “it is starting to smell like the Bronx.”

(P11)

P11 continued, stating that the racist misogyny continued toward her as an elected official: “And, then, as a legislator, I had other people tell me I was trying to be like
Barack Obama and things like that.” P11, then added how historical treatment of people of color at the door, including concerns of personal safety, affects present candidate recruitment:

We don’t typically ask Black women to run—or black men—because of racism at the door. . . . The two [Black] women that we had run in the past 10 years of my being on the committee, they both faced racism at the door, and while they were already on the ballot, they jumped ship [dropped out of the race] halfway through the campaign. . . . They couldn’t take it anymore. They didn’t feel safe [campaigning]. (P11)

P5, a committee member, vice committee chair, and an elected councilwoman, added the stresses of board work as a woman and a Latina who was facing both misogyny and racism:

It’s just the levels of expectation that we’re required, as women, to maintain is always higher. . . . In addition to being a woman on a board, at my first department head meeting with the department heads, I was asked: “Well, now that you’re on the board, are we going to have to offer bilingual board meetings?” And I said, “Well, I mean, do you need a translator?” And they’re like, “No.” I said, “Okay, so then, we're all speaking English.” I don't really know where that question came [from]. It just annoyed the crap out of me. Right? So, in addition to me being a woman, I had this other job as me as a Latina, like, “Oh, so what are you going to do now? Are you going to translate this? Are you going to do this? Are we going to change now? Oh, so we going to accommodate you in an American society?” So, there’s all these other discriminatory or stereotypical
perceptions of people. So, and then that compounds your experience. So that’s, just one example of it. So, now you have to not only be the best woman, but you have to be the best American. You have to show that I denounce my cultural background, and that I am totally American so that you believe in me, and that I don’t have an agenda to take over the board with Latinas. (P5)

Only one participant, P21, did not report perceptions of negative candidate recruitment.

The 25 political committee members who were interviewed for this study shared their perceptions of female candidate recruitment and answered Research Question 1. Their lived experiences identified both gender-neutral and gendered recruitment activities that were undertaken by local political committees including affirmative recruitment, sorority recruitment, Madonna recruitment, and negative recruitment.

**Research Question 2**

Data were collected to answer Research Question 2: *What committee culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices, if any, do female political committee members perceive affect the local political committees’ ability to recruit female candidates?*

The perceptions of the participants resulted in the emergence of two themes with four subcategories about the culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices of local political committee recruitment. The two themes that emerged were strengths and barriers to recruitment. The theme of strengths describes the positive committee culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices that the participants note affect female candidate recruitment. The theme of barriers to recruitment describes the adverse committee culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices that the participants
noted affected female candidate recruitment. The subcategories under strengths, were human capital and formality. The subcategory under barriers to recruitment was lack of capacity. Table 4.16 depicts the categories answering Research Question 2.

**Table 4.16**

*Research Question Two: Emergent Themes, Subcategories, and Codes*

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<th>Codes</th>
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<td>Formality</td>
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<td>Barriers to</td>
<td>Lack of capacity</td>
<td>Unwelcoming, ineffective leadership, ineffective communication, insular or recycled recruiting, candidate pipeline, lack of support and honesty</td>
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<td>recruitment</td>
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**Committee Strengths.** In accordance with Research Question 2, the theme of strengths describes the positive aspects of culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices that the participants reported affecting the political committee’s female candidate recruitment activities. Subcategories within strengths include formality and human capital.

**Committee Strengths: Human Capital.** In accordance with Research Question 2, the participants noted the positive effect of human capital on committee culture, customs, norms, values, practices, and processes of female candidate recruitment. Of the 25 participants, 21 (84%) reported dedication to the committee and the member resilience as having a positive effect on these, nonpaid, all-volunteer committees’ female candidate recruitment activities. Table 4.17 illustrates the theme of strengths and subcategory of human capital.
Table 4.17

*Strengths Theme – Human Capital Subcategory and Codes by Participant*

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<th>Longstanding Support</th>
<th>Resilience</th>
<th>Fun, social</th>
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*Committee Strengths: Human Capital – Committee Dedication.* The participants plainly noted their years of dedication to their committee, in a nonpaid, volunteer, political position. The average number of years that a participant was involved with their
committee was 16.8 years. For several others, the number of years were significantly more than that. P10 commented on when she became involved. “[I have been involved] since I was 18. You know, 32 years, and I sort of grew up [in it].” P1 stated that she had been involved “for like 20 years, at least. Off and on [with] different positions.” P3 stated that “It has to be 22, 23 years, at least.” P8 stated: “[It’s been] more than 20 years.” P4 stated that she had begun participating around the age of 20, “so it’s been 45 years.” P8 shared her feelings about being on the committee:

I’m honored and privileged to have the role that I have. I think it’s very important for women to be in leadership roles, outside of elected positions, to shape who our elected leaders are and who work best to represent our goals and values. And I’m glad I get to shape that and be part of that process. (P8)

P17 personified the sentiment, describing dedication, resilience, and continued commitment despite the difficulty at times:

I ran in 2000, 2005, 2006, 2007, and in 2011, I won. [I] was reelected in 2015 and lost in 2019. I ran six times for the same position. [This election season] I am [the campaign manager for] the sheriff’s campaign. . . . I think the hardest job I ever had was county chair; the most thankless [job], unless you love herding cats—then its lots of fun. (P17)

The participants discussed their dedication to the democratic process. P11 cited her initial reason for running for office: “I ran for office with the intention of running to give people the choice because my opponent at that time was running unopposed for 14 years.” P20 shared a similar experience and belief that motivated her to initially run for office:
I learned that my county legislator was not running again and that there was no one [from my political party] that was going to be running in his place, so I was like: “How could that be? It was 2017 and no one is running?” So, I chose to throw my name in the hat, because why give someone a walk in the park? (P20)

P9 and P18 discussed the impact of dedication on the overall work of the committees, while P9 shared the results of her committee’s hard work:

We work very hard behind our candidates. We got behind one of the candidates—who actually won and credited [our committee] for all the help that we gave her. She won for county [elected position]. She’s only the second woman to hold that job in 200 years and the only [member of our party] that has ever had that position [in our county]. So, it was a biggie. (P9)

P18 described her continuing dedication to strengthen her committee and broaden its success for women: “Something I’d like to do is collaborate with other [groups] to ensure that women continue to advance.”

P16 commented on the public image of political committees: “People don’t have any idea how hard [committees] work. The door-to-door knocking, petitioning, independent petitions, knocking on more doors.”

The dedication reported by the participants was aided by the formality of the committees and was hampered by the barriers to recruitment that the participants also reported. Table 4.18 illustrates the participants’ responses to the strengths theme and formality subcategory.
Table 4.18

Strengths Theme –Formality Subcategory with Codes by Participant

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<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Committee Rules</th>
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Committee Strengths: Formality. In accordance with Research Question 2, 12 (48%) of the 25 participants noted that the formality of the political committee structure was a strength to their committees. The participants reported that the formalities of the
committee structure empowered committee members to hold other committee members accountable. P2 reported of interactions at the county level:

I was always the one [asking], “Excuse me, I have a question. Point of information, what is that for? Why are we doing that? Who’s benefiting? Explain to me. Explain to everybody else, because I seem to be a little baffled by it.” When that started happening, they started getting their notes a little bit better on what’s going on. [We held the Executive Committee accountable.] “How come we don’t have a copy of the treasurer’s report? How come we don’t have copies of the minutes being distributed to us prior to this meeting, or at least get[ting] them to us?” (P2)

Several participants used the tools of meeting management, like Robert’s Rules, to maintain order. P9 shared her meeting-management efforts. “I have managed to get a lot of the dysfunctional people off the committee when I was very firm with Robert’s Rules.”

The legislation that covers political committees, combined with committee rules and bylaws, as reported by the participants, permits a level of formal collegiality that had, in part, allowed for the continued dedicated participation of members of the committees.

**Committee Barriers to Recruitment – Lack of Capacity.** In accordance with Research Question 2, the theme of lack of capacity emerged to describe barriers to recruitment within committee culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices, that the participants reported affected the political committees’ female candidate recruitment activities. The participants reported that issues of capacity, often gendered, hindered the successful recruitment of women. The participants noted ineffective
leadership and communication, insular or recycled recruiting, lack of a candidate pipeline, committee members wearing “many hats,” and a general lack of honesty and support when dealing with candidates. Table 4.19 illustrates the lack of capacity theme.

Table 4.19

*Barriers to Recruitment Theme – Lack of Capacity Subcategory with Codes by Participant*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Unwelcoming</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Insular or recycled recruiting</th>
<th>Candidate pipeline</th>
<th>Siloed women’s networks</th>
<th>Lack of success breeds reluctance</th>
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The participants described many hats as committee members who were responsible for multiple responsibilities often due to a lack of active committee members.
Of the 25 participants, 17 (68%) noted that failing to see women as successful candidates resulted in a lack of a candidate pipeline and became itself a barrier to successful female recruitment. While, individually, each lack of capacity can act as a barrier to recruitment, collectively, the participants noted that these barriers affected the successful recruitment of female candidates by the committees.

**Committee Barriers to Recruitment – Lack of Effective Leadership.** The participants noted poor committee leadership and an overall unwelcoming nature of the committee meetings. P23 reported, “You know, . . . after the agenda, we go around the table . . . and nobody ever has anything to say, and I always do, and they always roll their eyes when it’s my turn.”

P25 expanded the discussion of the unwelcoming nature of her committee to new female committee members: “[When they get] new blood, newer participants into the committee . . . they’re usually men; there’s not a lot of woman on my committee.” P24 noted the general untenable nature of committee meetings: “The [committee] meetings are just horrible . . . they would start at 7:30 pm and wouldn’t end until after 10:00 pm. And, my kids were texting the whole time.” P13 noted that her political committee functions as a “clique.” P7 stated her concern about information and communication: “There wasn’t enough engagement. Just to inform people. . . . You know, 99% of the time, miscommunication then turns into assumptions that then turns into animosity and everybody goes to their own corners.”

**Committee Barriers to Recruitment – Lack of Effective Recruitment.** P1 discussed the insular nature of committee recruitment:
We ask our committee members if they know anybody [willing to run] and perhaps one other committee member has names in mind, we reach out to them and see if they’ll [run]. Occasionally, people come to us, but usually not. Besides me and one other person, there’s really no effort [to recruit]. . . . And, I’m not happy about it. (P1)

P25 discussed her committee’s habit of recycling candidates, “Well, it’s kind of like they recycle the same people, so you know who’s ever been a councilman, now he wants to run for supervisor; you know that’s how the progression has gone.” An inability to create a pipeline of candidates makes the recruitment process difficult each year as the committee needs to find new people each time. P12, a town and county committee chair cited this problem when trying to establish a pipeline:

Retention is another thing . . . we have a lot of really talented young women who want to serve. But they [serve on a municipal board] for 2 years or 4 years and then they’re just burnt out because they have their house, their kids, their work, and their husbands. You begin to understand why most of the members of the board are retired, you know from their professional life, and so, I think part of [why more] women [aren’t] running for office is the same sort of problem as “Why aren’t there more women in law firms, and why aren’t there more women on Wall Street and these other professions where you don’t have good control of your [time and] life.” (P12)

**Committee Barriers to Recruitment – Lack of Enough Active Members.** Several participants mentioned that the committees need additional members. Further, this lack of depth in the number of available committee members was linked, by some participants, to
the committees’ abilities to assist in committee activities including campaigning. Several participants cited this lack of committee depth as the reason that their campaign was less than successful.

P21 stated: “I need some young people on the committee; but they are so busy. I’m working on that. I will remain on the committee, and I will do whatever I need to do to help, but I think a person should be taking [committee leadership] over.” P5 concurred, and as a committee member, she illustrated her frustration with leadership and a lack of support for committee fundraising and outreach activities. She also alluded to the lack of committee members available to perform all the activities required of a successful, supportive committee, requiring her to wear “many hats”:

But I found it was just me and one [other] person. . . . But the both of us, we were like organizing [the fundraiser], heading it, there were no volunteers, and then [the chair] came to collect the money. So, it was like, “okay, I can’t think of it, create it, plan it, run it.” And I just found when it came to doing things, [the response] was like, “oh, that’s a great idea,” but there was no support. “Oh, that’s a great idea, but I’m too busy.” So, I just kind of, that year, we raised several hundred dollars. We could have probably done more, but, I mean, there just wasn’t a lot of help. So, that year, that” when I kind of just said, “you know what? I’m going to back up a little bit.” (P5)

The participants, 16 (68%) of whom had been candidates themselves, noted the lack of committee help that affected the successful recruitment of female candidates and their campaigns. P24, a former committee member and a recent campaign volunteer for a
county candidate, cited the general weakness of the committees, which was linked to the number of committee people available to assist with campaign work:

What was asked of the candidate was a lot. And, we had no [committee] support. [We] didn’t even know how to put together a campaign committee. And, no one could tell us where we needed to be and what was the best thing for us to do. [We were] stretched too thin. (P24)

P13, a committee member, county officer, and former candidate, shared her experience with the lack of honesty, committee support, and training on a recent run for county office:

I was told by my local committee “Oh, you know we support you and will help you.” I’m sure it was heartfelt, but it didn’t materialize into any real productive support. It’s such an obviously large part of your time to run for office, so when you don’t get the support [you were promised] that’s very discouraging. [Most of the training came from] webinars and, honestly, [Eleanor’s Legacy and other groups] that’s where I learned most of what I learned about campaigning. It wasn’t from the local committee at all. (P13)

P14 agreed about the lack of help by committees when running for election:

I feel like I didn’t have enough help when I ran. There was the lack of support from committees, and it’s almost like people go out and get a petition signed, they do their own petitions, and they’ve done their job. . . . I would like to see that people are a little more willing to get out there and help candidates, and I don’t know the answer to that [to get people to do that]. (P14)

P13 explained a lack of committee support’s larger impact:
If the committees aren’t going to make that commitment and a real honest commitment to support people, whether it’s a woman or anyone else to run, you’re going to continue to have this [recruitment] problem, right, because [running] is a huge commitment, and I think there’s also a lack of explaining to people in advance what is involved in running and [what is] required of you. (P13)

P17 was an outlier in this theme. P17 did not report any lack of capacity of their committee. On the contrary, P17 reported on their perceptions of committee strength.

The participants’ answers to the Research Questions 2 illustrate both significant strengths and weakness that the participants perceived as affecting the successful recruitment of women to run for political office.

**Summary of Results**

This descriptive phenomenological study examined the perceptions of female members of local political parties as they recruited female candidates to run for elected office. It explored the local political committee member’s gatekeeper activity and the committee members’ perception of the committees’ capacities to identify a gender-diverse candidate pool to recruit candidates within its established culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices. The population chosen for this study was female members of local political committees located in five counties within a NYS judicial district.

The researcher interviewed 25 female committee members. These 25 women represent 20 political committees in 17 towns. The female committee members from each
of the five counties of the judicial district were interviewed. Both Democratic and Republican woman were interviewed.

Each of the 25 interviews was recorded and transcribed by a transcription service. The researcher then coded each interview using line-by-line coding so that the essence of the participants’ experiences could be revealed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The result of the coding process led to the creation of a holistic account of the perceptions of the female political committee members of the judicial district as they recruited female candidates for elected office.

Data were collected to answer Research Question 1: *Do female local political committee members perceive that local political committee candidate recruitment is gendered or gender neutral?* The perceptions of the interviewees resulted in the emergence of four themes about female candidate recruitment from the codes and categories expressed. The gender-neutral theme was labeled as affirmative recruitment. The gendered recruitment themes were labeled sorority recruitment, Madonna recruitment, and negative recruitment.

Data were collected to answer Research Question 2: *What committee culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices, if any, do female political committee members perceive affect the local political committees’ ability to recruit female candidates?* The perceptions of the interviewees resulted in the emergence of two themes with four subcategories about the culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices of local political committee recruitment. The themes that emerged were strengths and lack of capacity.
Municipal descriptive data and the participant demographic data were collected to provide a realistic account of the on-the-ground realities of the local political committee recruitment of women for elected office. This study adds to the body of literature on political recruitment practices of political parties by investigating recruitment at the local level in a diverse area. Local-level recruitment is viewed as an essential area of research that requires additional investigation (Fox & Lawless, 2010, 2011; Frederick, 2014; Gallagher & Marsh, 1988; Preece et al., 2016; Sanbonmatsu, 2006).
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Female political underrepresentation occurs worldwide (IPU, 2021). As a result, women are not descriptively represented parallel or nearly parallel to their population in the world or in most nation states (IPU, 2021). Without descriptive representation (representation that is directly reflective of the population), the lived experiences of women are unable to animate substantive representation (representation molded by lived experiences).

While women account for almost half of the world’s population at 49.6%, women only hold 25.5% of the world’s national legislative seats (IPU, 2021). The U.S. female population is higher than the world average at 50.8% (USCB, 2021a). Women also hold more U.S. legislative seats than the world average, at 26.5% (142) of the total (535) U.S. congressional seats (CAWP, 2021b). Compared to the rest of the world, the U.S. is ranked 67th based upon its number of women in elected national office (IPU, 2021). In NYS, women account for more than 53% of the population, yet they hold only 34.3% of the state’s legislative seats (CAWP, 2021b; NCSL, 2021). NYS is ranked 16th in the nation for its rate of women in elected representation (CAWP, 2021b). NYS has never elected a female governor.

The American political party system is central to the election process that includes the identification of candidates to run for office (Bowman & Kearney, 2011; Bucchianeri, 2018; Butler & Preece, 2016; Fox, 2011; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Lowi et al., 2019;
Pecorella & Stonecash, 2006; Seligman, 1961). Political parties are vibrant organizations with established customs, norms, and values (Adams & Smrek, 2018; Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2016; Kenny, 2014; Lovenduski, 2011). Further, the local political committees of these parties, the committee members, and political elites are a critical recruitment tool of candidates (Bowman & Boynton, 1966; Broockman, 2014; Bucchianeri, 2018; Butler & Preece, 2016; Fox, 2011; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Frederick, 2014; Miller & Stokes, 1963; Pettey, 2018; Sanbonmatsu, 2006; Seligman, 1961). Female candidates have stated that support from local political committees is an essential piece of the decision to run for office (Broockman, 2014; Bucchianeri, 2018; Butler & Preece, 2016; Fox, 2011; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Frederick, 2014; Pettey, 2018; Sanbonmatsu, 2006). Further, election to a local or state legislative office is a stepping-stone to higher state and federal office (Sanbonmatsu, 2006). Of the 101 women elected to serve in the 116th U.S. Congress, 58 (57%) previously held a lower elective office (CAWP, 2020c). Consequently, a means to increase female representation on the state or national level requires an increase in the percentage of women elected at the local level (Sanbonmatsu, 2006). Given that fewer women run for office, research about the recruitment of women by local committees is needed. This descriptive phenomenological study sought to determine whether female local political committee members perceived local female political candidate recruitment as gendered or gender neutral and, if the female local political committee members perceived the committees’ culture, customs, norms, processes, and practices as gendered or gender neutral.
This study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. Do female local political committee members perceive that local political committee candidate recruitment is gendered or gender neutral?

2. What committee culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices, if any, do female political committee members perceive affect the local political committees’ ability to recruit female candidates?

This descriptive phenomenological study examined female recruitment practices of local political party committees. The sample chosen for this study were female local political party committee members in a chosen judicial district within NYS. The sample of 25 female committee members were interviewed. Stratified purposeful sampling was utilized to make certain that each county was represented. Referential sampling was used to supplement the participant list. Email addresses, used to solicit participation, were gathered from local political websites. A total of 152 female committee members were contacted by email; 19 female committee members responded, and 18 were interviewed. Seven female committee members were referred to the researcher by other committee member participants. Each of those referred female committee members were also interviewed. A total of 25 female committee members were interviewed. These 25 female committee women represented 17 towns and 20 political committees. Female committee members, both Democratic and Republican, from each of the five counties of the judicial district were interviewed.

This study used archival, public, census demographic, and election data to provide descriptive background data. This descriptive data supplements the 25 semi-structured personal interviews to determine the methods of female candidate recruitment. The semi-
structured interviews were separated into two sections. The first set of questions were foundational questions that addressed each committee member’s history with the committee and their committee’s activities. The second grouping of questions were five open-ended questions in the Moustaskas (1994) form which permitted the researcher to collect data about female political recruitment by female local political committee members.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed. During the interview, the researcher made contemporaneous notes. Following the interviews, the researcher took additional notes to capture thoughts after the interview’s end. As the transcripts and notes were reviewed, several themes and categories emerged.

**Implications of Findings**

**Summary**

The phenomenological data findings suggest that while gender-neutral activities occur, much of the recruitment, by individuals and the committees, was perceived by female local committee members as gendered. The background descriptive municipal data of the 17 municipalities represented by the 25 local political committee members as well as the municipal findings of county executive leadership and county legislatures support these findings. All of which points toward a gendered approach to local political committee recruitment. Descriptive data of the judicial district and the participant municipalities created a contemporaneous picture of the on-the-ground realities of female candidate recruitment. Municipal election data revealed a level of female representation below the national and state averages as well as low female candidacy rates. Further, the phenomenological data revealed misogynistic recruitment activities, as well as an
intersectionality of misogyny and racism in recruitment, campaigning, and even after a successful election. An intersectionality of misogyny and ageism was also reported by the participants. Multiple barriers to female candidate recruitment exist, which, when combined, either in whole or in part, can create an intersectionality barricade to successful recruitment.

Complex findings were reported on the day-to-day workings of the committees. Phenomenological and descriptive data revealed weaknesses of capacity in the local political committee system: a lack of effective networking, an inability to create candidate pipelines, and inadequate committee support to assist recruited candidates. These demonstrated weaknesses are, in some committees, further weakened by a toxicity of misogyny, racism, and ageism in committee activities.

Conversely, other the phenomenological and descriptive data reveal strong individual committee member commitments of time, effort, responsibility, and vision. Many of these committee members were lifelong, unpaid political volunteers who were relentlessly dedicated to the success of their committees and endorsed political candidates, even when those success goals are difficult, if not impossible, to attain.

Findings in Response to Research Question 1

Research Question 1 sought to determine if the female local political committee members perceived recruitment as gendered or gender neutral. Where applicable, a notation is made if the descriptive data supports the phenomenological findings. There are three primary findings in response to Research Question 1.

The First Finding of Research Question 1. The first primary finding of Research Question 1 is that the local female political committee members perceived the
recruitment process as gendered. While the activities that support recruitment may be
gender neutral, the actual recruitment of individuals was described as significantly
gendered. Local political committee members described activities where both female and
male political committee members participated in gendered recruitment. That gendered
recruitment, according to the participants, fell into the three major subcategories of
sorority recruitment, Madonna recruitment, and negative recruitment. The essence of
sorority recruitment is the empathetic and protective—but gendered—approach female
committee members experience when recruiting potential female candidates. Madonna
recruitment describes gendered female candidate recruitment heavily influenced by male
political elites and marked by an exaggerated expectation of female electability in some
races. Madonna recruitment was reported as gender biased but not overtly misogynistic
or adverse in nature. Negative recruitment describes gendered female candidate
recruitment that was adverse.

Further, a high majority of the participants had personally experienced gendered
recruitment when they were candidates for political office as well as when they
participated in recruitment activities. These gendered actions, as well as others, impact
the political committee members’ recruitment activities. Both descriptive and
phenomenological data support this finding.

**Second Primary Finding of Research Question 1.** The second primary finding
of Research Question 1 is that adverse activities: misogyny, racism, and ageism were
reported during local political committee recruitment. Further, there exists an
intersectionality of these adverse activities. An intersectionality of misogyny and racism
and an intersectionality of misogyny and ageism were reported by the participants.
Misogynistic and racist recruitment activities were reported to have occurred during the recruitment process, campaigning, and often continued past the point of a successful campaign into the now-elected female’s term of office. Of the eight female committee members of color interviewed, seven (87.5%) noted racist and misogynistic encounters. Female elected officials of color reported that racist misogynistic encounters occurred after election and were perpetrated by fellow elected officials. Further, the female elected allies of people of color reported aggressive misogynistic retorts from fellow elected officials when racist activities were identified and called out as such.

The intersectionality of misogyny and racism and misogyny and ageism occurred in traditional recruitment activities as well as social media and online activities. The findings suggest that online and remote activities continue or multiply the effects of negative recruitment, misogyny, racism, and ageism. Further, while the intersectionality of misogyny and racism and misogyny and ageism affect potential female candidates, it also can negatively affect female recruiters and their recruitment efforts—especially when misogyny and racism emerge within the local political committee. The descriptive municipal data support these phenomenological findings in that it may explain, at least in part, the demographic makeup of local elected town boards and the dearth of women willing to run for elected office.

Third Primary Finding of Research Question 1. The third primary finding of Research Question 1 is that while recruitment, generally, is perceived as difficult for local political committee members, the recruitment of women is perceived as extremely difficult due in part to an intersectionality barricade that potential female candidates encounter. The findings reveal that while individual factors may negatively affect female
candidate recruitment, when combined, these individual factors seem to create an intersectionality barricade to female political recruitment. This intersectionality barricade is often too difficult for some potential female candidates to bypass or overcome.

Potential female candidates often have competing responsibilities at home, work, and within social or professional networks, that make the decision to run for office complicated and difficult. The participants noted the demands of these responsibilities are significantly affected by socioeconomic and traditional cultural norms that continue to exist. These responsibilities significantly impact a potential female candidate’s availability and therefore affect the decision on whether that potential candidate decides to run for office. A few (three) participants from separate committees noted that to be considered for candidacy there was an expectation that the candidate be a local political committee member. These restrictions limit the candidate pool even further and require yet another activity of a potential female candidate prior to recruitment.

The participants noted that potential female candidates often are negatively affected by self-doubt. Additionally, the participants noted that female candidates generally have a lower candidate self-view and lack campaign confidence in comparison to their male peers. Further, a lack of women modeling candidacies by running for office and succeeding as elected officials made it more difficult to convince future female candidates to run.

A lack of intersectionality across female social capital networks, as described by the participants, also negatively affects a potential female candidate’s confidence, self-view, and self-esteem as it relates to running for elected office. This lack of social capital network intersectionality led to an inadequate application of a potential female
candidate’s social capital networks. The participants reported that female social capital networks remain siloed, underutilized, and are not leveraged to the benefit of potential female candidates or female committee members. Potential female candidates who siloed their networks into personal or family-based networks separated those networks from other networks that were professional, or career based. Failing to integrate social networks constricted each network’s overall social capital potential and assistance for female candidates and female committee member recruiters. Further, the participants noted that most social networks remain gendered. This gendering continues the existence of homosocial capital as identified by Bjarnegård (2013), which, by its nature, is exclusionary to some or even most women. The combined phenomenological and descriptive data support this finding.

Findings in Response to Research Question 2

Research Question 2 sought to determine if the female local political committee members perceived that committee culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices of local political committee recruitment affected the local political committees’ ability to recruit female candidates. The descriptive data supports the phenomenological finding.

The Primary Finding of Research Question 2. The primary finding of Research Question 2 is that the participants perceived that committee culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices do affect the local political committee’s ability to recruit female candidates. Committees were found to be predominantly composed of committed, unpaid citizen volunteers who understood, and tried to rectify, the weaknesses of the committee system. The participants reported that the committees often lacked a capacity
to assist a female candidate’s campaign, despite a strong committee desire to do so. The committees and their members were found to be stretched too thin. Further, these conditions are exacerbated by committees where internal conflicts arose, especially when that conflict was rooted in misogyny, racism, or ageism. In the latter situations, repairs to the committee system seem insurmountable to the participants.

Committee difficulties also include attracting new members and volunteers to the committees. Volunteers and new committee members often open doors to untapped social networks that, in turn, could identify potential candidates as well as talented individuals to support candidates. Further, the committee members reported that they were both frustrated by and resigned to the continuation of this problem of attracting new members and additional volunteers.

The participants also noted that potential female candidates had not emerged from independent training organizations which had been identified, in the research, as a means to creating candidate pipelines. While the committee members referred potential female candidates to independent organizations (e.g., Eleanor’s Legacy, VoteRunLead, She Should Run) for training and financial support, the findings indicate that potential female candidates, previously unknown to the committees, do not emerge from these groups to run for local political office.

Findings in Response to the Descriptive Data

**Municipal and Participant Descriptive Data.** The 25 local female political committee members interviewed for this study were members of 20 local Democratic or Republican committees in 17 municipalities across the five counties of a NYS judicial district. Each of the 17 participant municipalities were governed by an elected board or
council led by an elected supervisor, mayor, or president. To maintain a level of consistency, the municipal board data only pertains to these 17 municipalities represented by the interviewees. All findings are based upon the descriptive data. Municipal descriptive data findings are presented in a manner that do not identify the municipality to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees. There are three primary findings of the descriptive data.

First Primary Finding of the Descriptive Data. The first primary finding of the descriptive data is that there is female underrepresentation in the judicial district on the county executive, county legislative, and participant municipal board levels, despite a greater female population across the judicial district. Further, the rate of women in positions of elected leadership is significantly lower than even the general female representation rate. Of the 29 county executives that have led the five counties since each county’s adoption of the county executive model, three (10%) have been women. Of the 17 participant municipalities, only one (5.9%) board had a woman in a position of leadership.

Female representation at the county legislative level is low as well. Of the 97 county legislators that served on the five county legislatures, only 24 (24.7%) were women. One county was an outlier, accounting for nine (37.5%) of the total female legislators representing the counties of the judicial district. When that county’s data are removed from the data set, the remaining four counties have a female county legislative rate of only 18%.

The rate of descriptive female representation on the participant local municipal boards is significantly lower than the state or national average. While women account for
51% of the participant municipalities, women account for only 19.8% (18) of the 91 total board members. Five (29.4%) municipalities have no female representation on their local municipal board.

Underrepresentation is not limited to election. The women in these 17 participant municipalities were also underrepresented on the election ballot, resulting in a low female candidacy rate in the participant municipalities. Over the course of three election cycles, a total of 56 (20.8%) women were among the 269 candidates who ran for office in these 17 municipalities. Further, across the three election cycles, only four (7.8%) women ran for a leadership position on their local municipal board.

**Second Primary Finding of the Descriptive Data.** The second primary finding of the descriptive data is that data relationships appeared to emerge from the descriptive municipal data. There appears to be a relationship between female population rates and municipal board gender composition. Female population above 50% may be a predictor, but not a determinant, of the potential for a greater number of female board representation. Of the 18 female board members, 14 (77.8%) came from municipalities with a female population above 50%. There was an outlier with one municipality with a population of 51.8% not having any female representation on its board.

Higher rates of female population may also be a predictor of greater board diversity. Of the 12 persons of color elected to these boards, eight (66.7%) were elected to municipalities with a female population above 50%. Four (57.1%) of the women of color were also board members of municipalities with a female population above 50%. Overall, the participant boards lacked diversity: 12 (13.2%) of the 91 town board
members were people of color; seven board members (7.7%) were women of color; one (5.9%) municipality had a male person of color elected to a leadership position.

Municipality median household income may not be a direct indicator of strong female board representation. Interestingly, the two highest and two lowest median income municipalities accounted for half of the women and the majority of persons of color sitting on municipal boards: nine (50%) of the 18 female board members and eight (66.7%) of the 12 people of color elected to the boards with the two highest and two lowest median household incomes. Further, the two municipalities where a woman and a person of color are in positions of leadership were within this group of four municipalities. The sole municipality with a women leader had the highest municipal median household income and the municipality with a person of color in the leadership position had the lowest median household income.

*Third Primary Finding of the Descriptive Data.* The third primary finding of the descriptive data is the demographic information gained about the committees and committee members: 19 (95%) of the participant committees were reported as at least half or majority female; eight (40%) of the committees were reported to be majority female; 10 (50%) of political committees had a virtually even level of male and female participation on the committee; one (5%) was reported as comprised solely of women; one (5%) committee of the 20 was reported as majority male.

Of the 25 committee members, 15 (60%) were existing or former members of the local political committee leadership, and 13 (52%) were existing or former members of their respective county executive committee leadership. The average age was 58 years, the median age was 58 years, and the mode age was 46 years. Of the 25 participants, 19
(76%) reported that they were married, 15 (60%) reported that they had children, and eight (32%) participants self-identified as women of color.

Of the 25 participants, 14 (56%) female committee members had, themselves, previously run for elected office. Further, six (24%) participants were existing elected officials and two (8%) were previously elected to public office; six (24%) declared they were running for office in 2021.

The average number of years a participant had served on their respective local political committee was 16.8 years, the median was 15 years, and the mode was 4 years. The participants reported three main motivations for joining a political committee: civic duty, local or national issue concerns, and family influence. Of the participants, 16 (64%) stated that their motivation to join the town committee was issue driven. Of those 16, 10 (62.5%) participants cited an issue of a local nature, and seven of the 10 (70%) said that a local environmental issue motivated them to join the committee; six (24%) committee members stated that concern with national leadership motivated them to join their local political committee after the 2016 election cycle.

Of the 25 participants, 13 (52%) were employed in the public sector in either public services, social work, or education, 10 (40%) participants were employed in the private sector, and two (8%) were employed in the not-for-profit sector; six (24%) participants reported that they worked in the legal profession as a lawyer or legal assistant.

**Interpretations and Significance of the Implications of Findings**

The fundamental implication of this study’s findings is that female committee members perceive much of candidate recruitment as gendered. Further, despite a strong
female committee member presence, female committee members in positions of leadership at the committee, county, and state level, multiyear dedication of members to the committees, and a belief by the participants of the importance of women as candidates and elected officials, the recruitment of women for local political office is perceived by the participants, and historically proven by the data, to be difficult. The phenomenological findings suggest several common concerns of potential female candidates that negatively affect female candidate recruitment. When combined, however, either in full or in part, these individual difficulties often create an intersectionality barricade to recruitment which, for many women, may be just too difficult to overcome or bypass. Further, the findings show that the prevalence of misogyny and the intersectionality of misogyny and racism, and misogyny and ageism have a deleterious effect on positive female political candidate recruitment.

The findings indicate that misogyny occurs in recruitment and campaigning, and it often continues after a successful election; all of which affects recruitment. The findings suggest that these experiences shared among the social and professional networks of women affect a potential female candidate’s decision whether to run for election, to put herself out there. The findings also suggest that the prevalence of sexist tropes and misogyny in and on social media platforms, as well as online meeting tools (e.g., Zoom, Teams, GoToMeeting), have a negative impact upon female candidate recruitment. The phenomenological findings indicate that such negative online platform interactions have a residual effect, since they are occurring in a universally open platform, and they are recorded publicly, in some cases, for posterity.
The findings suggest that the obligations of career and family seem to make women more cautious and less willing to spend the time to run for office when a positive outcome seems unattainable, or the path to success is uniquely difficult. Further, the phenomenological findings suggest that women, generally and comparatively, are more concerned about their ability to campaign and be effective as an elected official. That desire for definitive, effective outcomes often prompts potential female candidates to choose to affect change in their community through civic and not-for-profit volunteerism, rather than a run for office. In addition to familial and/or career commitments, the findings suggest that pervasive misogyny affects recruitment.

The municipal descriptive data findings indicate a low rate of descriptive representation in general municipal board membership, and an especially low rate of representation at the leadership levels. This is due, at least in part, to a low rate of female candidacy. Equitable female representation is not merely tested at the ballot box, it is also tested at the point of candidacy as well. This dearth of women in local board management or leadership positions has a ripple effect to other, especially higher, positions. The findings suggest that without a pipeline of formerly elected female officials with name recognition and a record of local representation, it is simply harder to obtain gender parity in statewide representation.

Further, misogyny, sexist tropes, and negative experiences, as indicated by the findings, affect female committee members while they perform their recruiting activities. Many of the committee member recruiters recalled similar first-hand experiences. While the findings show that female recruiters are supportive and offer encouragement to women candidates, and generally desire a female candidate to run for office, the female
recruiter’s shared lived experience makes the female recruiter more likely to understand a potential female candidate’s hesitancy and, thus, at times, were less likely to aggressively recruit a cautious, but recruitable, potential female candidate. Conversely, male recruiters, the findings suggest, often aggressively recruit some cautious potential female candidates unsuccessfully and to the detriment of other women willing to run for office. The findings show that only when a woman self-identifies as a potential candidate, do these recruitment conflicts ease. More women, therefore, the findings suggest, must see themselves as natural candidates. A candidate whose lived experiences can help them win an election, aid them in effectively serving, and who will be provided with the requisite committee support to run a successful campaign.

A disturbing finding was the rampant level of misogyny and racism that the committee members endured and witnessed. Of the eight committee members who self-identified as a woman of color, seven (87.5%) recalled an interaction of racism when being recruited, while campaigning, and/or continuing after a successful election. Further, the findings show that calling out a racist act or action was often met with an increased racist and/or misogynistic response. Participation in the democratic process on the local level is the most basic act of civic culture. The pervasive nature of racist encounters is detrimental to the entire system and undermines the very fabric of democracy in the subject area.

Over 39.7% of the population of the judicial district area was diverse. The prevalence of misogyny and racism in the findings suggests an issue for concern for the civic and general health of the district as well as the continued ability for committees to recruit candidates. Further, these encounters, as reported in the findings, have increased
in intensity over the last few election cycles. So, the impact of such racist misogynistic activities has a propensity to continue to negatively impact recruitment going forward.

To effectively support all, but especially female candidates, the findings show that most of the participant committees require additional members, training applications in campaign tasks and activities, and increased fundraising capabilities. The findings indicate that the present committee members have multiple competing committee responsibilities which diminish the overall effectiveness of the committee. Lack of committee effectiveness has a high negative impact on the recruitment of women since the committees often do not have the capacity to offer specific campaign management activities including campaign training, fundraising, public relations, volunteer engagement, and voter outreach on a uniform and consistent basis. Additionally, the findings show that the committees are seeking, but have mostly been unsuccessful at adding new members who can broaden the recruitment abilities of committees as well as provide additional resources for potential candidates.

A disturbing implication of the findings is the prevalence of misogyny and racism on the committee level. The findings show that misogynistic and racist interactions during committee level activities undermine the effectiveness of the committee and damage committee cohesion. Since all committee activities are on a volunteer basis, any toxic action or activity has a swift negative impact on the committee. Already overburdened with low active membership and significant responsibilities, adverse activities can cause irreparable harm to committees, making an already strained recruiting process even more difficult.
The importance of local elections cannot be overstated. The decisions of locally elected officials affect the day-to-day quality of life of the municipality. Further, locally elected officials are often tapped to run for higher office in the local municipality, in the county, or in the state. It is at the state level where critical civic decisions are made, from voting rights to public health to education to drawing congressional election districts. Without additional women running for and serving at the local municipal level, affecting local-level management, and creating a stepping-stone pipeline, a significant increase in female descriptive representation on the local and NYS legislative level will remain difficult, occurring only incrementally as it has done thus far.

**Emerging Theory**

Emerging from the findings of this study is the foundation of a theory that attempts to explain why there is gender disparity in the recruitment of candidates for political office on the local, county, or state level. The theory, entitled gendered recruitment theory, explains that there is a myriad of recruitment activities that are employed during the recruitment process that individually, or combined, can serve as a barrier to the recruitment of women. Further, when combined in all or in part, these barriers could create an intersectionality barricade to recruitment that a potential candidate cannot get over or bypass. Because of the nature of sorority, Madonna, and negative recruitment, this theory may also be applicable to any marginalized group because it can be applied effectively to the findings that discuss the intersectionality of misogyny and racism, and misogyny and ageism.
**Theoretical Framework of Emerging Theory**

The theoretical framework for gendered recruitment theory emerged from this study. Each frame, individually or in concert with another frame, can explain recruitment activities. Therefore, while each frame functions independently, potential female candidates could be exposed to overlapping activities from more than one frame throughout the recruitment process. Affirmative recruitment is the only gender-neutral recruitment activity. The three other frames, sorority recruitment, Madonna recruitment, and negative recruitment, all consist of gendered recruitment activities.

**Affirmative Recruitment.** Affirmative activities are described as the gender-neutral activities undertaken when recruiting candidates. Examples of such activities include candidate searches that seek out civically minded individuals with community involvement, vetting processes, and committee interviews. While similar activities may overlap gendered recruitment, affirmative recruitment was described by the participants as being marked by a gender-blind approach to activities.

**Sorority Recruitment.** Sorority recruitment describes gendered interactions between potential female candidates and female recruiters. At its core, the essence of this theme illustrates the empathetic and protective—but gendered—approach female committee members experience when recruiting potential female candidates. Sorority recruitment was described by the participants as being marked by a concern with a potential candidate’s caretaker concerns, the candidate’s self-view, the candidate’s motivation, and siloed women’s networks.

**Madonna Recruitment.** Madonna recruitment describes recruitment activities undertaken by male political committee members and male elected officials as they
recruit women to run for office. Madonna recruitment was described as biased but not overtly misogynistic in nature. Madonna recruitment describes the male recruitment of women based primarily or solely on gender with an exaggerated expectation of female electability grounded in the glorification of male perceptions of femininity.

**Negative Recruitment.** Negative recruitment describes the gendered female candidate recruitment activities that were seen by the participants as being adverse, misogynistic, ageist, and/or racist.

**Connection of the Findings to the Literature**

There are several connections of this study to the literature. The connections are mixed. While some of this study’s findings support the established literature, other findings of this study conflict with the existing literature.

**Gendered Recruitment**

Similar to the findings of the research highlighted in the review of the literature, this study’s findings indicate that recruitment activities are gendered. This study supports the findings of other researchers. It supports research findings where, in whole or in part, the research concluded that political recruitment differences exist depending upon the potential candidate’s gender. This study, however, in contrast to much of the review of literature, identifies the impact of traditional gender roles as a barrier to candidate recruitment. Further, the descriptive and phenomenological data suggest a socioeconomic barrier to entry that appears to negatively impact effective female candidate recruitment.

**Post-Modern Female Candidate Recruitment.** The findings of this study are in line with early mid-century and post-modern literature in the comparative strengths and availability of male social networks versus those of female social networks. The early
mid-century studies cited strong social networks of male potential candidates (Jacob, 1962; Seligman, 1961; Welch, 1978; Werner, 1968). This study found that women’s social networks were siloed and not leveraged to best benefit women as potential candidates. Post-modern concerns about public support (Welch, 1978; Werner, 1968) paralleled to this study’s participants’ experiences that cited social media harassment were barriers to female candidate recruitment.

**Female Candidate Recruitment.** Fox and Lawless (2010) reported that women are recruited less often than men. The findings of this study found that where women were recruited, they often were not recruited successfully. The findings of this study, however, do support the overarching findings of Butler and Preece (2016) and Fox and Lawless (2004) who found potential female candidates skeptical about the amount of assistance that they could expect from local political committees and elites. The results of this study’s findings differed, however, in that skepticism was based in the historically low capacity of the committee to actuate effective support. Further, this study supported the Fox and Lawless (2010) study that stated that gender determined whether candidates were recruited. Since this study found that recruitment was significantly gendered, it aligns, in that way, with the Fox and Lawless study. This study, however, did not align with some findings of the Crowder-Meyer (2013) study that found that the gender of party leadership yielded more female candidates. While the participants of this study cited the importance of women in party leadership positions, the descriptive data illustrate that the prevalence of women in those leadership positions did not seem to have a significant impact on an increase in the number of women who ran for office or the descriptive representation in the participant municipalities.
The findings of this study both support and diverge from Sanbonmatsu’s (2002) study. This study’s findings certainly confirm that the political parties’ ability to recruit candidates shape the representation on the local and state level. However, this study illustrated an effort of party elites to recruit women but that the capacity to do so was lacking. In contrast to Broockman (2014), Butler and Preece, (2016), Crowder-Meyer (2013), Fox and Lawless (2010, 2011), and Sanbonmatsu (2002), the findings of this study show that women are recruited but are often not recruited successfully, judiciously, or, at times, justly. The findings regarding misogyny and ageism speak to this where women were positively positioned to run for office but were overlooked because of the Madonna recruitment practices undertaken by the male political elites. This study confirms the overarching conclusion of the Fox and Lawless (2010) study that found that the gender of the political candidate determined whether a political candidate was recruited. The findings of sorority, Madonna, and negative recruitment speak to the gendered nature of local female candidate recruitment. The descriptive municipal data confirms the findings of Broockman (2014), which stated that political gatekeepers determine who gets on the ballot and, essentially, determine the chances of a woman’s election to office.

**Gendered Differences Between Democratic and Republican Recruitment.**

The findings of this study illustrate that both parties need to be more effective in the recruitment of female candidates. The descriptive municipal data illustrates a generally low number of female candidates regardless of party. This study supports the overall findings of Bucchianeri (2018) and Hennings and Urbatsch (2015, 2016) who found that,
generally, more women must be recruited by both parties to reduce female underrepresentation.

**Women as Candidates.** This study aligns with the research that discusses female candidate perceptions of the work required of a candidacy (Frederick, 2014; Miller, 2015). The participants in this study reported female candidates often were concerned, sometimes disproportionately or inaccurately, with the demands of a candidacy, and that those perceptions negatively impacted female candidate recruitment.

**Gendered Campaign Issues.** The findings of this study clearly show that gendered, misogynistic campaign experiences affect the effective recruitment of women. Additionally, this study’s findings suggest that potential female candidates believe they must work harder than their male colleagues to win elections. These findings support Brooks (2011), Calfano and Djupe, (2011), Frederick (2014), and Herrick (2016). The findings also suggested a negative impact of misogynistic social media and campaign messaging as a barrier to recruitment and the election of women. This finding supports Dowling and Miller (2015), and Shaw et al. (2018).

**Mitigation of Female Underrepresentation.** Some research has concluded that increased female representation is possible and likely in certain situations. Stiles and Schwab (2009) found positive results for female candidates in suburban areas. They suggested that even increased female representation was likely. Given the specific location of the studied judicial district, this study’s findings disagree with Stiles and Schwab (2009).
Limitations of the Study

The study was limited by its inability to attract an equal participation of Republican women to Democratic women. Four Republican women agreed to be interviewed. While the Republican women who participated reported similar perceptions to those of the Democratic women, without a greater representation of the Republican women, comparisons or differences due to party affiliation could not be made. The study was also limited by its exclusion of male committee members to interpret or solidify Madonna recruitment.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Committees

Committee Strength. The findings of this study revealed participant concerns about the strength of the committees. The majority (75%) of the participants reported this concern and noted that committee strength was related to effective recruitment and general support of candidates. Whether a member had joined 4 or 40 years ago, committee strength and the capacity of the committees to effectively recruit candidates and support those candidates once recruited was of critical concern to the participant committee members.

To strengthen the committee system, it is recommended that the weaker committees consider making use of the flexibility of committee membership. Registered members of NYS-recognized political parties residing in NYS counties, outside of New York City, are permitted to represent an election district of their respective party committees located within their assembly district (NYS BOE, 2021). Depending upon the assembly district, it permits political committee membership in any one of several local
committees. A committee member from some assembly districts in this study, for example, could represent an election district that is associated with at least 10 local political committees. It would be advantageous for local committee leadership to consider seeking out members according to assembly district, rather than by residence in their local town to balance the strength amongst all the committees. An assembly district approach, rather than a single committee approach, would have benefits beyond a local town election, but it would have benefits into the county- and state-wide elections. This recommendation is not without its own considerations. As illustrated in the findings of this study, committees have identities with long standing members so reframing a committee composition change may involve a fair amount of persuasion.

Generally, the participants noted that committees need to recruit better for committee spots and volunteers. Better outreach to potential committee members should be an ongoing effort. A stronger committee, as reported by the participants, will evolve into a better resource to recruit and support potential candidates.

**Committee Behavior.** The participants reported misogynistic and racist activities by some committee members. A more effective system of reporting, correcting, censuring, and removing committee members is needed. Bylaws should be amended to better address adverse behaviors. Any member who is proven to have engaged in such adverse behavior should be censured and removal from the committee should be considered.

**Recommendations for Members to Support Candidates**

**Buddy System.** The participants who also ran for office noted a level of concern for their safety during campaigning. Safety concerns were strongly reported by
participants of diversity. One participant noted that two local female candidates who were women of color had stopped campaigning, during the mid-campaign cycle because they feared for their safety while campaigning. Further, the participant noted that the candidates only felt safe when they were campaigning with a White committee member, preferably a male. To lessen the impact of negative campaign activities, committees should implement a buddy system for candidates, especially for candidates of color. No candidate who is seeking to represent their community should ever fear for their safety while campaigning, while exercising this vital piece of a representative democracy.

**Candidate Support Clearinghouse.** The participants from the area around the judicial district were committed to better rates of female representation. They were dispersed, however, throughout the region. To better aid in recruitment and support of female candidates, a regional network supporting women may be useful. This network could be a clearinghouse of individuals who are trained in various campaign activities: fundraising, financial reporting, management, social media management, messaging, volunteer recruitment, Get Out The Vote (GOTV), and public relations. The purpose of this group would be to connect candidates with persons willing to aid local campaigns with the management of these activities. This group would not take the place of the candidate training organizations but would be the next step in a candidacy once such trainings are complete.

**Tertiary Group Integration.** Committees should engage more third-party candidate training groups. These groups, such as Eleanor’s Legacy, VoteRunLead, She Should Run, and League of Women Voters, could assist local political candidates in their identification, campaign management, social network management, and general
candidacy activities. The participants reported that these third-party groups are helpful once a candidate is already identified. Committees should engage these groups at the beginning of the process to identify potential candidates.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Recommendations for future research emerged from the findings of this study. As a result of the findings, an emerging theory surfaced that may aid in explaining or investigating female candidate recruitment and the impact of that recruitment on the frequency of female candidacies. The emerging theory is gendered recruitment theory, and it has a framework that comprises affirmative recruitment, sorority recruitment, Madonna recruitment, and negative recruitment.

The suggested recommendations identified for future research will test whether gendered recruitment theory can be proven by its emergence in another research context and with different participants. To determine if the emerging theory is applicable to other research contexts and different participants, it is suggested that a replica of this study be done with different participants from different municipalities within a judicial district. Another option would be to identify a different research context to recreate the study and test the theory within NYS. Finally, the study could be recreated in a state other than NYS to determine if gendered recruitment theory emerges in a state other than NYS.

**Conclusion**

Female political underrepresentation occurs worldwide (IPU, 2021). As a result, women are not descriptively represented in parallel or even nearly parallel to their population in this country. Without descriptive representation (representation that is directly reflective of the population) the lived experiences of women are unable to
animate substantive representation (lived experience representation). Compared to the rest of the world, the US is ranked 67th based upon its number of women in elected national office (IPU, 2021). Further, NYS is ranked 16th in the nation for its rate of women in elected representation, with a rate of 34.3% female legislators (CAWP, 2021b). NYS has never elected a female governor.

**Literature**

Scholarly research has identified the political party system as central to the candidate recruitment process. The activities of political parties affect who becomes a candidate for office (Bowman & Kearney, 2011; Bucchianeri, 2018; Butler & Preece, 2016; Fox, 2011; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Lowi et al., 2019; Pecorella & Stonecash, 2006; Seligman, 1961). Political parties are organizations with established customs, norms, and values (Adams & Smrek, 2018; Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2016; Kenny, 2014; Lovenduski, 2011). The local political committees of these parties, the committee members, and political elites are a critical recruitment tool of candidates (Bowman & Boynton, 1966; Broockman, 2014; Bucchianeri, 2018; Butler & Preece, 2016; Fox, 2011; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Frederick, 2014; Miller & Stokes, 1963; Pettey, 2018; Sanbonmatsu, 2006; Seligman, 1961). Female candidates have stated that support from local political committees is an essential piece of the decision to run for office (Broockman, 2014; Bucchianeri, 2018; Butler & Preece, 2016; Fox, 2011; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Frederick, 2014; Pettey, 2018; Sanbonmatsu, 2006).

Further, election to a local or state legislative office is a stepping-stone to higher state and federal office (Sanbonmatsu, 2006). Consequently, a means to increase female representation on the state or national level requires an increase in the percentage of
women elected at the local level (Sanbonmatsu, 2006). Because fewer women run for office, research about the recruitment of women by local committees is needed.

**Theory and Research Questions**

This descriptive phenomenological study sought to determine whether female local political committee members perceived local female political candidate recruitment as gendered or gender neutral and, if the female local political committee members perceived the committees’ culture, customs, norms, processes, and practices affected the local political committees’ ability to recruit female candidates.

This study sought answers to these research questions:

1. Do female local political committee members perceive that local political committee candidate recruitment is gendered or gender neutral?
2. What committee culture, customs, norms, values, processes, and practices, if any, do female political committee members perceive affect the local political committees’ ability to recruit female candidates?

The theory utilized for this study was Feminist institutionalist theory (FIT). FIT combines third-wave feminist theory with new institutionalist theory. FIT permitted the researcher to investigate candidate recruitment to determine if the process was gendered or gender neutral. The connections between the findings of this study and the literature are mixed. While the findings of this study aligned with some scholarly literature, they conflicted with other literature.

**Research Context**

This descriptive phenomenological study examined female recruitment practices of local political party committees. The population chosen for this study was NYS local
political committees. The sample chosen were female local political party committee members of a five-county judicial district in NYS. The judicial district in this study was made up of the five counties. The researcher interviewed 25 female committee members. Stratified purposeful sampling was utilized to make certain that each county was represented. Referential sampling was used to supplement the participant list. Email addresses, used to solicit participation, were gathered from local political websites. A total of 152 female committee members were contacted by email; 19 female committee members responded, and 18 committee members were interviewed. The committee member participants referred seven female committee members to the researcher. Each of those referred female committee members were also interviewed. A total of 25 female committee members were interviewed. These 25 female committee women represented 17 towns and 20 political committees across the five counties of the judicial district. Both Democratic and Republican female committee members were interviewed. Female committee members from each of the five counties of the judicial district were interviewed. The study used archival, public, census demographic, and election data to provide descriptive background data. This descriptive data supplemented the 25 semi-structured personal interviews to determine the methods of female candidate recruitment.

**Findings**

The fundamental implication of this study’s findings is that local female political committee members predominantly perceived recruitment as gendered. Further, despite a strong female committee member presence, female committee members in positions of leadership, with multiyear dedication of members to the committees, and with a belief by the participants of the importance of women as candidates and elected officials,
recruitment of women for local political office was perceived by the participants, and historically proven by the data, to be difficult. The phenomenological findings suggest several individual issues that negatively affect female candidate recruitment. When combined, however, either in full or in part, these individual difficulties create an intersectionality barricade to recruitment which, for many women, may be just too difficult to overcome or bypass. Further, the findings show that the prevalence of misogyny and the intersectionality of misogyny and racism, and misogyny and ageism has had a deleterious effect on positive female political candidate recruitment.

The municipal descriptive data findings indicate a low rate of representation, due, at least in part, to a low rate of female candidacy. Equitable female representation is not merely tested at the ballot box, but at the point of candidacy as well. This dearth of women in local board management or leadership positions has a ripple effect to other, especially higher, positions. The findings suggest that without a pipeline of formerly elected female officials, with name recognition and a record of representation, it is simply harder to obtain gender parity in local or statewide representation.

The findings suggest that the obligations of career and family seem to make women more cautious and less willing to spend the time to run for office when a positive outcome seems unattainable, or the path to success is uniquely difficult. Further, the phenomenological findings suggest that women, generally and comparatively, are more concerned about their ability to campaign and be effective as an elected official. In addition to familial and/or career commitments, the findings suggest that pervasive misogyny affects recruitment. The findings indicate that misogyny occurs in recruitment and campaigning, and it often continues after a successful election; all of which affects
recruitment. The findings suggest that these experiences shared among the social and professional networks of women affect a potential female candidate’s decision whether to run for election, to put herself out there. The findings also suggest that the prevalence of sexist tropes and misogyny in and on social media platforms, as well as online meeting tools (i.e., Zoom, Teams, GoToMeeting), have a negative impact upon female candidate recruitment. The phenomenological findings indicate that such negative online platform interactions have a residual effect, since they are occurring in a universally open platform, and they are recorded publicly for posterity.

Further, misogyny, sexist tropes, and negative experiences, as indicated by the findings, affect the female committee members while they perform their recruiting activities. Many of the committee member recruiters recalled similar first-hand experiences. While the findings show that female recruiters are supportive and offer encouragement to women candidates, and they generally desire a female candidate to run for office, the female recruiters’ shared lived experience makes the female recruiters more likely to understand a potential female candidate’s hesitancy to run for office and, thus, at times, were less likely to aggressively recruit a cautious, but recruitable, potential female candidate. Conversely, male recruiters, the findings suggest, often aggressively recruit some cautious potential female candidates unsuccessfully and to the detriment of other women willing to run for office. The findings show that only when a woman self-identifies as a potential candidate, do these recruitment conflicts ease. More women, therefore, the findings suggest, must see themselves as natural candidates. A candidate whose lived experiences can help them win an election, aid them in effectively serving,
and they will be provided with the requisite committee support to run a successful campaign.

A disturbing finding was the rampant level of misogyny and racism that the committee members endured and witnessed. Of the eight committee members who self-identified as a woman of color, seven (87.5%) recalled an interaction of racism when being recruited, while campaigning, and continuing after a successful election. Further, the findings show that calling out a racist act or action was often met with an increased racist and/or misogynistic response. Participation in the democratic process on the local level is the most basic act of civic culture. The pervasive nature of racist encounters is detrimental to the entire system and undermines the very fabric of democracy in this area.

Over 39.7% of the population of the judicial district area is diverse. The prevalence of misogyny and racism in the findings suggests an issue for concern for the health of the district as well as the continued ability for committees to recruit candidates. Further, these encounters, as indicated in the findings, have increased in intensity over the last few election cycles. So, the impact of such racist misogynistic activities has a propensity to continue to negatively impact recruitment.

To effectively support all, but especially female candidates, the findings show that most of the participant committees require additional members, training in campaign tasks and activities, and increased fundraising capabilities. The findings indicate that the existing committee members have multiple competing committee responsibilities that diminishes the overall effectiveness of the committee. Lack of committee effectiveness has a high negative impact on the recruitment of women because the committee does not have the capacity to offer specific campaign management activities including campaign
training, fundraising, public relations, volunteer engagement, and voter outreach on a uniform and consistent basis. Additionally, the findings show that the committees are seeking but have mostly been unsuccessful at adding younger members who can broaden the recruitment abilities of committees as well as provide additional resources for potential candidates.

A disturbing implication of the findings is the prevalence of misogyny and racism on the committee level. The findings show that misogynistic and racist interactions at the committee level undermine the effectiveness of the committee and damage committee cohesion. Since all committee activities are on a volunteer basis, any toxic action or activities has a swift negative impact on the committee. Already overburdened with low active membership and significant responsibilities, adverse activities can cause irreparable harm to a committee, making an already strained recruiting process even more difficult.

The importance of local elections cannot be overstated. The decisions of locally elected officials affect the day-to-day quality of life of the municipality. Further, locally elected officials are often tapped to run for higher office in the local municipality, in the county, or in the state. It is at the state level where critical civic decisions are made—from voting rights to public health to drawing congressional election districts. Without additional women running for and serving at the local municipal level, creating a stepping-stone pipeline, a significant increase in female descriptive representation in the NYS Legislature will remain difficult and will occur incrementally as it has thus far.
Emerging Theory: Gendered Recruitment Theory

Emerging from the findings of this study is the foundation of a theory that attempts to explain why there is gender disparity in the recruitment of candidates for political office on the local and state level. The theory, entitled gendered recruitment theory, explains that there is a myriad of recruitment activities that are employed during the recruitment process, which individually or combined can serve as a barrier to recruitment of women. Further, when combined in all or in part, these barriers could create an intersectionality barricade that a potential candidate cannot get over or bypass. The framework for this theory includes four recruitment forms: affirmative recruitment, sorority recruitment, Madonna recruitment, and negative recruitment. Because of the nature of sorority, Madonna, and negative recruitment, this theory may also be applicable to any marginalized group and, even in this study, it could be applied to the findings that discuss the intersectionality of misogyny and racism, and misogyny and ageism.
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Appendix A

General Information & Invitation to Participate in Study

Invitation to Participate in Study

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Janette A. McCoyMcKay, and I am a doctoral student (Ed.D. in Executive Leadership) at St. John Fisher College (Cohort 11, Iona College, NY Campus). My dissertation is on female candidate recruitment by local political committees in the _____ Judicial District. This dissertation study is under the supervision of Dr. Anthony P. Chiarlitti of St. John Fisher College, ________@sjfc.edu.

My interest in this topic is based on my 25 years of political science experience, including 10 years as a municipal employee, 15 years as a professor of political science, and years of political activism, including running for local office. I am currently employed in higher education as well as an adjunct professor and am an active Democratic committee member.

While there have been several other studies on candidate recruitment, more academic research is needed on the female candidate recruitment at the local political party level. To the best of my knowledge there has never been a study looking at female candidate recruitment in the _____ Judicial District. This research is particularly important to determine how women are recruited to run for office. My hope in conducting this research is to inform potential female candidates, political organizations, and to inform academic researchers who study female recruitment.

I am writing to respectfully request that you participate in this study by completing the attached “Informed Consent to Participate in Research” form signifying your rights as well as your willingness to participate and agree to be interviewed. If you are interested in participating in this study, please indicate your availability and email this information along with the digitally signed “Informed Consent to Participate in Research” form back to me at ________@sjfc.edu. The interview should not take more than 45 minutes and will be held via Zoom.

Please note that because of the time constraints in this research study, I will need to know if you are interested in being interviewed within the next 30 days. Thereafter, I will be conducting the interviews and continuing the additional research. Once the dissertation has been successfully defended and approved by St. John Fisher College, I will be willing to provide a copy of my findings to any interested committee member participant.
I would like to thank you in advance for considering my request, and I am hopeful that you will participate in this study so that your feelings on this important topic as committee members can be known. If you have further questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at (___) ___-____ or by e-mail at ________@sjfc.edu

Very truly yours,
Janette A. McCoyMcKay
Doctoral Candidate
Appendix B

Consent Letter

St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board

Statement of Informed Consent for Adult Participants

"Remember the Ladies" in the 'Secret Garden': Female Candidate Recruitment by Local Political Committees.

SUMMARY OF KEY INFORMATION:

You are being asked to be in a research study of female political committee members who have participated in female candidate recruitment as committee members. As with all research studies, participation is voluntary.

The purpose of this study is to examine the recruitment of female candidates by local political committees.

Approximately 10-15 people will take part in this study. The results will be used for inclusion in this study of female candidate recruitment activities of local political committees. This study is a requirement of the St. John Fisher College doctoral program where the researcher is enrolled as a candidate for an Ed. D. in Executive Leadership.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be involved in this study for the duration of one interview and perhaps a short follow up conversation. The duration of the initial interview is expected to be about 45-60 minutes and will take place within 30-45 days from the time that you have agreed to be interviewed. There may be a follow up conversation within 30 days of the interview. The follow up conversation, if it occurs, should not take more than 10-15 minutes.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 45-60-minute recorded Zoom interview. The interview is meant to gather information about the female candidate recruitment activities of local political committees. A follow up conversation may be requested within a month of the interview. More detail will be provided in the consent form.

We believe this study has no more than minimal risk.

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study may add to the information known about local female political party candidate recruitment adding to the academic knowledge about this subject.
DETAILED STUDY INFORMATION (some information may be repeated from the summary above):

You are being asked to be in a research study of female candidate recruitment by local political committees. This study is being conducted via Zoom interviews in addition to publicly available data from the New York State (NYS) Boards of Election; NYS Campaign Finance Board and online political websites. This study is being conducted by: Janette McCoyMcKay under the supervision of Dr. Anthony P. Chiarlitti in the Ed.D. program at St. John Fisher College.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are a female committee member of a political committee in the ____ Judicial District.

Please read this consent form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be in the study.

PROCEDURES:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

Participate in an interview with the primary investigator, Janette McCoyMcKay via Zoom. The recorded interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. You may stop the interview at any time. The recorded interview will be transcribed by a transcription service. A month after the interview you may be contacted by the investigator for some follow up questions that should take no longer than 15 minutes.

COMPENSATION/INCENTIVES:

You will not receive compensation/incentive.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The records of this study will be kept private and your confidentiality will be protected. In any sort of report the researcher might publish, no identifying information will be included.

Identifiable research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. All data will be kept in a password protected laptop in the researcher's office. All study records with identifiable information, including approved IRB documents, tapes, transcripts, and consent forms, will be destroyed by shredding and/or deleting after 5 years. Recordings of the interviews will be used for transcription purposes only and will be deleted upon completion of the study.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:

Participation in this study is voluntary and requires your informed consent. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. John Fisher College. You may also withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.
CONTACTS, REFERRALS AND QUESTIONS:

The researcher conducting this study: Janette McCoyMcKay. If you have questions, you are encouraged to contact the researcher at ________@sjfc.edu or ____-____-____ or the supervisor of this study, Dr. Anthony Chiarlitti at _________@sjfc.edu.

The Institutional Review Board of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study/ or if you feel that your fights as a participant (or the rights of another participant) have been violated or caused you undue distress (physical or emotional distress), please contact the SJFC IRB administrator by phone during normal business hours at (585) 385-8012 or ifb@sjfc.edu.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT:

"Electronic Consent: Clicking on the "Agree" button below indicates that:

- I have read the above information.
- I voluntarily agree to participate.
- I am at least 18 years of age.
- I agree to be videorecorded/transcribed.

If you do not wish to participate in the study, please decline participation by clicking on the "Disagree" button below."

Click or tap here to enter text.

Please keep a copy of this informed consent for your records,
Appendix C

Participant Data

P1 is a local political committee member in M1. P1 is also a county executive committee member. P1 has been politically active for over 30 years and is presently on the local committee and has been for 12 years. P1 held positions of leadership on the county executive committee and the local committee. P1 is a retired professional in the public education sector. P1 remains active in profession-related union activities. P1 is married.

P2 is a local political committee member in M2. P2 is also a county executive committee member. P2 has been politically active for over 15 years. Prior to joining the committee, P2 worked on political campaigns in another area of the state. P2 held positions of leadership on the county executive committee and the local committee. P2 was a candidate for elected office multiple times. P2 is a professional in the public human services sector. P2 is active in profession-related union activities. P2 is a married parent. P2 self-identified as a woman of color.

P3 is a local political committee member in M3. P3 is also on the county executive committee. P3 has been active politically active for over 25 years. P3 held a position of leadership on the county executive committee and the local committee. P3 is a retired professional in the education sector. P3 remains active in profession-related union activities. P3 is a parent.
P4 is a local political committee member in M4. P4 is also a county executive committee member. P4 has been active politically active for over 45 years. P4 was appointed to a paid political position. P4 was also previously elected to local office and is considering another future run for office. P4 is a retired public servant.

P5 is a local political committee member in M5. P5 has been politically active for over 5 years. P5 held a position of leadership on the local committee. P5 was elected to public office. P5 was candidate for multiple office. P5 is considering another run for office. P5 is a director of a not-for-profit. P5 is married, a parent, and a business owner. P5 self-identified as a woman of color.

P6 is a local political committee member in M6. P6 has been politically active for 15 years. P6 is a professional in the legal sector. P6 is married.

P7 was a local political committee member in M7. P7 has been politically active for 10 years. P7 was elected to public office. P7 is a public servant. P7 is a married parent. P7 self-identified as a woman of color.

P8 is a local political committee member in M2. P8 is also a county executive committee member. P8 has been politically active for 30 years. P8 held a leadership position on the county executive committee. P8 was appointed to a paid political position. P8 is a professional in the public sector. P8 is a married parent.

P9 is a local political committee member in M8. P9 is also a county executive committee member. P9 has been politically active for 5 years. P9 held positions of leadership on the local committee. P9 is a retired professional in the human services sector. P9 is a married parent.
P10 is a local political committee member in M9. P10 is also a county executive committee member. P10 has been politically active for 32 years. P10 held positions of leaderships on the county executive and state committees. P10 was appointed to a paid political position. P10 is a professional in the public sector. P10 is married.

P11 is a local political committee member in M10. P11 has been politically active for 12 years. P11 was elected to public office. P11 was a candidate for office multiple times and for multiple offices. P11 is a professional in the legal sector. P11 is a soon-to-be-married parent. P11 self-identified as a woman of color.

P12 is a local political committee member in M11. P12 is also a county executive committee member. P12 has been politically active for 20 years. P12 held positions of leaderships on the county executive committee. P12 is a professional in the legal sector.

P13 is a local political committee member in M12. P13 is also a county executive committee member. P13 held positions of leadership on the town and county executive committees. P13 has been politically active for 4 years. P13 was a candidate for elected office multiple times for multiple offices. P13 is a professional in the executive management sector. P13 is married. P13 self-identified as a woman of color.

P14 is a local political committee in M12. P14 is also a county executive committee member. P14 held positions of leadership on the town and county executive committees. P14 has been politically active for 6 years. P14 was a candidate for elected office multiple times and for different offices. P14 is a professional in the legal sector. P14 is married.

P15 is a local political committee member in M13. P15 held positions of leadership on the town committee. P15 has been politically active for 15 years. P15 was
elected to public office. P15 was a candidate for elected office multiple times and for different offices. P15 is considering a run for office this year. P15 is a professional in the public sector.

P16 is a local political committee member in M14. P16 is also a county executive committee member. P16 held positions of leadership on the town and county executive committees. P16 was appointed to a paid political position. P16 has been politically active for 40 years. P16 was a candidate for elected office. P16 is a professional in the public sector. P16 is a married parent.

P17 is a local political committee member in M14. P17 is also a county executive committee member. P17 held positions of leadership on the town and county executive committees. P17 was an elected official. P17 has been a candidate for elected office multiple times and for different offices. P17 has been politically active for 25 years. P17 is a retired professional in the business sector. P17 is a married parent.

P18 is a local political committee member in M15. P18 is also a county executive committee member. P18 held positions of leadership on the town and county executive committees. P18 has been politically active for 20 years. P18 is a professional in the law sector.

P19 is a local political committee member in M16. P19 is also a county executive committee member. P19 has been a candidate for elected office multiple times. P19 is considering another run for elected office. P19 has been politically active for 5 years. P19 is a professional in the law sector.

P20 is a local political committee member in M6. P20 is also a county executive committee member. P20 held a leadership position on the county executive committees.
P20 was an elected official. P20 has been a candidate for elected office multiple times and for different offices. P20 has been politically active for 4 years. P20 is a professional in the business sector. P20 is a married parent.

P21 is a local political committee member in M13. P21 is also a county executive committee member. P21 held positions of leadership on the town and county executive committees. P21 has been politically active for 19 years. P21 is a professional in the business sector. P21 is a married parent.

P22 is a local political committee member in M17. P22 is also a county executive committee member. P22 held positions of leadership on the town committees and county executive committees. P22 has been a candidate for elected office multiple times and for different offices. P22 is considering another run for office. P22 has been politically active for 10 years. P22 is a professional in the business sector. P22 is married. P22 self-identified as a woman of color.

P23 is a local political committee member in M5. P23 has been politically active for 19 years. P23 was an elected official. P23 has run for office multiple times. P23 is considering another run for office. P23 is a professional in the public sector. P23 is married.

P24 was a local political committee member in M16. P24 was also a county executive committee member. P24 has been politically active for 4 years. P24 is a professional in the community services sector. P24 is a parent.

P25 is a local political committee member in M2. P25 has been politically active for 4 years. P25 is considering a run for elected office. P25 is married.