

The Effect of Sexual Misconduct on Political Decision-Making

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Introduction

- While many Democrats tend to be against sexual harassment, there may be situations in which they ignore potential claims of misconduct
- In that same vein, Republicans may also show a similar pattern as Democrats particularly when much is on the line (i.e., a presidential election)
- This present study looked to explore the effect that participant and candidate political ideology has on the trait attribution and feelings people have toward candidates accused of sexual misconduct

Background

- Recently, liberal politicians accused of sexual misconduct like former Senator Al Franken have been asked to resign from their position, whereas President Donald Trump, despite multiple accusations of sexual misconduct, has been openly embraced by many in his own party.
- Prior work on in-group bias typically finds that individuals prefer their own groups but show a negative bias toward members of out-groups (Levine, Prosser, Evans & Reicher, 2005)

Methods

Participants

- College students at Eastern Michigan University were recruited to take part in a study to investigate perceptions of Democrats and Republican engaged in sexual misconduct
- The study consisted of self-identified liberals (n = 95) and self-identified conservatives (n = 30).

Procedure

- To examine this, participants were asked to identify which political ideology (liberal or conservative) they most lean toward and answer some demographic and scale questions.
- Participants were then randomly assigned to see and read about either a liberal or conservative political candidate accused of sexual harassment.
- Each candidate denied the accusation.
- Participants were then asked a series of questions related to their feelings and thoughts about the candidate as well as their level of support for the MeToo movement.

Results

- Liberal participants indicate higher degrees of support for liberal candidates than conservative candidates (*diff* = .789, *p* < .001).
- Conservative candidates receive higher levels of support from conservative participants than they do liberal participants (*diff* = -1.40, *p* < .001).
- Conservative participants indicate higher degrees of support for their in-group candidates than liberals' participants indicate for their in-group candidates (*diff* = -.607, *p* = .002).
- Conservative participants indicate a higher degree of support for their out-group candidates than liberals do for their out-group candidates (*diff* = .906, *p* < .001).

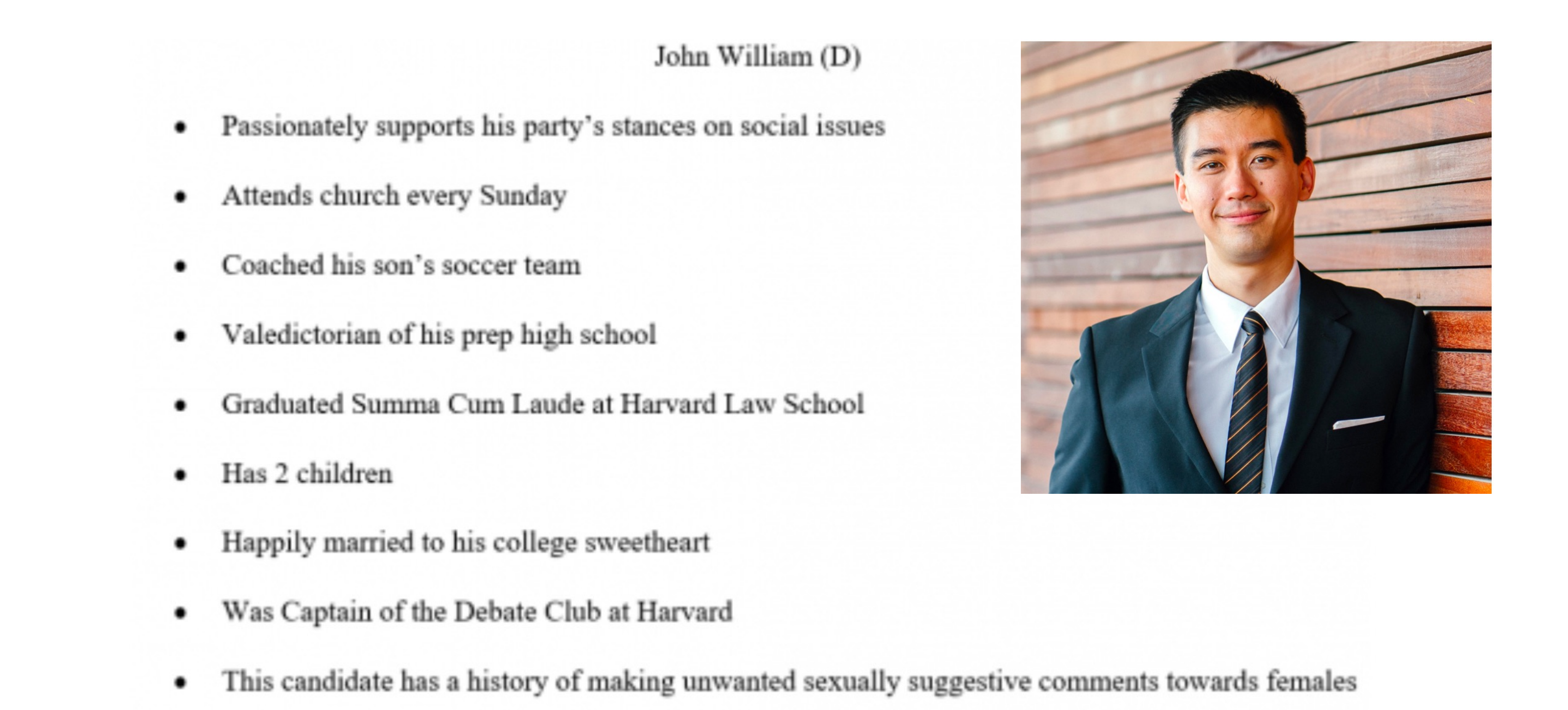


Figure 1. Democrat Profile

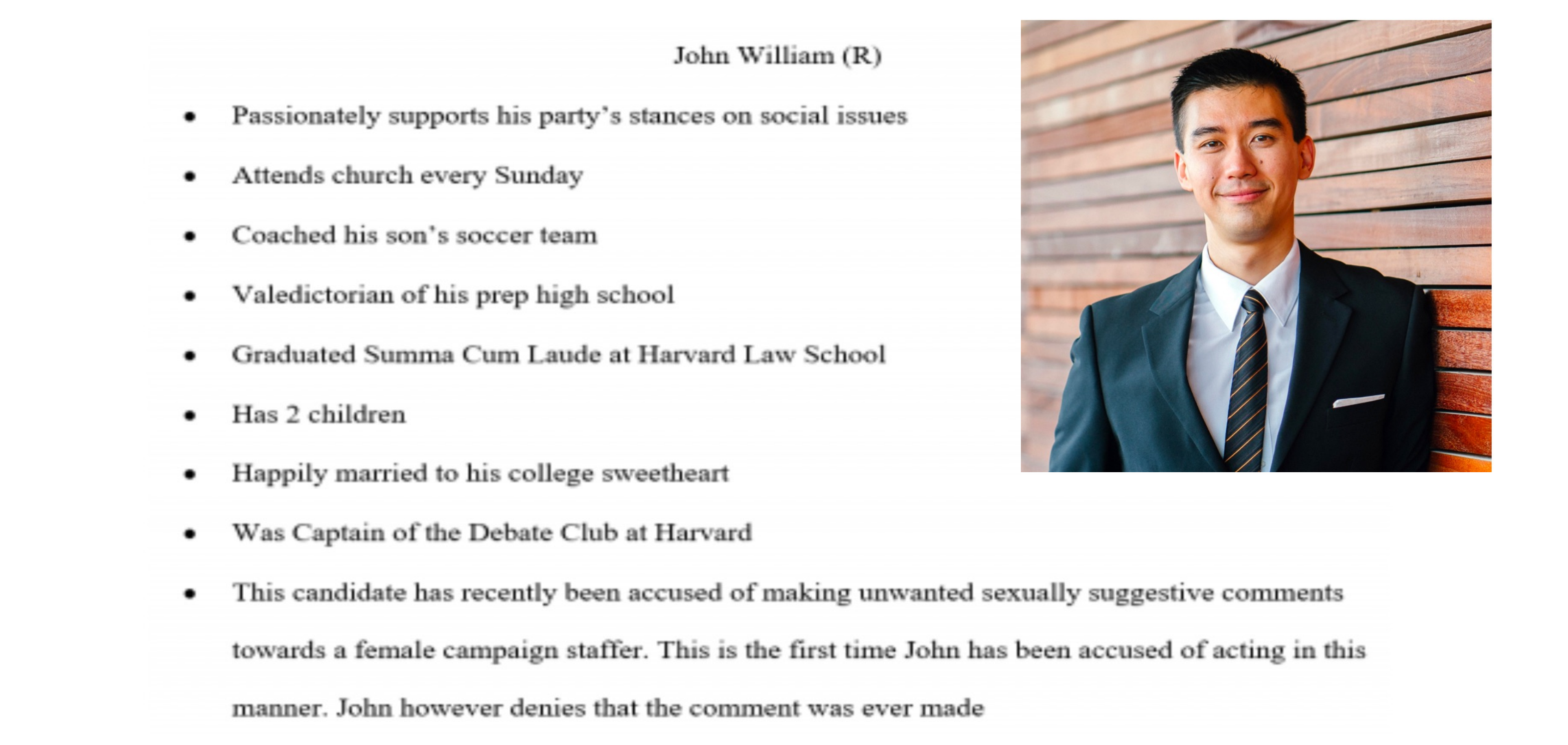


Figure 2. Republican Profile

Discussion

- These results suggest that overall, Republicans are more likely to support candidates accused of sexual misconduct.
- However, Democrats also show a bias toward favoring their own in-group with respect to sexual misconduct claims
- These results suggest that individuals have a bias to ignore unpleasant information about a candidate particularly when much is at stake (i.e., an election result)

Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations

- The sample size used in this study was extremely small.

Future Directions

- Future research should look to assess the degree to which participant perceptions are influenced by multiple accusations of sexual misconduct compared to just one instance as one instance could be explained away by a member of that candidate's in-group.
- Further, research should also look to investigate the impact that the severity of an accusation has on a candidate's perception (i.e., rape vs harassment)

Acknowledgements

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References

(Levine, M., Prosser, A., Evans, D., & Reicher, S. (2005). Identity and emergency intervention: How social group membership and inclusiveness of group boundaries shape helping behavior. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, 31(4), 443-453.