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REPLY



An Integrative Developmental Framework for Studying Gender Inequities in Politics

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ABSTRACT

Gender inequities in politics persist around the world. Research in political science and social psychology underscores how gender gaps in politics are fueled by societal messages that politics is a masculine domain. Developmental psychology offers a complementary, yet underappreciated, perspective on how gender inequities in politics are created and maintained. At first glance, children and politics may seem unrelated, yet broad cultural ideas can set in remarkably early in life. As an analogy, consider the gender inequities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM): Although gender gaps in this domain were initially theorized to begin during the college years, developmental research subsequently revealed how the societal messages and norms to which young children are exposed form the foundation on which gender gaps later emerge. We propose that the benefits of a developmental theory-driven approach to understanding gender gaps in STEM can be productively harnessed to understand and counteract gender gaps in political leadership as well. In our target article, we identified five critical areas of inquiry as a novel theoretical framework for investigating the developmental roots of gendered political disparities. Here, we situate these areas of inquiry within a sociocultural framework and integrate insights from the thoughtful commentaries on our target article. We discuss how *societal ideas* are transmitted to children through *everyday interactions* that shape children's developing *psychological tendencies* within a larger system of *institutions*. This integrative developmental framework provides unique and valuable insights across multiple levels of inquiry, which will further benefit from embracing intersectional and global perspectives.

KEYWORDS

Political leadership; politics; gender inequities; STEM; developmental psychology

Globally, governments remain vastly imbalanced in their gender compositions (UN Women, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2021). At the time of this article, men outnumber women 3 to 1 in seats in global parliaments and just 10 countries currently have a woman as head of state (UN Women, 2021). Important questions concern why and how these gender gaps arise, and what actions can help make political spaces more inclusive: More gender-balanced governance better reflects the needs and voices of all people and improves political decision-making (e.g., Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Halim, Yount, Cunningham, & Pande, 2016; UN Women, 2013). Certainly, progress toward greater equity and representation has been made—often with “inconsistent gender gaps” whereby women are better represented in some positions than others (see commentaries by Eagly; Dolan & Lawless)—but much work remains. In 2020, achieving global gender parity in politics was, at current rates, estimated to be 95 years away (World Economic Forum, 2020); in 2021, this statistic has increased to 145.5 years (World Economic Forum, 2020). Accelerating the pace of change toward gender equity in politics will require active efforts to understand the obstacles involved.

For years, political scientists and social psychologists have investigated the factors contributing to gender gaps in politics

(e.g., Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Sanbonmatsu, 2017). This research has revealed that gender inequities in politics result not from differences in men's and women's leadership skills (e.g., Lawless & Fox, 2008; Zenger Folkman, 2015) but from societal messages portraying politics as a masculine (and largely White) domain (e.g., Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Huddy & Capelos, 2002; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011; Schneider & Bos, 2019; see also commentaries by Caleo & Halim; Diekman, Joshi, White, & Vuletich; Dolan & Lawless; Eagly; Lombard, Azpeitia, & Cheryan; Reifen-Tagar & Saguy; Steele, Lee, & Baron). These messages are a barrier to women's political pursuits (e.g., Bernhard et al., 2019; Bos, Schneider, & Utz, 2018; Piscopo, 2019)—particularly for women (and men) with other intersecting underrepresented identities (e.g., Holman & Schneider, 2018; Rosette & Livingston, 2012; see commentary by Lombard et al.)—and result in explicit and implicit gender biases at the point of political office (e.g., Anzia & Berry, 2011; Dittmar, Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, Walsh, & Wineinger, 2017; Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010; Teele, Kalla, & Rosenbluth, 2018; Vial, Napier, & Brescoll, 2016) as well as before (e.g., Burns, Verba, & Lehman, 2001; Fox & Lawless, 2005, 2014; Schneider, Holman, Diekman, & McAndrew, 2016).

Developmental psychology offers a complementary, yet underappreciated, perspective on how gender inequities in

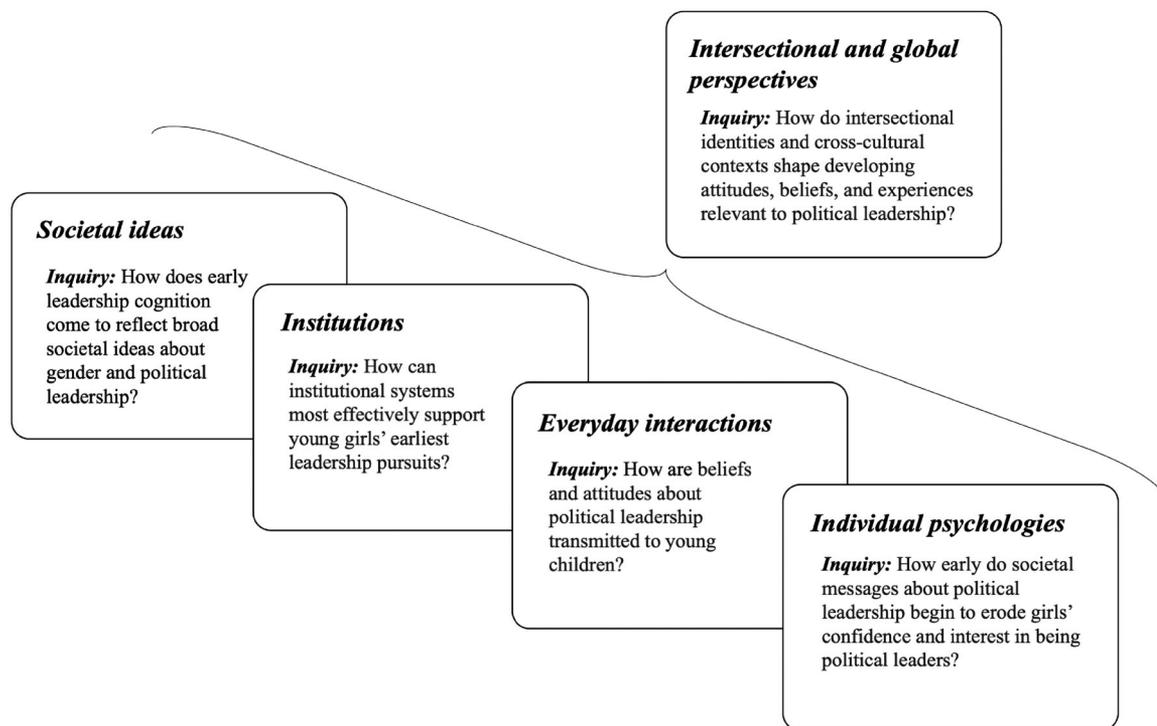


Figure 1. A sociocultural framework for studying the developmental roots of gender gaps in politics, organized by level of abstraction (societal ideas, institutions, everyday interactions, and individual psychologies). Together, this integrative framework demonstrates how societal ideas, transmitted through everyday interactions, shape the development of children's individual psychologies, within a broader system of institutions. These four levels of inquiry feed into and back on one another and will further benefit from being positioned within intersectional and global perspectives.

political leadership are created and maintained (Heck et al., this issue; see also Patterson et al., 2019). Although politics may seem outside the realm of early childhood, societal ideas and norms relevant to this domain begin influencing children's thinking surprisingly early in life. Indeed, research on patterns of underrepresentation in STEM provides a model for understanding how societal ideas and norms impact people's thinking across the lifespan and create both psychological and structural foundations on which gender gaps form. Whereas psychology researchers had initially assumed that the "leaks" in the "pipeline" of women going into careers in STEM start during college (Miller & Wai, 2015), recent experimental studies with children have demonstrated that societal biases are absorbed much earlier in life, and quickly begin undermining girls' interest and confidence in STEM pursuits (see Boston & Cimpian, 2018; Maltese & Tai, 2011; Master & Meltzoff, 2016). Although there are notable differences between careers in STEM and in politics, these domains share a deeper similarity: The societal messages about people pursuing STEM and politics are similarly incongruent with the societal messages that shape women's experiences and socialized identities. For this reason, research on gender gaps in STEM that is rooted in developmental theory can be productively harnessed to understand and counteract gender gaps in political leadership as well. In the target article in this issue, we leveraged existing developmental insights from STEM to identify five critical areas of inquiry that collectively define a theoretical framework for studying the developmental roots of gender inequities in political leadership (Heck et al., this issue):

Inquiry 1: What is the content of early beliefs and attitudes about political leadership?

Inquiry 2: How early do cultural messages about political leadership begin to erode girls' confidence and interest in being political leaders?

Inquiry 3: How are beliefs and attitudes about political leadership transmitted to children?

Inquiry 4: How do intersectional identities and cross-cultural contexts shape developing attitudes about political leadership?

Inquiry 5: How can we encourage girls to pursue activities and careers in politics?

Here, we elaborate on this proposal based on the thoughtful commentaries on our target article. In doing so, we embed our argument within a sociocultural framework (e.g., Fiske & Markus, 2012; see also Bronfenbrenner, 1977; for related calls on the importance of considering individuals as embedded within broader societal systems, see commentaries by Diekman et al.; Eagly; Lombard et al.; Steele et al.). In addition to providing a useful way of organizing and streamlining our argument, this framework allows us to add greater nuance to our discussion and to draw connections between our proposal and related research, including that with adults. In brief, we argue that *societal ideas* (i.e., widely and often implicitly accepted beliefs and values) are transmitted to children through their day-to-day *interactions* (e.g., with parents, teachers, and peers), which shape the development of *individual psychological tendencies* (e.g., identities, confidence, interest, sense of belonging) within a larger system of *institutions* (e.g., political, legal, and educational systems). As illustrated in Figure 1, another way of

organizing these four levels of analysis is along a continuum of abstraction, with the individual child at the concrete endpoint and intangible ideas at the abstract beginning. Each level reveals unique insights into how developmental processes contribute to gender inequities in politics.

Below, we bring the five areas of inquiry we identified in our target article into alignment with the levels of analysis in this sociocultural framework. We first discuss how an understanding of children's earliest beliefs and attitudes (*Inquiry 1*) speaks to the *societal ideas* at the foundation of gender gaps in politics and just how widespread these ideas are. Next, we discuss how children are exposed to societal ideas through *everyday interactions* and observations (*Inquiry 3*), and how these socialization processes shape children's own perspectives and attitudes toward political leadership (i.e., the *individual psychology* level; *Inquiry 2*). We then underscore the importance of integrating developmental views with perspectives emphasizing structural barriers to women's participation in political leadership; in particular, we argue that developmental science can help identify the structural and *institutional* changes that are most effective in the long term (*Inquiry 5*). We conclude by reiterating the importance of intersectional and global perspectives to a developmentally informed account of gender gaps in political leadership (*Inquiry 4*).

In framing our discussion within these levels of analysis, we tie together our original framework with the points raised in the commentaries and showcase where and how a developmental lens provides insight. To clarify, our argument is not that decisions about pursuing political careers are necessarily made early in life—clearly, they are not, at least for most people. Rather, developmental evidence is valuable because it can reveal how children develop broad ways of thinking about the world (e.g., about which careers are valuable) and themselves (e.g., about what they are good at) that often “stick” and influence their *later* reasoning about whether political leadership positions are worthwhile and attainable.

Societal Ideas

Societal ideas set the stage for and reinforce gender gaps in politics. Research across the social sciences suggests that making politics welcoming to people of all genders will require attending to and ultimately reshaping these ideas (as noted in commentaries by Diekman et al.; Joel; Lombard et al.; Steele et al.). In addition to revealing how society's ideas take root in new generations, asking when in life children absorb ideas about political leadership (*Inquiry 1*) can provide a window into the nature and pervasiveness of these ideas themselves. With this in mind, we focus on three societal ideas at the foundation of gender inequities in politics: (1) ideas about gender as salient, binary, and discrete (see commentaries by Joel; Geary; Lombard et al.; Martin & Fabes; Steele et al.) (2) “masculine defaults” (see commentary by Lombard et al.); and (3) definitions of political leadership and its goals (see commentaries by Caleo & Halim; Geary; Eagly; Reifen-Tagar & Saguy). This list is far from

exhaustive. Rather, our goal in discussing these specific examples is to illustrate the ways in which developmental science can reveal—and ultimately make more inclusive—pervasive societal ideas about political leadership.

Ideas about gender as salient, binary, and discrete

Society places immense importance on gender, rendering it a salient marker of identity and perpetuating the idea that there are two kinds of people in the world: men and women (for a thorough exposition, see commentary by Joel; see also commentaries by Lombard et al.; Martin & Fabes; Steele et al.). This framework tightens gender roles, excludes from the conversation those who do not identify within the gender binary, and validates prescriptive gender norms. Together, ideas about gender as salient, binary, and discrete create a landscape in which gender gaps can be misinterpreted as reflecting inherent, biologically determined differences between women and men, of which differences in political participation are just one.

Gender is perceived as salient, binary, and discrete from an early age. Within the first months of life, infants distinguish faces based on gender (Quinn, Lee, & Pascalis, 2019; Quinn et al., 2011), and by at least 5 years of age, children encode gender automatically (Weisman, Johnson, & Shutts, 2015) and view boys and girls as different *kinds* of people (Rhodes & Gelman, 2009). Children use gender to choose friends, evaluate others, and cultivate their interests (Bian, Leslie, & Cimpian, 2017; Liberman, Woodward, & Kinzler, 2017; Maccoby, 1988; Martin & Little, 1990; Shutts, Pemberton Roben, & Spelke, 2013; see Martin & Ruble, 2010 for a review). Indeed, (binary, discrete) gender appears to be *particularly* salient in children's social reasoning, even more than other social category markers like race (Rhodes & Gelman, 2009; Shutts, 2015) and even for children who themselves identify as non-binary (Glazier, Gülgöz, & Olson, 2020).

Gender's primacy and salience in children's thinking underscores why traditional views of gender may be difficult to challenge later in life and stresses the need to broaden ideas about gender when they are first forming. One approach may be to foster children's recognition of individuals' “unique mosaics” of both feminine and masculine traits (see commentary by Joel) and to challenge early-emerging ideas that boys and girls are different kinds of people. Despite children's rigid views on gender, there is in reality immense variation in children's conformity to gender stereotypes and norms (Gülgöz et al., 2019). It is possible that a greater appreciation of this variability would lead children to think more flexibly about who belongs in historically gendered fields (including stereotypically feminine fields; see commentary by Steele et al.). Further, a developmental lens can help pinpoint where (i.e., which cultures, countries, or regions) variation in early gendered cognition already exists; doing so can help identify what contexts and mechanisms may foster a more flexible and inclusive view of gender.

Last, it is worth noting that construals of gender as salient, binary, and discrete—as reflected both in children's

reasoning and society's ideas—may stem in part from the importance of sex in the evolution of our species. As Geary (this issue) notes, biological approaches can place human sex differences in a comparative (cross-species) and evolutionary framework and highlight commonalities with sex differences in other species. Certainly, an examination of sex differences can be meaningful (Wood & Eagly, 2002; see commentaries by Geary, Eagly), but it will be equally important to consider that purely “female” and “male” characteristics seldom exist in reality (e.g., Joel, 2021; Joel et al., 2018; see commentary by Joel) and that even small sex differences can be amplified through social forces, thus coming to *appear* larger than they may initially be (see Saguy, Reifen Tagar, & Joel, 2021; see also commentary by Reifen-Tagar & Saguy).

Masculine defaults

Another set of ideas laying the groundwork for gender gaps in politics are “masculine defaults” that center certain spaces and domains around traits stereotypically associated with (White) men (see commentary by Lombard et al.; Cheryan & Markus, 2020). Existing developmental research, such as that in STEM, underscores how pervasive masculine defaults can be: By elementary school, children already reflect knowledge of gender segregation in the workplace when reasoning about whether various occupations are for women or for men (Liben & Bigler, 2002). Similarly, children prioritize masculinity and whiteness in their representations of people in stereotypically masculine domains (e.g., Chambers, 1983; Fort & Varney, 1989; Miller, Nolla, Eagly, & Uttal, 2018). The long-term success of efforts to rectify gender inequities in politics will require challenging these defaults (as noted in commentary by Lombard et al.), a task that is likely to be facilitated by empirical studies with young children.

For example, whereas disentangling the role of various inputs perpetuating masculine defaults may be relatively challenging among adults, doing so may be more feasible when these defaults are first forming. Research on STEM has revealed that children's adoption of masculine defaults in their reasoning about a field parallels the actual diversity of that field, with stronger masculine defaults observed in children's reasoning about fields where there are fewer women (Cheryan, Ziegler, Montoya, & Jiang, 2017; Liben & Bigler, 2002; Master & Meltzoff, 2016; see commentary by Eagly for a discussion of how such patterns of variability can reveal important insights into the mechanisms at play). Investigating whether a similar process unfolds with respect to the political domain would be worthwhile. That is, does variability in children's masculine defaults about different aspects of the political domain (e.g., national versus local government, different political parties) mirror the actual diversity of these aspects in children's geographic and cultural contexts? Do children's observations of these real-world statistics predict the emergence of their masculine defaults with more accuracy than other potential sources (e.g., parents' gender attitudes)? Critical in asking these questions will be considering whether children also reflect

defaults along other social group lines: For example, given current patterns in the U.S. (e.g., Bialik, 2019; Carnes, 2018), American children may come to think of politics as largely White and high-income. The specific patterns children reflect in their reasoning are likely to depend on the geographic and cultural contexts in which they live, and these patterns may create particular challenges for individuals who identify as having multiple identities that are historically underrepresented in politics (see commentary by Lombard et al.).

Definitions of leadership and its goals

Societal definitions of leadership shape who is seen as belonging in leadership roles and what is viewed as possible to accomplish in them. Masculine defaults align political leadership and its goals more closely with stereotypically masculine characteristics such as competitiveness, dominance, and power-seeking (e.g., Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Nater, Miller, Kaufmann, & Sczesny, 2020; Schneider et al., 2016; see commentary by Geary for a discussion of how male-to-male interactions are often hypercompetitive). However, these definitions of leadership are not “natural” or necessary. Instead, they reflect, at least in part, the reality that political spaces have historically been limited to and defined by men—often, specific groups of men (e.g., in the U.S., land-owning White men; see commentary by Lombard et al.). Broadening definitions of political leadership and its goals will be critical in making political spaces more inclusive of people from a broader range of backgrounds and identities (see commentaries by Caleo & Halim; Diekmann et al.; Eagly; Joel; Lombard et al.; Reifen-Tagar & Saguy; Steele et al.).

Examining the developmental timelines of children's representations of leadership-related constructs can reveal what definitions of leadership may be most deeply rooted in cognition—and thus particularly intuitive throughout life. For instance, whereas children recognize and value dominance particularly early in life (Charafeddine et al., 2019; Enright, Gweon, & Sommerville, 2017; Pun, Birch, & Baron, 2016; Thomas, Abramyan, Lukowski, Thomsen, & Sarnecka, 2016; Thomsen, Frankenhuis, Ingold-Smith, & Carey, 2011; for reviews, see Pun, Birch, & Baron, 2017; Thomsen, 2020), there is less evidence that children represent leadership-related constructs that are less rooted in physical power and resource control as early (Heck, Bas, & Kinzler, 2021; see also Terrizzi, Brey, Shutts, & Beier, 2019; Thomas, Thomsen, Lukowski, Abramyan, & Sarnecka, 2018). Similarly, whereas a recognition of *malevolent* power (e.g., withholding permission; taking resources for oneself) emerges early and remains relatively stable, a recognition of *benevolent* power (e.g., giving permission; giving resources to others) unfolds more gradually (Gülgöz & Gelman, 2017; see also Hawley, 1999).

Of course, evidence on children's early notions of leadership does not—and should not—constrain how political leadership is defined today. In addition, although this evidence and the parallels between infants' and non-human animals' reasoning about social hierarchies hint at

evolutionary underpinnings (see commentary by Geary; see also Pun et al., 2017; Hawley, 2015; Terrizzi et al., 2019), this does not imply that these ideas are fixed or innate. Investigating the developmental roots of leadership cognition can add value in underscoring why some notions remain especially pervasive and intuitive in even adults' reasoning (Cao & Banaji, 2017; Gülgöz & Gelman, 2017; Hawley, 2015; Lukaszewski, Simmons, Anderson, & Roney, 2016; Toscano, Schubert, & Sell, 2014; Yu, Greer, Halevy, & van Bunderen, 2019; Zitek & Tiedens, 2012; see also commentary by Reifen-Tagar & Saguy). This conclusion applies not just to notions of what it means to be a leader but also to perceptions of who belongs in leadership roles. By age 4, children in France, Lebanon, and Norway already associate men more than women with power and resource control (Charafeddine et al., 2020; see also Cogsdill, Todorov, Spelke, & Banaji, 2014; Mandalaywala, Tai, & Rhodes, 2020; Terrizzi et al., 2019).

In summary, a number of widespread societal ideas—including those about gender, masculine defaults, and political leadership and its goals—shape children's emerging views and set the stage for the gender inequities observed in politics across the globe. Next, we discuss the mechanisms through which these ideas seep into young children's minds, focusing in particular on children's everyday interactions with parents, teachers, and peers.

Everyday interactions

Day-to-day interactions provide a means of studying the socialization processes through which abstract societal ideas become tangibly represented in children's minds and in the contexts in which children live (*Inquiry* 3). The importance of considering socialization was reflected in many of the commentaries in this issue (see Caleo & Halim; Diekman et al.; Dolan & Lawless; Eagly; Martin & Fabes; Reifen-Tagar & Saguy; Steele et al.). Here, we integrate points brought up in the commentaries into our argument and more explicitly describe the socialization processes that were implicit in, but nevertheless central to, our original proposal (Heck et al., this issue). We focus specifically on (1) gender socialization and (2) political socialization, and discuss both direct and indirect routes through which socialization can occur.

Gender socialization

Central to our argument in the target article, and here, is the observation that as soon as, if not before, children are born, they begin to be molded into societal gender roles (Leaper & Farkas, 2015; see commentaries by Diekman et al.; Eagly; Martin & Fabes). Role congruity theory describes how people are positively evaluated when their characteristics are recognized as aligning with their group's social roles (see commentaries by Caleo & Halim; Diekman et al.; Eagly; Lombard et al.). Gender socialization forms the backbone on which gendered ideas emerge, including those about both STEM and political leadership. Day-to-day interactions in children's lives reveal the mechanisms through

which gender socialization occurs. Parents, teachers, and other adults—all of whom have been exposed to societal ideas about gender for their entire lives—transmit gendered ideas to children in both explicit and implicit ways, including through language (e.g., gender labels and generic language), gender-stereotypical expectations, and modeling of gender roles (e.g., occupational disparities and household divisions of labor) (Leaper, 2014). Peers, too, form an important vector of gender socialization, and children often self-segregate into same-gender peer groups (see commentary by Martin & Fabes).

Even without an intention to transmit gendered ideas, adults commonly use gender labels (e.g., “Hello, boys and girls!”; Bigler, Hayes, & Hamilton, 2014; Hilliard & Liben, 2010; Waxman, 2010) and generic language (e.g., “girls wear pink”; e.g., Rhodes, Leslie, Bianchi, & Chalik, 2018; see also Chestnut & Markman, 2018) that implicitly suggest gender is central to *who* people are and *how* they should behave. Indeed, children in preschools in which gendered language is *reduced* (i.e., “gender-neutral” classrooms) show less gender stereotyping than children in classrooms in which these efforts are not made (although children show no corresponding reduction in the tendency to spontaneously encode gender; Shutts, Kenward, Falk, Ivegran, & Fawcett, 2017). Likewise, *increasing* the salience of gender in a preschool classroom for two weeks (e.g., through gender labels, physical separation of boys and girls) led children to be less likely to play with other-gender children (Hilliard & Liben, 2010; see also Bigler, 1995; Patterson & Bigler, 2006).

Adults also hold different expectations about girls' vs. boys' activities, playmates, toys, and clothes (e.g., Leaper, 2014), which are likely to further depend on both adults' and children's other intersecting social identities as well (e.g., race, social class, national identity; e.g., Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Howard, Rose, & Barbarin, 2013; Hughes et al., 2006; Stromquist, 2007; Thomas & King, 2007). Adults' reactions when children do not conform to expected gender norms inform children of what is expected of them as members of their gender group (Sullivan, Moss-Racusin, Lopez, & Williams, 2018). These reactions may be especially negative when boys behave in stereotypically feminine ways: Whereas 76% of adults in the U.S. say it is a good thing to encourage girls to participate in activities associated with boys, only 64% of adults have positive views of young boys' participation in stereotypically feminine activities (Horowitz, 2017).¹

Adults also socialize children through their own modeling of gender roles. Despite generational shifts toward more egalitarian gender norms (e.g., Brenan, 2020; Eagly et al., 2020; Horowitz, 2017; Thijs, Te Grotenhuis, Scheepers, & van den Brink, 2019), gendered occupational segregation and gendered divisions of labor in the household remain prevalent (Brenan, 2020; McHale, Crouter, & Whiteman, 2003; United Nations, 2020; see commentary by Eagly). Through their observations of these patterns, children may come to recognize gender stratification in societal roles

¹The gap between these percentages further varies as a function of adults' own gender and political orientation.

(Leaper, 2014) and form ideas about what constitutes “men’s work” and “women’s work” both inside and outside of the home (Basu, Zuo, Lou, Acharya, & Lundgren, 2017; Croft, Schmader, Block, & Baron, 2014; Liben & Bigler, 2002; Midgette, 2020; Murgatroyd, 1982; Parks-Stamm, Henson, & Martiny, 2020; Solbes-Canales, Valverde-Montesino, & Herranz-Hernández, 2020). Measuring variation in early family contexts (e.g., division of household chores; parents’ sexual orientation; family structure) offers an important lens into how children’s experiences and observations may inform the formation of gender roles, with implications for children’s later career and leadership aspirations (Bertrand, 2019; Croft et al., 2014; Deutsch, Servis, & Payne, 2001; Fulcher, Sutfin, & Patterson, 2008; McHale et al., 2003).

Indeed, by modeling gender roles and expressing differential expectations of boys and girls, adults can also shape children’s *own* early career-related experiences. Research in STEM demonstrates that parents and teachers shape children’s access to STEM-related activities and opportunities (e.g., Chang, Sandhofer, & Brown, 2011; Crowley, Callanan, Tenenbaum, & Allen, 2001; Gunderson, Ramirez, Levine, & Beilock, 2012; Simpkins, Davis-Kean, & Eccles, 2005). These experiences are impactful: Early gender and career socialization predicts career attainment longitudinally (e.g., Bleeker & Jacobs, 2004; Charles, Guryan, & Pan, 2018; Chhin, Bleeker, & Jacobs, 2009; Lawson, Crouter, & McHale, 2015).

Importantly, children not only absorb information about the world but also become active agents of gender socialization themselves (see commentaries by Martin & Fabes; Steele et al.). As toddlers, children label their own gender (Zosuls et al., 2009), and by at least 5 years of age, children demonstrate both explicit and implicit preferences for members of their own gender group (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2016; Halim, Ruble, Tamis-LeMonda, Shrout, & Amodio, 2017). Children seek out information, activities, playmates, toys, and clothes that align with their socialized gender roles (i.e., “self-socialization”) and evaluate others through a gendered lens (e.g., Andrews, Martin, Field, Cook, & Lee, 2016; Cook, Martin, Nielson, & Xiao, *in press*; Halim, Walsh, Tamis-LeMonda, Zosuls, & Ruble, 2018; Halim et al., 2014; Hammond & Cimpian, 2021; Martin & Fabes, 2001; Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002; Owen Blakemore, 2003; Tobin et al., 2010; Zosuls, Ruble, & Tamis-Lemonda, 2014; see commentary by Martin & Fabes). It will be particularly important to understand the roles children may play in enforcing stereotypical gender roles versus acting as allies of one another’s pursuits, be they gender-conforming or not (e.g., Xiao, Cook, Martin, & Nielson, 2019; see commentaries by Lombard et al.; Steele et al.). Socializing children to think beyond traditional gender roles (and encouraging cross-gender friendships; see commentary by Martin & Fabes) may help both in making traditionally masculine spaces more welcoming of girls and in broadening the spaces boys feel are available to them (e.g., stereotypically feminine roles; see commentary by Steele et al.; see also Block, Gonzalez, Schmader, & Baron, 2018), thus aiding efforts to address occupational gender segregation as a whole (see commentary by Eagly).

Political socialization

Everyday interactions provide a useful context for studying early political socialization as well. Studies with young children can offer insight into how children are exposed to ideas that are relevant to politics as a whole, but also more specifically to the role of *gender* in politics. Through their interactions and observations, children may form ideas about who belongs in political spaces and what value these spaces hold. As with ideas about gender, the transmission of ideas about politics is likely to occur in both direct and indirect ways.

Prior research on political socialization has rarely focused on children prior to adolescence (see Abendschön, 2017; Patterson et al., 2019) and has tended to examine views and attitudes about specific political topics (e.g., party identification; policy positions). After increased interest in young children’s political socialization during the 1950s and 60s (e.g., Greenstein, 1965; Hyman, 1959), studies with young children drew substantial criticism due to an overreliance on the idea that political views adopted during childhood would remain unchanged (e.g., Cook, 1985; Flanagan & Sherrod, 1995; Greenstein, 1970; Marsh, 1971; Niemi & Hepburn, 1995; Somit & Peterson, 1987; see also Flanagan & Sherrod, 1995). In reality, many aspects of political knowledge and behavior can and do change, and political socialization continues in adulthood too (see Sears & Brown, 2013 for a review; see also commentary by Dolan & Lawles). Recent perspectives on political socialization embrace consistency *and* change across the lifespan (see commentary by Dolan & Lawless), but also showcase why calls to ignore childhood entirely may have come too soon (e.g., Abendschön, 2017; Abendschön & Tausendpfund, 2017; Patterson, 2019; Patterson et al., 2019; Sapiro, 2004; Simon, 2017; Van Deth, Abendschön, & Vollmar, 2011; Wegemer & Vandell, 2020). A focus on children need not imply that ideas learned early in life remain wholly unchanged, but simply that there is benefit in understanding broad views that are acquired early in life (e.g., ideas about gender and the goals of leadership) that provide a foundation on which later decisions and behaviors in the political arena are made.

Indeed, contemporary developmental psychology has already begun to offer nuanced empirical insights into the early roots of political socialization and reasoning. For instance, recent studies have suggested that parents’ broad sociopolitical orientations (e.g., authoritarian values, social dominance orientation; see Altemeyer, 1998; Duckitt, Wagner, Du Plessis, & Birum, 2002; Feldman & Stenner, 1997) may influence how even preschoolers navigate the world (e.g., Guidetti, Carraro, & Castelli, 2017; Reifen-Tagar, Federico, Lyons, Ludeke, & Koenig, 2014; see commentary by Reifen-Tagar & Saguy). Other research has documented systematic individual and cultural differences in children’s thinking about politically relevant topics such as hierarchies and inequality (e.g., Charafeddine et al., 2019; Hussak & Cimpian, 2018; Kajanus, Afshordi, & Warneken, 2020; Reifen-Tagar, Hetherington, Shulman, & Koenig, 2017; Roberts, Ho, Gülgöz, Berka, & Gelman, 2020). To the extent that these early differences are a function of differential

socialization, their presence early in life highlights the value of further research on political socialization.

Looking to the future, efforts to understand political socialization—and *gendered* political socialization particularly—may draw inspiration from the gender socialization literature. For example, it will be important to ask how language about politics and leadership may (subtly or overtly) convey to children that politics is a masculine domain. Adults may also transmit ideas about the valence and relevance of politics as a whole. As Dolan and Lawless (this issue) note, some parents may view politics and political leaders unfavorably and even discourage children from political careers. Correspondingly, there is some evidence that children’s attitudes about politics have become more negative over time (Carter & Teten, 2002), although girls and boys may differ in this respect: By middle school, girls in a nationally representative sample were more than twice as likely as boys to expect to be viewed as “bossy” if they were to occupy a leadership role; to the extent that they anticipated such social backlash, girls were also less interested in leadership roles (Girl Scouts Research Institute, 2008).

In summary, everyday interactions are a vehicle through which abstract societal ideas come to shape individual children’s outlook on political leadership. Next, we discuss the effects of this socialization process on children’s reasoning about the political sphere.

Individual psychological tendencies

Children’s day-to-day interactions, and the ideas and institutions that shape them, are likely to influence children’s developing attitudes toward political leadership, including their confidence, interest, and sense of belonging in this domain. An individual’s pursuit of political leadership hinges both on their confidence in their leadership abilities and on the value they see in being a political leader (Bos et al., 2018; Fox & Lawless, 2005; Preece, 2016; Wolak, 2020). Previously, we proposed that societal ideas (e.g., cultural portrayals of leadership as masculine) begin derailing young girls’ confidence and interest in political leadership long before adulthood (*Inquiry 2*). Here, we build on our proposal and integrate points raised in the commentaries, including the importance of understanding young boys’ leadership-related psychologies (see commentaries by Lombard et al.; Martin & Fabes; Steele et al.) and the development of children’s broader values (see commentaries by Diekmann et al.; Eagly) and worldviews (see commentary by Reifen-Tagar & Saguy).

Confidence, interest, and belonging

Research in STEM suggests that societal messages begin undercutting young girls’ STEM-related confidence early in life (Bian et al., 2017; Boston & Cimpian, 2018; Master, Cheryan, Moscatelli, & Meltzoff, 2017; Muzzatti & Agnoli, 2007; Oppermann, Brunner, & Anders, 2019), as well as their interest (e.g., Blažev, Karabegović, Burušić, & Selimbegović, 2017; Master et al., 2017; McKenney & Voogt,

2010) and sense of belonging (Cheryan, Meltzoff, & Kim, 2011; Cvencek, Meltzoff, & Greenwald, 2011; Liben & Bigler, 2002). In fact, these investigations reveal that young girls’ confidence and interest in STEM has, in some cases, already taken a hit by *preschool* (del Río & Strasser, 2013; Oppermann et al., 2019). Importantly, girls’ lower confidence and interest in STEM does not reflect actual differences in abilities (Boston & Cimpian, 2018; Cimpian, Kim, & McDermott, 2020; Correll, 2001; Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfeld, 1993) but rather the societal ideas to which children are exposed. For example, the more middle school girls endorse the “math = boys” stereotype, the lower their math interest and confidence (Steffens, Jelenec, & Noack, 2010).

Experiments with young children in the STEM domain can provide a valuable template for thinking about how broad societal messages may begin undermining girls’ confidence, interest, and sense of belonging long before political office is even an option. Existing research suggests young girls may largely still be confident in their abilities to take on leadership roles (Girl Scouts Research Institute, 2014; Patterson et al., 2019), but by college, a gender gap in confidence is present (Fox & Lawless, 2014; see commentary by Dolan & Lawless). It will be important to better understand how this gap in confidence emerges and whether its roots may actually be present earlier in life if measured with a greater variety of tasks and in a greater variety of contexts (e.g., when leadership is framed in more or less masculine ways).

Efforts to unpack gaps in girls’ and boys’ confidence in leadership may be complemented by an understanding of overconfidence in men and boys (see commentary by Lombard et al.). In one study, for instance, 14-year-old girls were underconfident about their performance on a future math test and 14-year-old boys were overconfident (Dahlbom, Jakobsson, Jakobsson, & Kotsadam, 2011): When the adolescents actually took the test at a later date, girls overperformed relative to their stated expectations and boys underperformed. On a broader scale, boys at the lowest percentile of high school STEM achievement (i.e., the 1st percentile) in the U.S. are as likely to major in physics, engineering, and computer science as are girls in the 80th percentile (Cimpian et al., 2020). Notably, these patterns may be emerging during early childhood. By age 6, boys are more willing than girls to engage in an activity described as being for children who are “really, really smart” (Bian et al., 2017). Such developmental insight from STEM highlights the importance of understanding mechanisms shaping both under- and over-confidence in a domain, and may be harnessed to understand gendered patterns of confidence in the leadership sphere as well (for related research with adults, see Reuben, Rey-Biel, Sapienza, & Zingales, 2012). Although we do not advocate tempering boys’ political aspirations, better understanding boys’ and men’s behaviors in political spaces will reveal the role they can play in upending historic patterns of inequality (see commentaries by Martin & Fabes; Steele et al.).

As children internalize societal messages about leadership as being “for men,” interest in political leadership may also diverge along gendered lines. By elementary school, young girls already report that “act(ing) like a leader” is more for men than women, and by adolescence, boys show more political interest and knowledge than girls (e.g., Mayer & Schmidt, 2004; Pereira, Fraile, & Rubal, 2015; Simon, 2017; Van Deth et al., 2011; see commentary by Dolan & Lawless). It will be essential to better understand what societal messages encourage or discourage interest in leadership among diverse groups, as well as what moderators influence the trajectory of children’s interest in political leadership (e.g., geographic, family, and political contexts; children’s unique intersecting identities). Doing so can help identify relevant mechanisms shaping interest in leadership and also aid efforts to create spaces that will support (and even strengthen or “scaffold”) leadership aspirations across childhood and into adulthood (see commentaries by Caleo & Halim; Diekman et al.).

Critically, efforts to understand how societal messages inform young children’s developing confidence, interest, and sense of belonging in leadership will remain incomplete without additionally bringing children’s other social identities into view (e.g., race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexuality, language, religion, and immigration status) (see Heck et al., this issue; see also commentaries by Lombard et al.; Steele et al.). Research in STEM consistently underscores that gender gaps in STEM confidence and interest are not one-size-fits-all (e.g., Girl Scout Research Institute, 2019; Perry, Link, Boelter, & Leukefeld, 2012; Riegler-Crumb, Moore, & Ramos-Wada, 2011; Saw, Chang, & Chan, 2018), and the same will almost certainly be true of gender gaps in the domain of political leadership as well.

Values and worldviews

Attending to children’s broader values (e.g., communal versus agentic values; family versus career orientations) and worldviews (e.g., valuing of hierarchy and authority) will contribute to an understanding of children’s early leadership cognition. Evidence from STEM demonstrates that portrayals of STEM careers as incompatible with communion and family-oriented goals may lead some women (and men) to be less interested in STEM careers (Diekman, 2010, 2011). Stereotypical depictions of politics are similarly incongruent with communal goals (Schneider & Bos, 2019; see also commentaries by Caleo & Halim; Diekman et al.; Eagly), and highlighting communal aspects of political leadership can boost women’s interest in political leadership roles (Pate & Fox, 2018; Schneider et al., 2016; see commentary by Caleo and Halim). By age 6, individual differences in children’s communal versus agentic values *already* relate to the extent to which young children report valuing career-versus family-oriented goals (Block et al., 2018; see also Döring et al., 2015). Children’s early values and broad career orientations may similarly shape their pursuit of leadership roles, with girls’ valuing of communion potentially making political leadership less appealing to them (given how

politics is commonly portrayed). To level the playing field, future interventions should consider not only how to increase girls’ leadership aspirations (e.g., by reframing political leadership as a community-serving role) but also how to increase boys’ valuing of communion and family-related goals. The latter is an essential piece of the puzzle here, as it will both broaden boys’ perception of their own future careers and also help loosen the expectation that only girls can pursue stereotypically feminine roles (e.g., healthcare, early education, and domestic roles; see commentary by Steele et al.).

Children’s nascent sociopolitical worldviews—abstract beliefs and preferences pertaining to the structure of society—are another key psychological variable that relates to leadership cognition. Historically, such sociopolitical attitudes (e.g., social dominance orientation, authoritarianism) were thought to emerge only in adolescence or early adulthood (e.g., Altemeyer, 1981; Duckitt, 2001). Yet recent studies demonstrate that even preschoolers reason in systematic ways about societal authorities and hierarchies and, notably, that the differences between children in this respect can be predicted from their parents’ sociopolitical attitudes (Guidetti et al., 2017; Hellmer, Stenberg, & Fawcett, 2018; Reifen-Tagar et al., 2014; Reifen-Tagar et al., 2017; Ruffman et al., 2020; see commentary by Reifen-Tagar & Saguy). Even though children’s sociopolitical worldviews may of course evolve with time, this evidence nevertheless suggests that they begin to take shape early on, potentially informing the development of more specific attitudes—most relevant to our purposes here, attitudes toward gender and leadership. For example, to the extent that a child sees group hierarchies as acceptable, maybe even desirable, they may be less inclined to challenge gendered hierarchies in politics by aspiring to leadership positions (if they are a girl) or by supporting girls’ leadership aspirations (if they are a boy; see commentary by Reifen-Tagar & Saguy). On this point, research suggesting that men are more likely than women to endorse social hierarchies (see commentaries by Geary; Reifen-Tagar & Saguy) highlights a potential obstacle to the goal of making politics more inclusive.

To summarize, children’s interactions with others shape a wide range of psychological variables, from their confidence in their ability to lead to their preference for a hierarchical vs. egalitarian society. These variables lay the developmental foundation for the differences observed between adult women and men’s involvement in political leadership. Next, we integrate developmental views on these gaps with perspectives emphasizing structural and institutional barriers to women’s (and girls’) political pursuits.

Institutions

So far, we have discussed how societal ideas manifest in socialization and, as a result, in young children’s self-concepts and attitudes. In this section, we focus on the institutional systems in which individuals are embedded. Institutions both reflect and maintain gender inequities in politics: They uphold the gendered status quo, deny

resources, and limit political access to privileged groups. Here, we focus on two types of institutions that are particularly relevant to gender gaps in political leadership: (1) educational systems (see commentaries by Martin & Fabes; Steele et al.) and (2) policies and political systems (see commentary by Lombard et al.). For each, we describe how institutional forces shape children's gendered notions about political leadership and highlight interventions that could prompt change in this respect. In fact, since institutions undoubtedly share in the responsibility of change (as noted in commentaries by Diekman et al.; Eagly; Martin & Fabes; Steele et al.), a unique value of developmental research is that it can reveal which institutional shifts will most effectively support the emergence of a diverse next generation of leaders (*Question 5*).

Educational Systems

Schools likely serve as epicenters of children's burgeoning (or waning) leadership aspirations. A developmental perspective can help reveal the roles educational systems play in the transmission of gendered ideas about political leadership. In school, children are exposed to curricula with certain (implicit or explicit) perspectives on women and men leaders; they are provided with what is likely their first opportunity to observe leaders first-hand (e.g., principals, superintendents); and they are provided with (or deprived of, as the case may be) opportunities to pursue and occupy positions of leadership themselves.

Educational curricula may be the most direct routes through which children form ideas about who belongs in political spaces. For example, in the United States, the large majority of historical (and current) political figures are White men (Cassese, Bos, & Schneider, 2014; Maurer, Patrick, Britto, & Millar, 2016). Among women that are included, further patterns of underrepresentation emerge: For example, in an analysis of social studies standards, Maurer et al. (2016) found that not a single Asian American or Pacific Islander woman was included. To avoid transmitting gendered ideas, some classroom instructors may aim to take a gender-blind approach to historical pedagogy and simply not discuss the gender imbalance among historical figures covered in class (Cassese et al., 2014; Lay et al., 2021; Maurer et al., 2016; Olivo, 2012; see also Patterson, 2019; for a discussion of "hidden curricula" that communicate gender values in classrooms, see commentary by Diekman et al.). However, this approach may backfire; without addressing the historical contexts in which gendered patterns of leadership exist, teachers may implicitly reinforce the notion that political leadership is "naturally" a masculine pursuit (Bigler, Arthur, Hughes, & Patterson, 2008; see commentary by Steele et al.). Children track social patterns to reason about who is likely to hold leadership roles (Heck, Kushnir, & Kinzler 2021), and without other input, children may interpret descriptive patterns as prescriptive norms (Roberts, Gelman, & Ho, 2017; Tworek & Cimpian, 2016). Explicit dialogue about the historical contexts in which gender imbalances in leadership have arisen may help minimize

the likelihood that children will conclude that political leadership is a masculine pursuit (for related research from STEM, see Margolis & Fisher, 2002; Miller & Wai, 2015). As an alternative (but not mutually exclusive) strategy, schools and teachers may also make concerted efforts to include prominent women leaders (and members of other historically underrepresented groups) in their curricula, as well as media with more gender-equitable narratives (see commentary by Caleo & Halim). These conversations will further benefit from attention to discrimination along other social dimensions (e.g., racism, colonialism; see Roberts & Rizzo, 2020), both historically and in the present day.

Patterns of leadership within schools—both among educators and students—may further contribute to a developing perception that leadership is masculine. In the U.S., women make up 68% of the teacher workforce but only 45% of school principals (Martínez, Molina-López, & de Cabo, 2020; see also Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2016). Aside from vertical gender segregation along lines of power and authority, schools' structures may also reflect horizontal segregation (see commentary by Eagly) in the kinds of positions women hold (e.g., who teaches different subjects or domains). Better understanding how children make sense of both vertical and horizontal gender divisions in their educational institutions will be informative in deciding which institutional changes to prioritize.

Schools might also provide children themselves with more opportunities to engage in leadership roles (see commentaries by Martin & Fabes; Steele et al.). Interestingly, the STEM literature suggests it is generally the STEM domains taught *less* frequently in K-12 environments in which gender imbalances are greatest (Cheryan et al., 2017). As such, creating spaces that afford girls relevant experiences in leadership may be especially important. If we think about a given leadership position in adulthood as the culmination of leadership experiences throughout one's lifetime (including the formative years of primary and secondary school), then schools are uniquely positioned to support young children's earliest leadership endeavors.

As educational systems experiment with change, it is critical to test which changes are most effective, both in supporting the leadership ambitions of children from historically underrepresented groups and in raising a generation of historically conscious future citizens and voters. Developmental science provides tools for asking these questions, as well as for identifying the effects of *existing* variation in pedagogical approaches (both within and between countries).

Policies and political structures

Even beyond the institutions in which children participate directly, developmental science can provide tools for understanding the mechanisms by which shifts in policies and political structures (e.g., efforts to increase women's political representation; changes in countries' voting systems) may promote lasting societal change. For example, studies of children can investigate the downstream consequences of

policy-level interventions like gender quotas (Krook, 2009), which immediately increase the visibility of women leaders.² In turn, seeing more women in politics may impact children's developing ideas about who belongs in political spaces (Beaman, Chattopadhyay, Duflo, Pande, & Topalova, 2009; Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2006; Wolbrecht & Campbell, 2007). For instance, a policy experiment in India revealed that an increased presence of women leaders on village councils resulting from gender quotas positively influenced adolescent girls' career ambitions (Beaman, Duflo, Pande, & Topalova, 2012). An analogous policy experiment in Lesotho revealed a subsequent increase in younger women's, but not older adults', gender egalitarian ideas (Clayton, 2018). Thus, shifts in representation may be especially powerful in shaping *young* citizens' notions of political leadership, arguably because these notions are more malleable at younger ages.

Variations in political systems have likewise been found to relate to women's political representation. For example, an overreliance on independent self-recruitment into politics can advantage men (Shames, 2015), and ranked-choice and proportional voting systems can mitigate the strength of masculine defaults (Brechenmacher, 2018; see commentary by Lombard et al.) and lead to more gender-balanced political bodies (e.g., Norris, 2004; Kaminsky & White, 2007). In addition to their immediate consequences, such shifts in political systems may initiate longer-lasting social and cultural change—a process that developmental evidence can uniquely illuminate. That is, because children's attitudes are relatively malleable and their experiences more limited, research with young children may provide a particularly sensitive way of investigating whether institutional changes are also successful in promoting long-lasting *cultural* changes.

Intersectional and Global Perspectives

Across levels of inquiry, a developmental framework that embraces intersectional and global perspectives will provide a more comprehensive picture of gendered political inequities. Gender intersects with individuals' other identities (including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexuality, language, religion, and immigration status) (see Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989), and societal ideas related to gender inequities in politics also reflect this intersectionality (e.g., Childs & Hughes, 2018; Junn & Brown, 2008; Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips, 2008; Schyns, Tymon, Kiefer, & Kerschreiter, 2013). For instance, both adults and children treat Black women as less representative of the generic *woman* category than White and Asian women (Lei, Leshin, & Rhodes, 2020; Leshin, Lei, Byrne, & Rhodes, 2021; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), and masculine defaults in leadership often prioritize whiteness and lighter skin (i.e., colorism) (e.g., Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Hunter, 2007; Roberts, Ho, et al., 2020; see commentary by Lombard et al.). Children's social evaluations begin to reflect the

complex intersections of these identities at a young age (Perszyk, Lei, Bodenhausen, Richeson, & Waxman, 2019); even evaluations relevant to STEM show intersectional patterns (Jaxon, Lei, Shachnai, Chestnut, & Cimpian, 2019). However, many questions remain regarding children's intersectional reasoning about political leadership, as well as leadership more broadly. In addition, capturing the intersectional nature of children's *own* identities (see Ghavami, Katsiaficas, & Rogers, 2016; Lei & Rhodes, 2021; Santos & Toomey, 2018) will be critical in understanding the development of children's reasoning about political leadership and the institutional barriers that children are likely to face.

Finally, we note that children's geographic and cultural contexts play a key role in shaping their outlook on political leadership. Political institutions, and the societal ideas that they embody, vary dramatically across the globe (e.g., in some countries, women are barred from holding political office altogether; Ayman & Korabik, 2010; World Economic Forum, 2021), and arriving at a better understanding of how this variation relates to children's leadership cognition is essential. For example, pinpointing geographic or cultural contexts in which the political ambitions of young girls are better able to grow can help reveal the mechanisms—both psychological and structural—that support these political pursuits.

Conclusion

An integrative developmental framework provides an underutilized, yet immensely valuable tool in understanding and rectifying gender inequities in politics. We have identified five developmentally minded areas of inquiry that reveal how *societal ideas*, transmitted through *everyday interactions*, shape the development of *individual psychologies* within a broader system of *institutions*. This framework serves as both a template and a call to action for future efforts to uncover the developmental foundations on which gender gaps in politics are formed.

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²Of the 19 countries that currently have 40% or more women in parliament, over two-thirds have implemented quotas (UN Women, 2021).

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