

First Spouses in the States: Analysis of How they Inhabit  
their Roles and Contribute to the Executive

by

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*“The First Lady is an unpaid public servant elected by one person – her husband.”*  
*- Claudia “Lady Bird” Johnson*

## **Abstract**

This study examines the first spouses at the state level, specifically the roles of the men and women who filled this position in 2020, drawing close attention to how their roles differ on the basis of gender, age, and region. Analyzing first spouses' websites and Twitters, as well as semi-structured interviews of 16 members of the first spouses' staff and first spouses themselves, I find a pattern: Each first spouse interprets the unofficial and undefined public role not as a limitation but as an advantage. Sixteen spouses uniquely embrace their experiences and determine how they wish to contribute to the governors' administrations and their given state. Conclusively, the ambiguous and informal nature of the position of the first spouse at the state level is such that it allows those who inhabit this role in 2020 to define it in individualistic and unique ways.

## Introduction

Hillary Clinton made history in 2016 by becoming the first woman to receive the Democratic Party's nomination for the President of the United States. Although she lost the election to former President Donald J. Trump, many political scientists, as well as the American people, believe that her 2008 and 2016 candidacies demonstrated that women can be key contestants for the presidency. A CBS News poll shows that in 2008, 60% of men and 76% of women believed that Clinton's 2008 candidacy, in particular, would encourage future women to run for president ("Poll: Clinton's" 2008). The prediction appeared to come true as a record number of Democratic women ran for president in 2020: Elizabeth Warren, Amy Klobuchar, Kamala Harris, Kirsten Gillibrand, Tulsi Gabbard, and Marianne Williamson.

Despite the growing number of women participating in politics, and especially running for president in the United States, a woman has yet to claim the highest elected political position. A Pew Research Center survey indicates that in 2019, 69% of all women believed that "significant obstacles still make it harder for women to get ahead than men" (2019). From its founding with George and Martha Washington to its current state with Joe and Jill Biden, the position of the president upholds its masculine traditions without exception. These 'obstacles' that contribute to women's lack of descriptive representation seem limitless, and Julie Dolan, Melissa M. Deckman, and Michelle L. Swers address their entire book, *Women and Politics: Paths to Power and Political Influence*, to the subject. They highlight the various gendered challenges that are essential to understanding women's roles in American politics, some of which include: the confidence gap, family constraints, the media's gendered and sexist lens, societal expectations of women as homemakers, and other factors. Generally, women are hesitant to run for office and those who do face barriers that men do not experience. Despite the shifting gendered terrain in American politics, women's underrepresentation as executive, elected political leaders endures.

In 2016 when Hillary won the presidential nomination, despite her eventual defeat, questions emerged such as: Would the American people refer to Hillary's husband and former president Bill Clinton as the first gentleman? What traditions would he inherit from the presidential first ladies who came before him, and how would he take on this role? The nation has yet to see a first gentleman at the presidential level, while the number of first ladies continues to rise, with First Lady Jill Biden serving as the 54<sup>th</sup>. Although I hope one day soon I *can* empirically research the roles of the first gentleman at the presidential level, for now, I will analyze first spouses at the state level where this position is not assumed exclusively by women.

Although gender is an important component of my research, I am interested in the role that first spouses play as public-facing individuals, hosts and hostesses, political advisors and partners, and policy influencers in their particular states. I also observe first spouses' career trajectories and how, if at all, their careers were altered or influenced when becoming first spouses overnight with new responsibilities and expectations. Further, I identify the preferred titles of the first spouses as well as how the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically adjusted many of their schedules. Using a combination of methodologies (i.e., website and Twitter analyses and semi-structured interviews), I reveal untold stories, diverse routines, and unique experiences of 2020 state level spouses. I hope that examining first spouses' varying impacts on governors' administrations will not only help us understand executive power at the state level but also offer us a glimpse into what the future *would* be like when a woman is elected as the President of the United States and her presumed husband becomes the *first* first gentleman. This research might also generate expectations of the first gentleman at the presidential level based on what we can see with men and women playing the role of first spouse at the state level.

Before I introduce Chapter 1, it is important to articulate how I define and understand the first spouse terms. I will use the language of *first spouse* when I reference spouses of the

governors—state level first spouses. When I reference spouses of the presidents, I will communicate this explicitly with key terms such as *presidential first lady* or *ladies*, highlighting both the level of the executive and the precedented femininity of the position. Evidently, the nomenclature is complicated for first spouses because there are executive spouses at both the federal and state levels. Moreover, there are additional complications at the state level, specifically, with the added dimension of gender. There are a variety of titles that the first spouses at the state level use (i.e., First Lady, First Gentleman, First Partner, etc.). For ease and simplicity, I am going to, again, use *first spouse* as a default term and I will discuss naming and conventions later in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 1, I will present a brief history of presidential first ladies and an analysis of their roles as hostesses, cultural models, and political influencers. This is followed by a theoretical account of state level first spouses to discuss how might they fulfill these roles or embrace new ones. Chapter 3 will examine the profiles of first spouses in 2000, 2010, and 2020 with respect to gender, age, and region. I then examine the 46 state level first spouses of 2020 in my website and Twitter analyses to gauge what types of public-facing personas they inhabit. Thereafter, I introduce my interview protocol where I converse with staffers of 16 first spouses in 2020, and a few first spouses personally, to identify the roles of the first spouses. I then conclude that the ambiguous nature of the first spouse position generates the freedom and flexibility for individuals to define the position as they see fit on an individual basis. Lastly, I discuss the limitations and directions for future research of my project.

## **Chapter 1** **Presidential First Ladies: A Modern Overview**

Presidential first ladies have left their mark on the presidency and the nation. Holistically, drawing on social science literature from scholars who dedicate their research to the ever-changing roles of the first lady, I adapt MaryAnne Borrelli's three types of first lady

representation—the symbolic, the descriptive, and the substantive—to understand the position as consisting of three main roles (2011, 10). First, as a *hostess*, which I define as someone responsible for planning and participating in a variety of events, both informal and formal. Second, the first lady as a *cultural model*, responsible for sending a signal for the proper, often feminine, expected role for women in American society. Third, the first lady as a *political influencer*, a role that has become increasingly important over time and is often subject to contestation. I define this third role as a first lady who willingly campaigns with the president, advocates for her own initiatives and policy priorities independent of the president, and serves as his chief advisor.

Political scientists distinguish separate duties and expectations between the pre-modern and modern presidency, one that is marked by President Franklin D. Roosevelt (Skowronek 1993, 4-5). One of many factors that contributes to this distinction is that FDR passed the Executive Reorganization Act of 1939 which established the Executive Office of the President (EOP) and gave future presidents the authority to reorganize the Office and to hire a meaningful staff. The EOP ultimately houses the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the National Security Council (NSC), and the Council of Economic Advisors (CEA), for example, which are key actors today. Orren and Skowronek explain that the EOP acknowledges the president’s “newfound leverage as orchestrator of the nation’s expanded policy commitments” (2017, 108). Additionally, Thomas E. Cronin and William R. Hochman credit FDR for transforming the pre-modern presidency “from a mere enforcer and implementer of the will of Congress to a central leadership agency” that is expected to resolve both national and international issues (1985, 285). Further drawing on Cronin and Hochman’s analysis, they claim that FDR’s contributions to expanding the presidency “were as great and probably greater than any president since George Washington” (1985, 285). FDR dramatically revolutionized the modern institution of the presidency, which is

inclusive of the first lady, and for this reason, my discussion will include Eleanor Roosevelt and first ladies who came after her.

### *The Hostess*

Serving as the nation's hostess is arguably one of the oldest roles of the presidential first lady and traces back to Martha Washington, who spent most of her time managing the presidential homes in New York City and Philadelphia rather than cultivating a cultural image or fighting political battles. The modern first lady has since been expected to play hostess for social events and, according to Borrelli, is among those in the White House Office "deciding who will be recognized by the presidency" concerning guest lists, in addition to overseeing dinner menus and seating arrangements (2011, 60). This role has become increasingly political, as invitations and seats are often extended to powerful decision makers and policy makers (Borrelli 2011, 90). Besides the political and social outreach, first lady hostesses also preside over renovations, restorations, and refurbishments of the White House's private and public living spaces.

Jackie Kennedy particularly enjoyed her hostess role and used her knowledge of art and her position as first lady from 1961 to 1963 to initiate a restoration project when she remodeled the White House with new furniture and art "that transformed [her home] into a national showcase" (Pastan 2009, 54). Lisa Kathleen Graddy and Amy Pastan add that Jackie presented the changes she made to the public and welcomed renowned writers, artists, musicians, scientists, and politicians to her state receptions (2014, 39). Her televised tour of the newly decorated White House became a CBS News special program titled, *A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy*, which won her an honorary Emmy award, and thus cemented her role as a cultural icon (Graddy and Pastan 2014, 39). Kennedy favored hosting cocktail hours with live music when she allowed guests to drink casually and smoke indoors (Vaughan 2009, 76). At these gatherings, she encouraged casual, social mingling rather than professional, political meetings. The cultural icon

and exquisite hostess shied away from the third role of first lady, the political influencer, and once remarked, “I get all my opinions from my husband, which is true. How could I have political opinions? His were going to be best” (Mooney 2011). The public, mesmerized by her beauty, glamour, and poise, did not pressure her to become the political activist that she was not, and instead looked to President John Kennedy for their political needs.

Similarly to Jackie, Pat Nixon disliked politics, especially her personal involvement, but felt it was her duty as first lady to campaign for her husband, President Richard Nixon. Despite this, the Nixon administration thrust her into the public eye to contribute to his successful run for the presidency in 1969 (Graddy and Pastan 2014, 33). Pat embraced her role of hostess even on the campaign trail, representing the ideals of home and family and, in turn, appealed to women voters. Pastan explains that as first lady from 1969 to 1974, Pat picked up where Jackie left off in the White House renovation and restoration projects, “adding more than five hundred antiques and pieces of art” (2009, 57). She displayed the improvements she made and, with her warmth and desire to personally connect with those who entered her home, welcomed thousands of guests to the White House. As opposed to Jackie’s informal cocktail hours and dress, Pat hosted lengthier and more ornate dinners (Borrelli 2011, 84).

### *The Cultural Model*

The role of a cultural model has become increasingly visible, as modern first ladies have been the subject of continued interest, and judgment to both the public and media (Borrelli 2011, 91). Propelled into a national spotlight, first ladies have been showcased as fashion icons, the centers of the First Families, and ultimately, social and cultural trendsetters. Borrelli credits the modern press, broadcast news, and electronic journals for shaping the cultural model role, adding: “Like it or not, and many first ladies have not liked it at all, the press mediates between the first lady and millions who will never have the opportunity to meet her in person” (2011, 147).

Nevertheless, the first lady has attracted the public—men, women, and children alike— and, with them, creates a bond and connection through magazine covers, interviews, and television programs. The responsibilities that come with being a cultural model are not simple. The first lady must seamlessly reflect a well-mannered depiction of a woman who typically “resonates with ideas of upper-class, white, female” standards (Borrelli 2011, 147). She is expected to represent both a traditional and modern woman.

Mamie Eisenhower, a cultural model, represented the quintessential woman of the 1950s. She largely dedicated her first ladyship from 1953 to 1961 to her responsibilities as a wife and a mother. Mostly, she appealed to American housewives “who felt they had something in common with the most visible woman in the country,” and the media did not fall short of highlighting this (Pastan 2009, 51). She was a fixture in women’s magazines for her cooking and baking expertise as well as for her habit of saving the leftovers from White House meals. Beyond Mamie’s motherly instincts, her “personal style and glamour mixed with folksiness added to her public appeal and reinforced the optimism of the era” (Graddy and Pastan 2014, 43). As an extension of her domestic duties, she also took on a hostess role and “excelled at entertaining,” though refused the political influencer role, hence entering the president’s Oval Office “only four times in eight years” (Vaughan 2009, 74). Contributing to her role as a cultural icon, Mamie corrected administrative officials, the press, and the public who, with great respect for her title, called her “First Lady Mamie Eisenhower.” She often responded with, “Call me Mamie” (Vaughan 2009, 74). This informality appealed to women around the country who widely imitated her bangs and were fond of her feminine presence and love for the color pink (Vaughan 2009, 74).

Jackie Kennedy was, too, a cultural icon and admired by women—and men—across the country for her beauty, sophistication, wealth, and regal bearing. She attracted the press, captivated the public, added to national culture, and, as Pastan puts it, “may have been her

husband's greatest asset during his campaign for president in 1960" (2009, 52). Her fashion sense contributed to public taste, inspired a new look that women countrywide endeavored to imitate, and was the "epitome of chic, a cultural icon, [and] the object of public adulation" (Vaughan 2009, 75). Jackie constantly remained at the top of national "best-dressed" lists in the early 1960s, while copies of the First Lady's clothes that exemplified "The Jackie Look" were imitated in department stores (Graddy and Pastan 2014, 41). The press and public were, as an extension of their obsession with Jackie, fascinated by the First Family or, as Pastan suggests, the "model American family" (2009, 54). She and John's three-year-old daughter Caroline and infant son John Jr. joined them in the political and cultural spotlight and, together, the Kennedys brought a "vibrant young family" to the White House (Pastan 2009, 54). Despite this, Jackie was determined to shelter her children "from the attention directed at them by their father's position" and to maintain a private life, but as the most popular political family of the time, this was often a losing battle (Pastan 2009, 54). Caroline and John Jr.'s faces were plastered on magazine covers, newspaper columns, and commercial products, such as comic books (Pastan 2009, 54).

### *The Political Influencer*

Modern first ladies who undertake the political influencer role have the opportunity to wield power and advance the nation's interests. If she is successful in meeting constituents' needs, she is applauded, but if she falls short of doing so, she is highly scrutinized, even as an unelected and unappointed political actor. Some first ladies exercise behind-the-scenes, private political power while others remain vocal about how they impact public policy and executive decision-making. Karen O'Connor, Bernadette Nye, and Laura Van Assendelft trace these differences in overt versus covert political influencer roles and acknowledge that the scrutiny that first ladies receive from the media as well as from a "traditional public uncomfortable with women in positions of influence...may continue to place limits on the overt exercise of political

influence that some women would like to exercise” (1996, 848). Despite the challenges of navigating a political persona in a male-dominated executive branch, first ladies have persisted and used their impactful role to carry out their political ambitions.

Eleanor Roosevelt, nicknamed “The First Lady of the World” by her husband FDR, was an impassioned social activist and took a public and political role as first lady from 1933 to 1945. She advocated for greater opportunities for women, social reform for the disadvantaged, and civil rights for African Americans—efforts that led Pastan to coin Eleanor as “one of the greatest humanitarians of the twentieth century” (2009, 48). Although the roles of state level first spouses are largely overlooked by political scientists and historians, Graddy and Pastan touch on Eleanor’s role as lead campaigner in her husband’s victorious run for Governor of New York in 1928 as well as President in 1932 (2014, 47). Carolyn Vaughan reinforces Eleanor’s active political role as presidential first lady, tracing her dedication to not only the public but also her husband: She traveled approximately 40,000 miles and made 70 speeches a year, wrote 2,500 newspaper columns, 300 magazine articles, and six books, and answered thousands of letters (2009, 70). Also, as a skilled communicator, she thrust herself into the political spotlight and boosted American public morale during World War II at home and abroad, visiting women’s training centers and inspecting American Red Cross units in Europe (Pastan 2009, 48).

Gil Troy suggests that before the 1930s, or in other words before the Roosevelt administration, first ladies defined their positions freely and generally declined political involvement (2000, 592). Consistent with Troy’s claim, Eleanor, ambitious to bring hope to millions of suffering Americans during the Great Depression, was an effective political partner to her husband. I adapt Pierre-Marie Loizeau’s definition of a *political partner* and define it myself as a spouse of an elected official who is active in politics and participates in campaign activities (2015, 1). According to Troy, Eleanor’s public-facing role and legacy pressured her successors,

Bess Truman, Mamie Eisenhower, and Pat Nixon, in particular, who “abhorred politics and shunned the spotlight” to “be more active than they wished” (2000, 293).

Claudia “Lady Bird” Johnson served as first lady from 1963 to 1969 and, like Eleanor, was dedicated to building a relationship with the public. Women across America admired her voice of reason and composure in social settings. She campaigned alongside her husband President Lyndon B. Johnson’s presidential campaigns, rallies, and tours and played a significant role in urging the Southern Democrat vote, especially in 1964 when she led a four-day “Lady Bird Express” whistle-stop tour, which made 47 stops in eight states (Vaughan 2009, 78). Lady Bird’s active role in her very own campaign tour on behalf of her husband’s running highlights her immense dedication to the political influencer role as first lady. Additionally, Lady Bird held a degree from the University of Texas and used her education to further her husband’s career and political agenda. She had her own press office, worked directly with senior White House aides, and “implemented a multifaceted communications strategy designed to focus public attention on successful federal programs” (Borrelli 2011, 29). She spent extensive time promoting the preservation of America’s natural environmental beauty and successfully encouraged Congress to pass the Highway Beautification Act of 1965 to “limit billboards and set aside millions of acres for national parks and wilderness areas” (Vaughan 2009, 78). This resurgence of environmental policies in the hands of a first lady is significant, considering President Theodore Roosevelt initiated similar environmental protection policies in the earlier twentieth century.

Rosalynn Carter’s role as first lady from 1977 to 1981 is also defined by her policy influence and political engagement with the public, but unlike Eleanor and Lady Bird, was criticized for her impact. Before her husband Jimmy Carter was elected in 1977, Rosalynn campaigned generously for him, “working 18-hour days and speaking in hundreds of cities” (Vaughan 2009, 84). Rosalynn undertook diplomatic work in various countries and became

honorary Chair of the President's Commission on Mental Health (Pastan 2009, 59). She involved herself in Jimmy's executive affairs and was arguably his most loyal and trusted assistant and advisor. Rosalynn attended cabinet meetings and briefings to discuss crucial issues with her husband, including the Iran hostage crisis and the Camp David Accords (Vaughan 2009, 84).

Rosalynn's political influence, however, came with a price. Loizeau explains extensively how Rosalynn was attacked by the press for assisting her husband in political affairs, "acting as co-president," impacting U.S. policy, and sitting in on cabinet meetings (2015, 6). Journalist Gloria Steinem criticized Rosalynn for her collaborative work with her husband and charged: "More than any other president's spouse I have seen there is no independent thought or phrasing from him" (Troy 2000, 594). Rosalynn overcame these challenges and persisted through critics' gendered disapproval. She and members of the Garden Club visited Lady Bird Johnson's ranch where, with Lady Bird's help, Rosalynn began her work on the Georgia Highway Wildflower Program (Gould 1996, 563). Rosalynn, as a political influencer, dedicated her first ladyship to promoting peace, world health, and democracy alongside her husband, and even Lady Bird.

Hillary Rodham Clinton began to promote similar ideals of peace, public service, and democracy. Even before her first ladyship from 1993 to 2001, she shined a hopeful light on women in American politics and encouraged her generation to accept newly enlightened and progressive attitudes toward women's roles. Hillary campaigned generously for her husband Bill and worked alongside him when he became president in 1993. She was immediately involved in important issues given her policy-making and political expertise that she gained in her previous public service experiences. Bill appointed Hillary to head a task force on health care reform, and she accepted the responsibility with dedication (Vaughan 2009, 90). MaryAnne Borrelli claims that Hillary "pushed her gender role modeling further, than other policy-oriented first ladies," especially by fulfilling her campaign promise to manage health care reform and advocate for the

education of women and children (2011, 131). Hillary spent nearly her entire life thus far promoting health, safety, and comfort to families, women, and young girls nationwide—an agenda that she continued to implement as first lady.

Nevertheless, her active role in promoting positive change came with challenges, including when Congress “rejected her health care plan, and she was criticized not only for wielding political power without having been elected but also for being unladylike” (Vaughan 2009, 90). Before, during, and after her role as first lady, Hillary has been shamed for stepping beyond the invisible boundaries of a woman in politics, and for rejecting ‘ladylike’ behavior, which some critics condemn, while others admire. Gould believes that she “became one of the most loved and hated presidential wives” in American history during the middle of the 1990s, a subject that Valerie A. Sulfaro has studied extensively (1996, 641). Hillary undoubtedly paved a successful, though highly criticized, political career.

### Conclusions

A review of this history of the roles of the first ladies at the presidential level reveals that first ladies play each of these roles—hostess, cultural model, and political influencer—to some degree. These roles are not mutually exclusive, which also reveals the possibility that first ladies might define their experiences individually based on their personal preferences and abilities, although these women are under enormous pressure to act in accordance with public expectations. First ladies do not exclusively play one role in isolation from another, but oftentimes fulfill a combination of such, hence Jackie Kennedy inhabiting both roles as hostess and cultural model. Further, Pat Nixon, who I classify as a hostess, was also a political influencer. She campaigned for her husband’s successful 1968 presidential campaign, made public appearances overseas at diplomatic summits in China and the Soviet Union, and was the *first* first lady to endorse the Equal Rights Amendment (Graddy and Pastan 2014, 33). Next, I classify Lady Bird as a political

influencer although she also inhabits the hostess role. She planted pansies throughout Washington D.C. and hosted 51 receptions during the 1964 election year (Graddy and Pastan 2014, 35) (Borrelli 2011, 79). Finally, Mamie Eisenhower, who I describe as a cultural model, was also a hostess. She put her stamp on the White House and redecorated it, furnishing her private quarters with pink pillows and towels to make them as comfortable as possible (Pastan 2009, 51).

Throughout history, the presidential first ladyship has not simplified, but rather become more complex, and its evolution does not establish permanent expectations of the job. Outlining this evolution is important for my research and highlights, again, that first ladies, typically, take on more than one role as hostess, cultural model, and political influencer, though with the weight of public pressures and expectations. Despite this, I find that the first ladies have embraced their roles as full-time positions—a career for which they neither interviewed nor applied but was rather cast upon them overnight when their husbands became president.

## **Chapter 2**

### **State Level First Spouses: A Theoretical Discussion**

While there is a plethora of scholarship about the role of the presidential first lady including historical, political science, and sociological accounts, there is incredibly little academic scholarship on the first spouses at the state level. In fact, I only found two academic articles, but there are other ways that we can understand the roles of the first spouses at the state level, such as through biographies. Framing a conversation about state level first spouses in categories of host/hostess, cultural model, and political influencer might reveal important findings about their roles. However, because there is so little research, it is difficult to recognize if this is an insightful approach to thinking about these individuals.

Most biographical sketches are located on a page on the governors' websites or on a separate first spouse dedicated website. They do not encompass sufficient information to either

accurately code the spouses as hosts/hostesses, cultural models, or political influencers or make generalizable conclusions about their roles. They, instead, typically consist of a self-portrait and brief paragraphs tracing hobbies, education, family, and children of the first spouse. On the other hand, it is possible to generalize and code for the roles of presidential first ladies, as I have accomplished in Chapter 1, for two main reasons. First, there are so few presidential first ladies (54), while there have been hundreds of state level first spouses. Second, there is a variety of academic scholarship and biographies dedicated to each presidential first lady, while, for the majority of state level first spouses, the most information that can be found is, again, within their brief biographical sketches on governors' websites. The sketches of former first spouses, however, are deleted and replaced by those of the current first spouses. To navigate these challenges, I will pose a theoretical conversation to trace why we might expect the roles of state level first spouses to be the same as or different from presidential first ladies.

In addition to the question of whether we can apply presidential first lady roles as hostess, cultural model, and political influencer to the state level, there is also the complicating factor of gender. There have been several male first spouses at the state level, while we have not seen a male first spouse at the presidential level. Do male first spouses at the state level fulfill these traditional roles of presidential first ladies? This question is equally as important concerning female first spouses at the state level. These uncertainties lead to my overall purpose of carrying out this study, as my findings shed light on spouses at the state level where there are few observations. Scholars have not addressed *how* to understand these roles or, more importantly, what these roles entail. Spouses at the state level have different genders, so this research is necessary to also understand how, if at all, male and female first spouses play similar roles.

Nonetheless, I was determined to find the few scholarly academic sources that *do* exist. The first scholarly article that I found is written by Laura A. van Assendelft and Bernadette Nye

and is titled “First Ladies in the States: The Motivations and Political Resources of Governors' Spouses.” Their research is based primarily on survey data collected from state level, female first spouses in 1996. They found the women to be politically active or, in the terms that I use, fulfilling the role of political influencer. Notably, the majority were interested in policies targeted on traditional women’s issues, such as abortion (van Assendelft and Nye 1998, 102). Their study reveals that each woman carries out the political influencer role exclusively, without any evidence that points to the fulfillment of the hostess or cultural model roles (van Assendelft and Nye 1998, 81-85). This contrasts with what I find at the presidential level, where the roles of first ladies overlap—they consistently fulfill at least two. While van Assendelft and Nye’s efforts inform my work, my goal is somewhat different. I want to explore how male first spouses fit into the conversation to understand how men, in addition to women, define their first spouse roles.

The second scholarly work that I found on state level first spouses is an interview with writer Riane Eisler published in the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies* that uncovers details on Jennifer Siebel Newsom’s (CA) position as first spouse in 2020. The interview reveals her role as political influencer, with no indication that she fulfills the role as hostess or cultural model, similar to the female first spouses in van Assendelft and Nye’s study. With an awareness that I cannot draw strong conclusions based on a single interview, her career as a filmmaker, director, and producer seems to shape her role as political influencer. She dedicates her career to advocating for gender equality, shedding light on society’s often unfair treatment of women and families, and dismantling toxic masculinity (Eisler 2020, 2-3). She addresses these issues in her documentary *Miss Representation* (2011) and film *The Mask You Live In* (2015), for example, which were both produced before she became first spouse. Her film career sets the tone for her political influencer role as first spouse, as she has “championed issues related to raising healthy, whole children and advancing gender equity, including the launch of

her first initiative, #EqualPayCA” (Eisler 2020, 7). As first spouse she comments, “We need to prioritize caring sectors like health, education, and childcare, over more ‘masculine’ sectors like war, weapons, and incarceration,” which are issues that she felt passionate about before becoming first spouse, and so her career might have facilitated her political initiatives (Eisler 2020, 7).

Beyond the academic scholarship, there are biographical accounts that trace the roles and routines of individual first spouses at the state level. One example is a biography written by First Spouse Elise Winter (MS) and JoAnne Prichard Morris titled, *Once in a Lifetime: Reflections of a Mississippi First Lady*. This book, which unlike van Assendelft and Nye’s study that analyzes 26 female first spouses in a single year, focuses specifically on the experiences of one female, Elise Winter (MS) who fulfills the position of first spouse from 1980 to 1984. Furthermore, the study traces how various female first spouses fulfill the role of political influencer, while this book covers how a single female first spouse fulfills the role as not only hostess but also political influencer, similar to Siebel Newsom (CA).

Elise Winter’s journal entries within this book illuminate how she sought to define her role as Mississippi’s first spouse. Moreover, these entries are organized by topics, or chapters, one of which includes, “At Home in the Mansion,” which outlines her role of hostess: she is a “planner of elegant parties, a sophisticated hostess, a hands-on gardener, and an enlightened steward of the historic Governor’s Mansion” (Winter and Prichard Morris 2015, xi). A separate chapter, “Passages: Personal to Political,” outlines her role of political influencer: she was “well-informed about policy and politics, and she actively assisted her husband in winning passage of progressive programs, especially the Education Reform Act” (Winter and Prichard Morris 2015, xi). These chapters demonstrate Winter as hostess and political influencer during her time as first spouse in additional ways that I do not address. Significantly, her journal entries do not signal the fulfillment of a cultural model role, as she exclusively discusses her impact within the state of Mississippi.

In conclusion, I find two important takeaways from looking at the little scholarship that exists on state level first spouses. First, the works that I discuss in this section do not address the first spouses as cultural models. This signals that the cultural model role might only be fulfilled by presidential first spouses because they are positioned on a national stage, representative of the entire country, whereas first spouses at the state level are positioned on a smaller geographic scale, solely representative of a single state. There is another dimension to this discovery: because state level first spouses do not carry out their position on a national scale, they might not receive high levels of scrutiny and pressure from the public. For example, on the presidential level, first ladies were—and still are—pressured to be politically active. It seems as though presidential first ladies do not have the freedom to define their role as they see fit. To what extent do external pressures force them to succumb to their roles as hostess, cultural model, and political influencer? The public expects and pressures presidential first spouses to fulfill the three roles, thus leading to overlap—it is not enough to simply fulfill the hostess role. This leads to my second takeaway: State level first spouses can fulfill one role, as Jennifer Siebel Newsom (CA) articulates in her interview. Is this because state level spouses do not receive public pressure on a grand scale as do presidential first spouses? Do state level spouses have more freedom to define their roles as they see fit? I will reveal the untold stories of additional first spouses in 2020 to understand first if their roles are the same or similar to those that we have seen presidential first ladies fulfill, and second if the roles of men and women state level first spouses are the same or different.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **First Spouse Profiles in the Past 20 Years**

As a preliminary point, it is important to acknowledge that women are underrepresented in electoral gubernatorial politics, which means that men are underrepresented in the first spouse role. Even though feminist scholars recognize that the governorship has been a masculine role and the first spouse has been a feminine role, little is known beyond that about the specific individuals

who have occupied this latter position. As a result, I collected the name, regional affiliation, age range, and gender of each first spouse throughout the United States in 2020, 2010, and 2000 to better understand the demographic characteristics of these individuals. Organizing this data allows me to compare the variables of age, gender, and region to identify patterns, trends, or surprising disjunctions in the makeup of both the position of the governor and first spouse. It is also critical to describe exactly *who* I am discussing in my research methodologies later, and that is the 46 first spouses specifically in 2020 administrations. In this section, I have the benefit of expanding my research across not only space but also time.

### Gender

In 2020, there were seven male and 39 female first spouses. However, we cannot simply conclude based on the number of male and female spouses that there are seven female governors and 39 male governors. There were nine female governors and 41 male governors in 2020. Governor Polis (CO) is a member of the LGBTQ+ community and is married to his partner, First Spouse Marlon Reis. Also, Governors Ivey (AL) and Cuomo (NY) are divorced and Governors Mills (ME) and Michelle Lujan Grisham (NM) are widowed. This totals 46 first spouses, although there are 50 governors in 2020. Forty-seven of the 50 governors in 2020 continue to serve in 2021, apart from new administrations including Governor and First Spouse Cox (UT), Governor and First Spouse Gianforte (MT), and Governor and First Spouse McKee (RI).

Although women are underrepresented as governors and men are underrepresented as first spouses, we cannot assume all governors have an opposite-sex spouse, or are married in general because, as we have seen, some are LGBTQ, divorced, and/or widowed. Despite this, I quantitatively analyzed the extent to which the position of the first spouse has been dominated by women across time. I looked at the gender demographics of the governors and their spouses in 2010 and 2000 as well. In 2010, there were five male first spouses and 43 female first spouses,

which totals 48 first spouses. The governors of Hawaii and Illinois were unmarried. In 2000, there were three male first spouses and 47 female first spouses, which totals 50 first spouses, as each governor was married. These findings indicate that even though we see a small increase in the number of male first spouses—in 2000 there were 6% or three; 2010, 10% or five; and 2020, 15% or seven—the position of the first spouse continues to be grossly dominated by women.

### Age

Because very few ages of the governors' spouses are publicly available, I instead gathered each age of 46 governors in 2020 and estimated the age of their spouses in three categories: 40 or younger, 40-60, and 60 or older. I assumed that each spouse was roughly the same age as their partner, the governor. For example, in 2020 Governor Dunleavy (AK) was 59, so I included his wife, First Spouse Rose Dunleavy (AK) in the 40-60 age range, and Governor Carney (DE) was 64, so I included his wife, First Spouse Tracey Carney (DE) in the 60 or older range. To check the accuracy of these placements, I asked interview participants to identify which age range the specific first spouse belonged, and their answers invariably matched my predictions, which gives me confidence that most, if not all, of the remaining 30 first spouses who I designate in age groups are also correctly placed.

I found that of the 46 first spouses in 2020, zero were 40 or younger, 19 were between the ages of 40-60, and 27 first spouses were 60 or older. These findings are consistent with the ages of the 48 first spouses in 2010: one was 40 or younger, 23 were between the ages of 40-60, and 24 were 60 or older. To add to the consistent pattern, of the 50 first spouses in 2000, zero were 40 or younger, 38 were between the ages of 40-60, and 12 were 60 or older. I identify most first spouses to be between the ages of 40-60, which explains why the average age of the governor in each year is as follows: 2020 (60), 2010 (58), and 2000 (54). These findings suggest that when comparing 2020, 2010, and 2000, the ages of governors and their spouses have increased.

The most notable takeaway from analyzing the governors' and first spouses' ages in 2020, 2010, and 2000, was that of all the first spouses, I categorized one, First Spouse Supriya Jolly (LA) as 40 or younger in 2010. This means that of the governors in 2020, 2010, and 2000, one was 40 or younger, and it was Governor Jindal (LA) who barely fit this category, considering he was 39 years old in 2010. I was surprised by this, especially because most states require the governor to be at least 30 years old. According to the National Youth Rights Association (NYRA), the age of candidacy is defined as "the minimum age required for someone to hold political office...and can vary widely from state to state" ("NYRA," n.d.). Thirty-four states require the governor to be at least 30 years old, six states at least 25 years old, six states at least 18 years old, one state at least 21 years old, one state at least 31 years old, and two states have no age requirement ("Age of Candidacy," n.d.). If the age of candidacy for 34 states is 30 years old, and the remaining 17 states have flexible, or younger, age requirements, why is the average age of the governor increasing over time?

### Region and Gender

I use the U.S. Census Bureau's grouping of the states by region, which categorizes nine states in the Northeast (CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT), 12 states in the Midwest (IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WI), 16 states in the South, excluding D.C., (AL, AK, DE, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV), and 13 states in the West (AZ, AK, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA, WY) ("U.S. Census," n.d.).

The number of male first spouses and female first spouses in each region remains constant across the three years that I analyzed, or, in other words, we do not see significant changes in the gender makeup of the first spouses per region. In 2020, 2010, and 2000, each region has significantly more female first spouses than it does male first spouses, as shown in Figures 1, 2, and 3. For instance, looking specifically at the 16 U.S. Census-designated Southern states, in

2020 there were 15 first spouses and they were all female, in 2010 there were 16 first spouses and 15 were female, and one was a male, First Gentleman Bob Eaves (NC), and in 2000 there were 16 first spouses in the South and they were all female (“U.S. Census,” n.d.). In 2010, of the 16 first spouses in the South, 15<sup>1</sup> were female and one was male, indicating that there was one female governor in the South in 2010, as there was in 2020. I can make such conclusions because in 2000 and 2010 there were no governors who belonged to the LGBTQ+ community, and in 2020, there was only one, and that was in Colorado, a state that the U.S. Census designates to the West (“U.S. Census,” n.d.).

I examine whether there is a region of the U.S. that is more progressive and therefore more likely to elect female governors which would then be more likely to have male spouses. When combining numbers in 2020, 2010, and 2000, of the 35 first spouses total in the Midwest, five or 14% were male. Of the 37 first spouses in the West, five or 13% were male. Of the 47 first spouses total in the South, one or less than 2% was male. Of the 25 first spouses in the Northeast, four or 16% were male. I must highlight that the U.S. Census does not divide the states into regions evenly. As previously mentioned, there are nine states in the Northeast, 12 states in the Midwest, 16 in the South, and 13 states in the West. So, I cannot conclude that one state is likely to elect a woman as governor versus another state. Despite this, these percentages are telling of the lack of women’s descriptive representation as governors, and therefore the lack of male first spouses, especially in the South where 46 of the 47 total first spouses in 2020, 2010 were female.

Overall, concerning gender, the number of male first spouses has increased over the past 20 years (with there being three in 2000, five in 2010, and seven in 2020), but they remain in the minority. In terms of age, even though the age required to be governor is, for most states, at least

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<sup>1</sup> There were 15 first spouses in the South in 2020 instead of the expected 16 because Governor Ivey’s husband is deceased, who would have counted as a male first spouse.

30 years old, the average age of the governor (and thus my assumption about the age of the first spouse) is 54 in 2000, 58 in 2010, 60 in 2020 and is increasing slightly over time. Geographically, I find that male first spouses have been in all regions of the country over the past 20 years, but are more likely to be in the Northeast, Midwest, or West as compared to the South.

Figure 1: 2020 Gender of First Spouses by Region

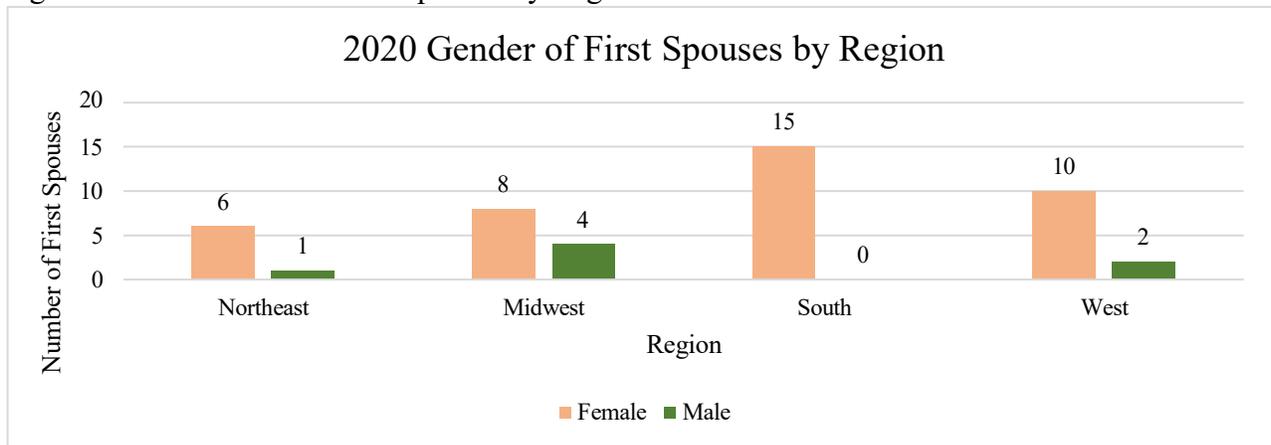


Figure 2: 2010 Gender of First Spouses by Region

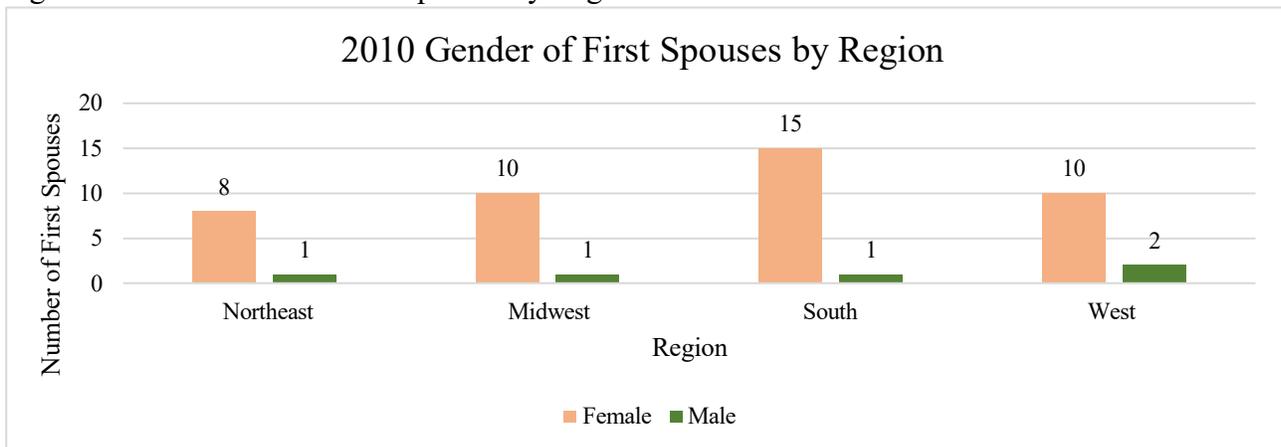
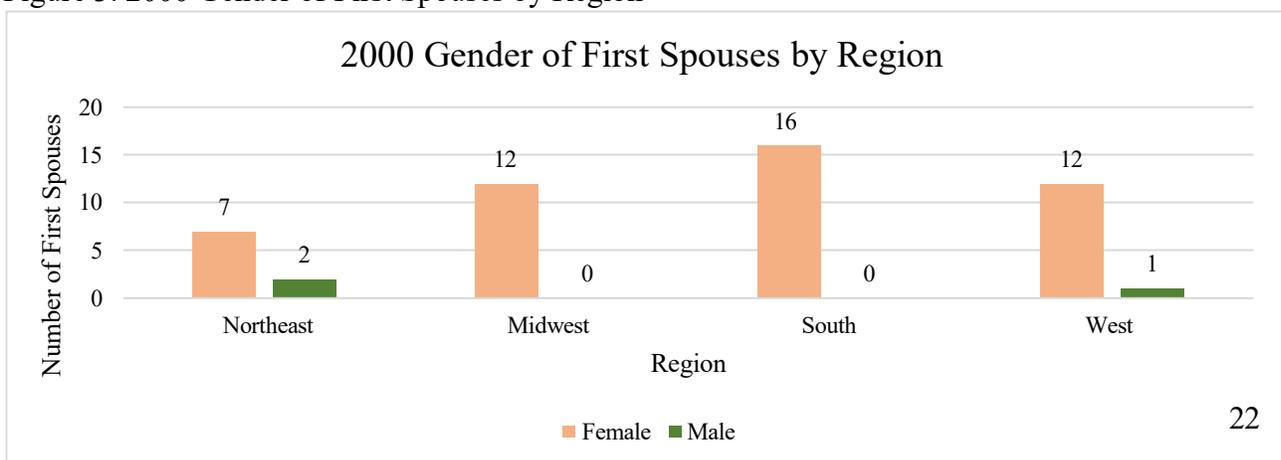


Figure 3: 2000 Gender of First Spouses by Region



## Chapter 4 Public Personas of First Spouses

### 4.1 Website Analysis

Table 1: First Spouse Websites Per State

First Spouse Websites	States	Count
Independent First Spouse Website	MO, OH, VA	3
First Spouse Page Linked through Governor's Website	AR, CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, HI, ID, IN, IA, KY, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NC, ND, OH, OK, OR, PA, SC, SD, TN, TX, WA, WV, WI, WY	33
No Website or Page	AK, AZ, IL, KS, MI, NE, NH, VT	8
<b>Total</b>		<b>44</b>

My investigation of the roles of first spouses in 2020 began with an examination of each of their public-facing personas. I was interested in understanding the extent to which the first spouses engage with the public. While researching, I recognized that first spouses present themselves through different online formats, which prompted me to identify three levels of engagement. These levels, organized from what I would theoretically expect to signal the most important first spouse public-facing role to least important are as follows: “Independent First Spouse Website,” “First Spouse Page Linked through Governor's Website,” and “No Website or Page.” Each category describes the status of website/page presence, or lack thereof, of the first spouses. The majority of first spouses have biographical pages linked through the governors’ official websites but, how, if at all, do the remaining individuals interface with the public? I found that very few spouses have independent websites to the governors’, and even more have neither of the two forms of public online engagement. These details can be found in Table 1.

I exclude Utah, Montana, and Rhode Island from the website analysis. In 2021, Governor Cox (UT) succeeded former Governor Herbert (UT), Governor Gianforte (MT) succeeded former Governor Bullock (MT), and Governor McKee (RI) succeeded former Governor Raimondo (RI). As a result of the change in administrations, website information on the former governors and

first spouses in 2020 has been replaced by current governors and first spouses in 2021.

Conclusively, I omit seven states from my website analysis. In addition to Utah, Montana, and Rhode Island, I exclude Alabama, Maine, New Mexico, and New York, as there, again, are no first spouses in these states. Though this would make the total count for my data 43, my total count, instead, is 44. First Spouse Fran DeWine (OH) is marked for having both an “Independent First Spouse Website” and a “First Spouse Page Linked through Governor’s Website.” Ohio is included in the list of states for both categories.

On the surface, an independent website, a page linked through the governor’s page, and a nonexistent website or page would seem to signal three separate functions and purposes. First, an “Independent First Spouse Website” might signal that within that state, or for that specific individual, the role of first spouse is more important and essential than the roles of the first spouses in the remaining two categories. Second, along the same lines, a “First Spouse Page Linked through Governor’s Website” likely suggests that the role of the first spouse might be more important than that of the first spouses with nonexistent websites or pages, but less important than the roles of first spouses with independent websites. Third, “No Website or Page” possibly signals that the role of first spouse is the least recognized and important compared to the spouses’ roles in the remaining two categories. This category also might indicate that the first spouse does not want a public role. While from the websites alone I cannot determine what the role of the first spouse is, in the remainder of this section I will outline my coding of the websites into the three categories. Then, I will revisit the discussion of the roles in Chapter 5.

I coded three first spouses, Teresa Parson (MO), Fran DeWine (OH), and Pamela Northam (VA), to have an “Independent First Spouse Website.” These stand-alone websites include highly curated pages with details such as a biography, self-portrait, historical and visitor information of the governor’s mansion, contact information to the office of the first spouse,

“News” and “Events” sections, and live social media feed to the spouse’s Twitter account. For example, the URL to First Spouse Pamela Northam’s (VA) website appears as: <<https://www.firstlady.virginia.gov/>>, which highlights that the page belongs to her, as opposed to Governor Northam (<<https://www.governor.virginia.gov/>>). Pamela Northam’s (VA) website includes more than simply an “About” section or a brief biographical sketch, like that of the majority of first spouses who have a page linked on the governors’ websites. Her website consists of a “News” column with trending Virginia stories and press releases, a “Week in Review” column that outlines the events that the First Spouse attends, and live Twitter feed with the First Spouse’s most recent activity (“First Lady Pamela,” n.d.). Additionally, there is an extensive biography and self-portrait of not only the First Spouse but also of her three staffers, including David Cary and Bailey Harlow with whom I interviewed, as well as their titles and contact information. Her website includes more than eight photographs and logos of Virginia non-profit institutions and museums and consists of more than 2,200 words (“First Lady Pamela,” n.d.).

Second, I coded 33 first spouses with a “First Spouse Page Linked through Governor’s Website,” which mainly consists of a first spouse’s self-portrait and brief, biographical sketch. One example of a first spouse with a page linked through the governor’s website is Jennie Gordon (WY). When visiting Governor Gordon’s (WY) website, there is an “About” link with a “Meet Jennie” option. This URL appears as: <<https://governor.wyo.gov/about/meet-jennie>>, which traces the aforementioned steps to reach her page and highlights that the website belongs to Governor Gordon (WY). This link guides me to a self-portrait—and no additional photos or logos as featured on Northam’s (VA) page—as well as a 319-word biographical sketch of First Spouse Jennie Gordon (“Wyoming: Governor” n.d.). Only 43 of the 319 words are dedicated to her experiences as first spouse, while the remaining trace her childhood, education, career, and family (“Wyoming: Governor” n.d.).

Finally, I coded eight first spouses to have “No Website or Page,” who, needless to say, have neither an independent page separate from the governor’s website nor a page dedicated to them on the governor’s website. It seems likely that if a spouse has neither form of website presence, they may not play a role in public life, such as First Spouse Rose Dunleavy (AK) and Angela Ducey (AZ) who both fit into this category.

I initially thought that analyzing the first spouses’ public-facing personas via a website analysis would help me to understand their roles, but realized that I did not have sufficient information about what those roles are, exactly, at this point in my research. Frankly, I need the data that I gain from my interview conversations to understand these roles. This means that the degree to which I can prove whether an “Independent First Spouse Website,” for example, truly signals a more dedicated, important, and influential role is not high, based on this chapter alone. I will revisit these conversations and hypotheses in Chapter 5 when I find information about how the first spouses perceive their roles. I might find no connection between different levels of website presence and the first spouses’ roles.

While I cannot use the websites alone to understand the roles of the first spouses, I can examine the type of website presence they have based on the age, gender, and region of the first spouse. In doing so, I find two definite patterns. First, the three spouses coded to have an “Independent First Spouse Website” share the same genders (female) and regional affiliation (Midwest states). Second, six of the seven male first spouses are coded to have a “First Spouse Page Linked through Governor's Website,” while only one is coded to have “No Website or Page,” and that is Ted Daughety (KS). From the website analysis, it seems as though the female first spouses, and more specifically, female first spouses of Midwestern states, are the greatest contributors and influencers of the governors’ administrations. Moving forward, I frame my Twitter analysis with a similar theory that first codes the different Twitter presences of the first

spouses and, second categorizes them in order of what I hypothesize to signal the most engagement with the public and importance of the role to the least.

## 4.2 Twitter Analysis

Table 2: First Spouse Twitter Profiles Per State

Twitter Profile	States	Count
First Spouse Dedicated	AK, FL, GA, IN, KY, LO, MN, MS, MO, NJ, NC, ND, OH, OK, RI, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV, WY	21
Personal with Mention of First Spouse	CA	1
Personal	CT	1
None	AZ, CO, DE, HI, IA, IL, ID, KS, MA, MD, MI, NH, NV, NE, OR, PA, SD, UT, VT, WA, WI	21
Total		44

As previously stated, my second step in analyzing the first spouses’ public personas was to look at their social media presence. I chose to carry out a Twitter analysis as opposed to that of other widely used platforms, such as Facebook or Instagram, because Twitter has become increasingly popular in the past decade amongst politicians (Lerer 2019). This holds true concerning each of the 50 governors of 2020 with a Twitter profile dedicated to their position, as opposed to personal Twitter profiles. Although unelected, first spouses are established public figures. Do all the first spouses in 2020 have Twitter profiles dedicated to their position as well? I found that 23 of the 44 first spouses, or 52%, have Twitter profiles. With additional research, I uncovered a notable detail: 21 first spouses dedicate their profile to their position, while one first spouse has a personal profile with a brief mention of their position, and another first spouse has a personal profile with no mention of the position. These details can be found in Table 2.

Similar to the engagement hierarchy that I identified in my website analysis, I recognized four levels of engagement with respect to Twitter. These levels, organized from what I hypothesize to be the most to least important are as follows: “First Spouse Dedicated,” “Personal with Mention of First Spouse,” “Personal,” and “None,” and describe the statuses of Twitter presence of the spouses. I expect that each level signals four separate functions and purposes.

First, the “First Spouse Dedicated” Twitter profiles might point to more first spouse autonomy, and so I would expect the first spouses in this category to have the most important role, administratively and publicly. Second, the first spouses with Twitters coded as “Personal with Mention of First Spouse” likely signal less commitment to their role, which might be perceived as secondary to their additional responsibilities, careers, and interests. Third, the first spouses with “Personal” Twitter profiles might be disconnected from the public and have the least important roles within the governors’ administrations in comparison, especially, with the first spouses with Twitter profiles dedicated to their role. Fourth, the first spouses whom I coded as “None,” meaning that they do not have any form of Twitter presence, seem unlikely to engage with the public or have a public role, in general, more so than those in the aforementioned categories.

I will exclude the same seven first spouses from my Twitter analysis, as I did for my website analysis, except First Spouse Andy Moffit (RI). Although there was a different governor’s administration in 2020 (Governor Gina Raimondo and First Spouse Andy Moffit) than there is currently in 2021 (Governor Daniel McKee and First Spouse Susan McKee), former First Spouse Andy Moffit’s Twitter is still publicly accessible.

First, I coded 21 of the 23 total Twitters as “First Spouse Dedicated.” This means that “first lady” or “first gentleman” is included either in the first spouse’s Twitter handle or name, or both. For example, First Lady Pamela Northam’s (VA) Twitter handle is @FirstladyVA, First Lady Britainy Beshear’s (KY) Twitter name is “First Lady Britainy Beshear,” and North Dakota’s First Lady Kathryn Burgum’s Twitter handle is @FirstLadyND and her Twitter name is “First Lady Kathryn Burgum.” The spouses within this level post frequently—daily or once per week—and the majority have posts describing events they attend and initiatives they support, as well as news pertaining to the specific state. I briefly expand on the political and apolitical nature of the Twitter content in the *Twitter* section of Chapter 5.

Second, I identified two first spouses' Twitter profiles as "Personal with Mention of First Spouse," which I code as profiles that are not solely dedicated to the first spouse. Instead, they trace other careers or affiliations independent of the first spouse role. I code First Spouse Jennifer Siebel Newsom's (CA) Twitter profile at this level. She includes "First Partner of California" in her biography in addition to being "Married to @GavinNewsom and mom of 4!" (Siebel Newsom, n.d.). She also adds that she is the "Filmmaker behind @representpledge and the @maskyoulivein," two films previously mentioned (*Miss Representation* (2011) and *The Mask You Live In* (2015)), and the "founder of @therepproject," The Representation Project (TRP), a global non-profit organization established in 2011 (Siebel Newsom, n.d.).

Third, I coded one first spouse's Twitter profile as "Personal" and that is Annie Lamont's (CT). This means that there is no mention of her title, position, or role as first spouse in her biography, header picture, profile picture, Twitter handle, Twitter name, and linked website. Notably, First Spouse Annie Lamont (CT) does, however, include in her biography that she is the "Co-Founder & Managing Partner of @oakhcft," or OAK HC/FT, a venture capital fund investing in health care and financial technology, and she links the fund's website in her biography. Also, she includes the Twitter handles of six of her "Active investments," in her biography. It seems to be the case that Lamont (CT) prioritizes her independent career and financial investments over her role and position of first spouse to a greater degree than the two first spouses with Twitters coded as "Personal with Mention of First Spouse." (Lamont, n.d.)

Fourth, there are 21 first spouses without Twitter profiles, so I coded them as "None." This means that I did not identify either personal or first spouse dedicated Twitter profiles for these individuals. Although First Spouse Trudi Inslee (WA) and First Spouse Jeanette Herbert (UT) have Twitter profiles, I coded them both as having "None" because their Twitters are inactive. In other words, both women have zero Tweets and Retweets.

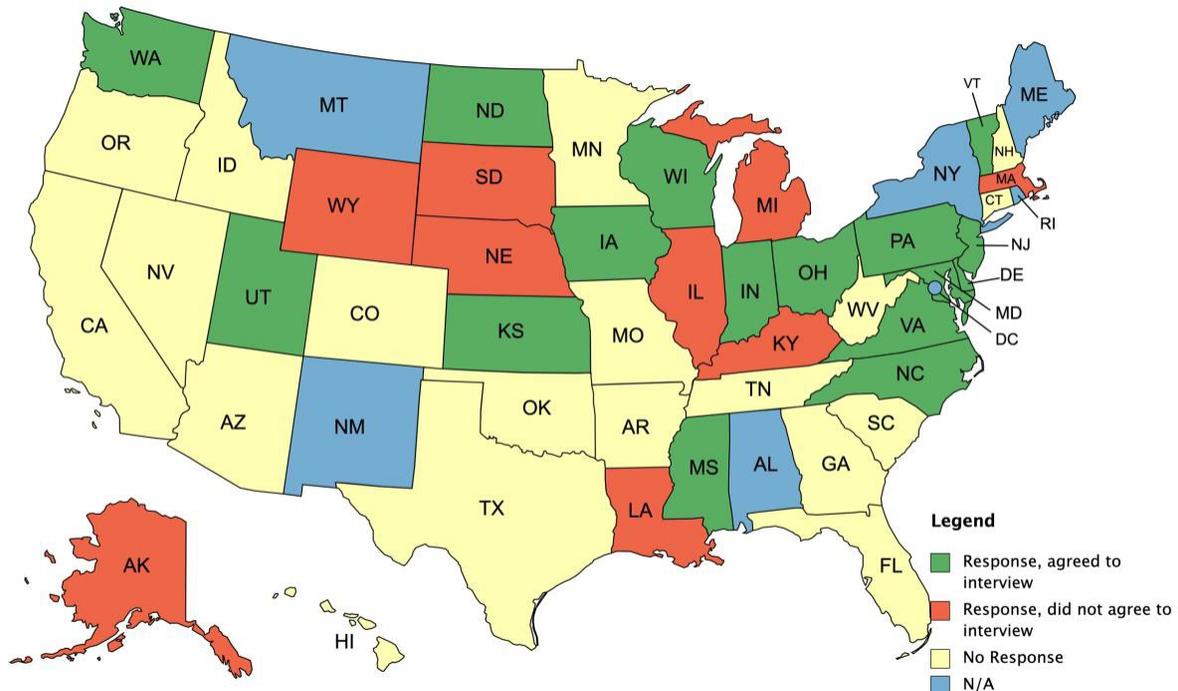
Similar to my website analysis, I recognize that it is irresponsible based on a Twitter analysis alone to conclude that these four separate levels of engagement truly signal different roles of first spouses. Nevertheless, it seems plausible to predict that a first spouse with a Twitter profile dedicated to their position not only engages with the public more often but also carries out a more influential role than a first spouse without a Twitter profile. I will revisit this discussion, in addition to the website analysis, in Chapter 5.

I find no patterns with respect to age and region, but one concerning gender. Six of the seven male first spouses do not have Twitter profiles and are thus coded as “None,” while one male first spouse, Andy Moffit (RI), has a “First Spouse Dedicated” Twitter profile. This suggests that female first spouses are more likely to establish a strong public-facing persona compared to male first spouses.

## Chapter 5 Interview Protocol

### 5.1 Methodology

Graph 1: Map of Interview Respondent Data



After completing my website and Twitter analyses, I wanted to understand the nuances of the first spouses' roles. This led me to carry out an IRB-approved interview protocol. The bulk of my results can be found in this chapter, where I spoke with a portion of the population of first spouses' staffers. My respondents are representative of the relative population of spouses with respect to gender, age, and region, as well as the population of spouses from my website and Twitter analyses. Exact proportions and comparisons can be found in Table 4. I omitted six states from my interview data: Alabama, Maine, New Mexico, and New York because the governors in these four states do not have spouses, and Montana and Rhode Island because there are new governors' administrations in 2021. Utah also has a new administration, but an unnamed staffer of Jeanette Herbert served/serves as both the Director of Scheduling of First Spouse Jeanette Herbert in 2020 and First Spouse Abby Cox in 2021. I interviewed her concerning Herbert's experiences and role to remain consistent with my other interviews where I analyze the first spouses of 2020.

Table 4: Proportion Comparison of 2020 First Spouses Total to Interview Selection

<b>Gender</b>	<b>2020 First Spouses (Total Population)</b>	<b>2020 First Spouses (16 from Interviews)</b>
Male	7 (15%)	2 (12%)
Female	39 (85%)	14 (88%)
<b>Age</b>		
40 or younger	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
40-60	19 (41%)	2 (12%)
60 or older	27 (59%)	14 (88%)
<b>Region</b>		
Northeast	7 (15%)	3 (19%)
Midwest	12 (26%)	6 (38%)
South	15 (33%)	5 (31%)
West	12 (26%)	2 (12%)
<b>Website</b>		
Independent First Spouse Website	3 (7%)	2 (13.33%)
First Spouse Page Linked through Governor's Website	33 (75%)	11 (73.33%)
No Website or Page	8 (18%)	2 (13.33%)
<b>Twitter</b>		
Personal	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Personal with Mention of First Spouse	2 (5%)	1 (6%)
First Spouse Dedicated	20 (45%)	6 (38%)
None	21 (48%)	9 (56%)

I contacted 44 governors' offices<sup>2</sup> via email and phone, shared with them my research interests and goals, and asked if a staff member who works closely with the first spouse would be willing to participate in my interview methodology. Twenty-five out of 44 states answered my recruitment email, which means I had a 57% response rate. Sixteen of the 25 states (64%) agreed to participate, but nine (36%) did not. Seven of the 16 states (44%) agreed to an interview but could not commit to a Zoom interview, so I emailed them interview questions and they responded via email format. Nine of the 16 states (56%) agreed to an interview via semi-structured video

<sup>2</sup> I had originally planned to contact the *Office of the First Spouse* in each state but realized that very few governors' administrations have an official office dedicated to the first spouse, so I went through the *Office of the Governor* for the majority of the states to locate the appropriate contact.

chat (Zoom). Interviews were conducted between March 1, 2021 and April 6, 2021. The 16 states that participated are as follows: Delaware, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin. A full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

As expected, my Zoom interview data was more detailed than my email interview data. The nine Zoom interviews that I carried out produced fruitful, quality conversations that I cherish. For instance, I had the privilege and opportunity to speak with First Gentleman Ted Daughety (KS) via Zoom. There is a certain value in deepening a conversation when people can exchange facial expressions, nods, and body language. Additionally, conducting Zoom interviews allowed me to ask follow-up questions more efficiently and naturally, an advantage that makes email interviews less desirable, as they are more time-consuming and require patience when waiting for responses. Despite this, the email interview participants were inviting of follow-up questions, which helped me overcome some limitations. Although face-to-face, in-person interviews with the first spouses themselves are ideal, it was difficult to connect to the first spouses directly, given their unique, demanding schedules, and it also being impossible to travel across the country to meet. Zoom interviews with staff members who work closely with the first spouses were the closest that I came to face-to-face interview experiences with the first spouses, with the exception of speaking with First Gentleman Ted Daughety. I must also mention that First Spouse Elee Reeves (MS) and First Spouse Kathryn Burgum (ND) assisted their staffers in answering my interview questions via email.

Similarly to how I assigned the umbrella term of *first spouse* to all state level first spouses, I assign a similar nomenclature to the interview participants: *last name (staffer, state)*. For instance, I condense and simplify *Frances Munez Carter, Executive Mansion Administrator/Assistant to the First Lady of Washington* to *Carter (staffer, WA)*. I spoke to a

several different people in a variety of positions in 16 separate governors' offices across the country and, in some cases, there were multiple interview participants per state. The interview participants' full names and titles, as well as interview modes (email or Zoom) and dates, are included in a table in Appendix B. Nevertheless, for ease of understanding, I refer to all of them as *staffers* except for Ted Daughety. A second exception is that the staffer of First Spouse Jeanette Herbert (UT) and the staffer of First Spouse Yumi Hogan (MD) preferred that I do not disclose their names, so I refer to these staffers in my writing as an *unnamed staffer of Yumi Hogan (MD)* and an *unnamed staffer of Jeanette Herbert (UT)*.

## 5.2 Findings

My overarching interest in these interviews is to understand whether these state level first spouses fit into the presidential first lady roles I examined earlier. There is much variation in the roles of the state level first spouses, so before I highlight conversations about the roles of hosts/hostesses, cultural models, and political influencers, there are a few additional topics that I asked interview participants about that are interesting to highlight. First, I asked subjects to disclose the preferred title of the first spouses. When I learned, early in my research, that Jennifer Siebel Newsom (CA) rejects the traditional first lady moniker and is widely known as “First Partner,” I was interested if other spouses also preferred alternative titles. Second, it is critical to understand how the first spouse role fits into their professional lives, so I also discussed with interview participants the prior careers that the first spouses had, or continue to have, before becoming first spouse.

### **Preferred Title: “First Lady,” “First Gentleman,” or an Alternative?**

I had conversations with 13 participants regarding first spouses' preferred titles and in each interview, I asked if they prefer the title “first lady,” “first gentleman,” or another title. Though I was expecting brief responses, each of participant explained extensively the first

spouse's preference and reasoning. I found that each of the 13 first spouses whom I analyze prefer an alternative title.

Ten first spouses prefer to answer to their first names, although two of the participants explained that they overlook the first spouses' preference out of respect for their official title. Three first spouses extended alternative names or nicknames that the first spouses prefer. Notably, all 13 first spouses respect their titles as "first gentleman" and "first lady" and acknowledge that the public, political leaders, and governmental organizations will regard them as such, to which they will answer and respond.

Clarey (staffer, OH) draws on the personable relationship First Spouse Fran DeWine shares with the people of Ohio. Her husband has served as an elected politician in Ohio since 1981 and thus, after extensive time in the political and state government spotlight, she is well regarded by the public as his political partner, which I expand on in the *Political Partner* section. When I extended the question, "Does she prefer the title First Lady Fran DeWine, or another title?" to Clarey (staffer, OH), she responded: "Formally, 'First Lady' is the appropriate title, but many Ohioans know and love [her] and often call her by her first name, Fran." Similarly, First Gentleman Kevin Reynolds (IA) also prefers to be called by his first name, but not because of his close connection to and friendliness with Iowans, like the relationship Fran shares with Ohioans. Rather, the reasoning for this preference entirely opposes First Spouse DeWine's. Becker (staffer, IA), when describing First Gentleman Kevin Reynolds, says, "He prefers no title at all. He's just not like that. At dinners that he and his wife host together, the guests call him Kevin." Further, she explains how he is "very nonpolitical," and so the "first gentleman" title with its political undertones is undesirable.

Both First Spouses Kristin Cooper (NC) and Tammy Snyder Murphy (NJ) prefer to be called by their first names, but Cooper's Communications Director and Snyder Murphy's Chief of

Staff explain that they refuse to call the first spouses by their first names. Grimes (staffer, NC), drawing on her experiences working with Cooper, reflects that “it was hard for [her] when [she] joined the team not to call her First Lady” adding that even though it can be a “little awkward” at times to introduce her as “First Lady Kristin Cooper,” Grimes continues to do so, three years into her position as Communications Director. Next, Lagos (staffer, NJ) explains that, despite the First Spouse’s preference to be called “Tammy,” she does not concur, again, due to respect. Lagos acknowledges the crucial role that first spouses play in the governors’ administrations, adding:

I always say, ‘First Lady’, even though she's very casual with us. She would say, ‘just call me Tammy’, but I think there’s something inherently important about these offices and the position that they hold and the power they have, so I like to be more formal...that’s my choice, not hers.

As noted previously, three first spouses prefer alternative titles. First, Ted Daughety (KS) shared that he “[prefers] the title First Doc of Kansas, but it didn’t stick,” and added that he will answer to “first gentlemen,” but will “never refer to [himself]” as such. Instead, because ‘First Doc of Kansas’ never gained traction, he prefers “Ted” or “Dr. Daughety.” The title ‘First Doc of Kansas’ and ‘Dr. Daughety’ both allude to his career as a medical doctor, with which he identifies more personally than “first gentleman,” largely because of his minimal role as first spouse, which I describe in greater detail in the *Career* section.

Second, Harlow (staffer, VA) mentions that he became First Spouse Pamela Northam’s (VA) Executive Assistant in July 2020, so he has been with the administration for less than a year. Despite his short time with the team, he feels comfortable calling Northam, “FLOVA,” a mnemonic for “First Lady of Virginia.” Cary (staffer, VA), too, calls her ‘FLOVA’, although when they are in public spaces or introducing her to a formal crowd, he will consult her as “Pam” or “First Lady.” Nevertheless, Cary explains that ‘FLOVA’ complements “the brightness and energy” that she brings to the office each day.

Third, drawing rather on formality, Hershman (staffer, DE) explains that First Lady

Tracey Carney (DE) prefers the title “First Spouse Tracey Carney,” but due to traditions and precedents of the previous Delaware female first spouses who came before her, as well as most governors’ wives in 2020 opting to the traditional title of “first lady,” her request is often unacknowledged. Respectfully, she will answer to “First Lady,” but will politely correct the speaker. Hershman (staffer, DE) explains this in greater detail when I asked her if she preferred “First Lady” or another title:

Tracey prefers ‘First Spouse’ through and through. She is a very powerful lady, and she stands up for equality...She won't push back on the National Governors Association calling her ‘First Lady’, but ... I’ve heard her give her remarks when she's been introduced as ‘First Lady’ and she responds by saying, ‘Please call me First Spouse’.

Here, Hershman highlights that First Spouse Tracey Carney finds her way barred by gender norms, and ‘stands up for equality’ when doing so. She addresses the stereotypes about what it means to be a politician’s wife by embracing the gender-neutral term of ‘spouse’.

## **Career**

The women who have become first ladies on the presidential level have consistently taken on their positions full-time.<sup>3</sup> In the past decade, Jean H. Baker, amongst other scholars, has recognized this dedication and believes that the first spouse of the president must be “defined as a paid public position, with salary” (2016). Despite efforts like these that value and acknowledge this all-consuming job that comes with being the first spouse at the presidential level, similar efforts do not take place at the state level. Why? Is this because first spouses at the state level generally do not embrace this position full-time? I find that most spouses in my interview protocol, in fact, do. I asked interview participants a series of the following questions: “Does the first spouse have a career/job beyond that of being the first spouse? If so, what career(s) or job(s)? Did he/she continue this as First Spouse? Could you briefly expand on this transition phase, if so?” Given the detailed nature of the questions, I received various responses and stories.

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<sup>3</sup> This might be changing, as Dr. Jill Biden became the first first lady to continue her career in 2021. I will revisit this discussion in Chapter 6.

To articulate them efficiently, I coded the first spouses into three different categories: *Continued Career*, *Did Not Continue Career*, and *Other*, and define each category in their subsections.

### *Continued Career*

Some first spouses continued their career while assuming first spouse responsibilities, such as host/hostess and/or political partner, but others continued without taking on responsibilities that we see first spouses inhabiting. The latter career status does not necessarily seem to be gendered, as I find an example of one woman and one man who fit into the category.

Three out of the 16 first spouses continued their prior careers while also carrying out first spouse roles and responsibilities. For example, Clarey (staffer, OH) provides background to First Spouse Fran DeWine's (OH) long-time career as caretaker of her family. She explains that DeWine had been a full-time mother while her husband served his first elected position in 1981 as an Ohio State Senator. While he advanced his political career for the past 40 years as Lieutenant Governor, U.S. Senator, Ohio Attorney General, and, currently, Ohio Governor, Fran DeWine carried out her full-time role as mother of her eight children, and in more recent years, as grandmother of her 26 grandchildren. Clarey (staffer, OH) recognizes her family caretaking duties as a career and, in conclusion, reinforces that "her role has been to take care of the family while her husband has served." Additionally, this is not to say that DeWine does not also fulfill responsibilities as first spouse. Clarey describes the First Spouse's passion for "promoting early childhood literacy, helping new moms and families, and making sure children have access to nutritious meals." First Spouse DeWine acts on these interests and visits schools to read and participate in learning activities as an "active volunteer and advocate for children and literacy."

Another example of a first spouse who continued their career while also assuming first spouse responsibilities was Elee Reeves (MS), specifically her 20-year experience as an investment advisor at an investment securities firm, Coker and Palmer. Wilcher (staffer, MS)

identifies both her career and role as first spouse as full-time jobs and describes the transition period of becoming first spouse in addition to an investment banker as challenging. Specifically, she shared that the first few months were the most difficult time for Reeves when she “had to learn how to adapt to balancing both roles.” Further, Wilcher explains:

She does her best to devote the same amount of time to each role whether it be as an employee, the First Lady, a mom, and a wife. There is not much spare time, and when there is, she is filling it with responsibilities [as a financial investment advisor] or her responsibilities as First Lady.

Reeves undoubtedly balances two full-time careers, as well as the responsibilities that come with being a mom and a wife, as Wilcher (staffer, MS) points out. To reiterate Baker’s conversations that bring to light these challenges, there is an obvious difference in the presidential first ladies’ experiences and that of the three women first spouses’ who continued their careers (DeWine (OH) as caretaker, Reeves (MS) as investment advisor, and, unmentioned, Frances Wolf (PA) as professional artist). Presidential first ladies have taken on their roles as their sole full-time career, but here we see three instances of state level female first spouses who not only do just that but also carry out the full-time careers they established before becoming first spouse.

Additionally, I code two of the five first spouses who continued their careers as doing so without taking on first spouse responsibilities. First, Delude (staffer, VT) explains that First Spouse Diana McTeague Scott (VT) “prefers not to share the political spotlight [with Governor Scott]” or take on a committed role as first lady. Delude adds that this is the case because McTeague Scott “is a full-time nurse and keeps quite busy with family and her private activities.” Similarly, First Spouse Ted Daughety, a pulmonologist, describes the separate careers that he and his wife, Governor Kelly, carry out intentionally:

I’ve always seen it as our job is to do our job, and she was interested in politics, and I was not, and I was interested in medicine and, although she has some interest in that area, we've seen it as an opportunity for each of us pursue our own careers. She has never once asked me to stand behind her and smile and nod while she's given a speech, nor have I been inclined to volunteer for that sort of duty...I’ve been impressed with the contact I’ve

had with governors' spouses in other states, and how engaged they've been in their roles, but I have patients who I must care for, just as my wife has constituents to serve.

Daughety's response signals that he is conscientious of his responsibilities as a doctor and decided to prioritize his patients before the people of Kansas, precisely, because his wife was elected to take on the latter responsibility. Daughety continued to devote his energy to the field he is most passionate about, while his wife takes on the roles that come with being governor.

### *Did Not Continue Career*

The struggles that come with balancing two full-time positions might sound undesirable for other first spouses for various reasons. The nine first spouses who I identified as "Did Not Continue Career" ended their prior full-time work experiences to take on the all-consuming responsibilities that come with becoming a first spouse. I find that this transition period was challenging for many of these spouses who made the hard decision to end their prior careers.

For example, Moore (staffer, NC) explains that Kristin Cooper (NC) had been a full-time legal attorney prior to becoming first spouse, but struggled to balance the two roles, so decided to put her law career on hold. Moore adds:

She wants to keep her law license. I believe she will return to law after this term or her husband's political career because her passion is there, but she has taken a backseat... When she became first lady it was very shocking to her when security said, 'you can keep doing this if you want to, but we're having a hard time figuring out how we're going to do what we have to do for you'.

Moore's account signals that Cooper attempted to fulfill both full-time positions, but meeting with clients and entering courtroom spaces complicated the protection she was extended as a first spouse. This came as a 'shock' to her when her security staffers communicated their struggles to keep her safe in the spaces she generally entered as a lawyer. Moore adds, despite this hiatus, that the First Spouse completed her Continuing Legal Education (CLE) courses in February 2021, signaling her wish to continue her legal career in the future, and significantly, when she is able to do so is dependent on when her husband's political career ceases, as Moore highlights.

Although First Spouse Kristin Cooper (NC) has intentions to pick up her legal career, I draw on two examples of first spouses who, rather, ended their careers permanently. First, Ness (staffer, ND) says that before becoming First Spouse, Kathryn Burgum (ND) “had a 25-year career in human resources and marketing, which spanned industries, including retail, biotechnology, software, manufacturing, agriculture, and real estate development.” Similarly, an unnamed Utah staffer explains that before becoming First Spouse, Jeanette Herbert (UT) “owned and operated a daycare center for 23 years. She made the difficult decision to sell the business when her husband became governor.” Drawing attention to the extensive years that both Burgum (25) and Herbert (23) dedicated to their careers, it is admirable that they ceased their endeavors in their non-political fields to enter the political spotlight as first spouses, and full-time at that. Neither Ness (staffer, ND) nor the unnamed Utah staffer describes the transition period or further details about the first spouses’ decisions to become a full-time first spouse.

### Other

Two first spouses had given up their careers many years prior to their spouses becoming governor. For instance, Lagos (staffer, NJ) explains that before becoming first spouse, Tammy Snyder Murphy (NJ) did not have a career or job, so no transition period was needed. Lagos says that Snyder Murphy “previously worked in finance in the United States and Europe,” but ended this career more than ten years before her husband became governor, “unknowingly that she would eventually become First Lady.” Another similar experience is that of First Spouse Kathy Evers (WI), who “held IT management positions with private companies” but, as Weix (staffer, WI) explains, “had retired a few years before the Governor took office, so no real transition was necessary.”

While discussing first spouses’ careers and responsibilities, a question arises: Are there certain jobs that are impossible to continue as first spouse? For instance, First Spouse Kristin

Cooper (NC) paused her legal career, whereas five first spouses continued their careers—one as a caretaker, one as an investment advisor, one as a professional artist, and two as health care workers. Is it impossible to be a lawyer while one's spouse is a governor because of a conflict of interest? Is there less of a perceived conflict of interest in finance or health care?

Now that we understand who creates time in their schedule to fulfill the position as first spouse, we can consider whether they are spending that time as host/hostess or a political influencer. Structurally, although we might expect a section that highlights the cultural model to come between that of host/hostess and political influencer, there is no evidence that any of the 16 first spouses whom I examine inhabit this role. In Chapter 2, I concluded that the first spouse literature—the academic scholarship on various first ladies and First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom (CA) and biography of First Spouse Elise Winter (MS)—does not highlight the first spouses as cultural models. I find no evidence from my interviews that points to first spouses embracing this role, as well. To reiterate, I believe that this is the case because presidential first ladies represent the entire nation, whereas each first spouse at the state level represents a single state. Also, the cultural model role is not a job that presidential first ladies necessarily choose to inhabit. For instance, Jackie Kennedy did not set out to be a cultural model, but she became one with the intense media coverage that comes with being a first lady on the national scale. First spouses at the state level, on the other hand, have less media coverage and a smaller audience.

### **Host/Hostess**

As previously emphasized in Chapter 1, being a hostess is an important, precedented role of the presidential first ladies. Social scientists have described the first ladies' hostess roles as planners and hostesses of luncheons and dinners, as well as remodelers of the White House and, less commonly, the White House gardens. I find that state level first spouses expand this role and define it in ways that scholars do not describe as relevant to presidential first ladies. I identify four

major themes of the state level host/hostess role, or the most common duties that they fulfill, when I extended the question: “To what extent does the First Spouse assume a host/hostess role?”

These categories are as follows: *Decorating/Remodeling*, *Event Hosting*, *Cooking*, and *Gardening*. The final two categories, especially, present unique conversations about the details of the host/hostess role that have not been had, or are extremely less likely to surface, at the presidential level, or even the state level until now. Conclusively, approximately 80% of the first spouses fulfill the host/hostess role, whereas about 20% of the first spouses reject these responsibilities and, instead, bestow the duties to staffers, or, specifically, mansion directors.

### *Decorating/Remodeling*

As a professional working artist, First Spouse Frances Wolf’s (PA) artwork is featured on the walls of the Pennsylvania Governor’s Residence for the public to admire. The exhibits are thematic and switched out quarterly with new paintings, photographs, and installations. Wilburne (staffer, PA) explains that Wolf uses her art skills and position as first spouse as an opportunity to “represent various peoples in and out of Pennsylvania.” For example, one former exhibit represented photos of refugee families living in the state to highlight their “diversity and backgrounds” and to acknowledge their perseverance. When celebrating the opening of this exhibit, Wolf discussed with the public “the importance of welcoming people in Pennsylvania.”

With a similar outlook in mind, First Spouse Pamela Northam (VA) takes on a “very proactive” role in remodeling the Virginia Governor’s Mansion, and Harlow (staffer, VA) emphasizes that her role as hostess “is one of her biggest priorities.” The building is the oldest occupied of all of the governor’s mansions in the country, and with that comes an “unfortunate history of slavery and slaves being involved in its functioning,” especially within the kitchen, which was the slaves’ quarters. Harlow further explains that renovating the kitchen area and “making it historically accurate to recognize the stories and experiences of the enslaved peoples

that once lived there” is an important task of First Spouse Northam (VA). He adds that “when it comes to renovating for her, it is less renovating the aesthetics of the Mansion and more influencing the museum and historic aspects of it.” Additionally, Northam educated the staffers who carry out tours at the Governor’s Mansion on the enslaved peoples’ histories, herself, to ensure that their stories and struggles are told when presenting the kitchen to the public.

The type of renovations that contribute to ‘the aesthetics of the Mansion’ is precisely the type of remodeling that First Spouse Yumi Hogan (MD) carries out in her state. An unnamed staffer of Yumi Hogan (MD) explains that within the first year of living in the Maryland Governor’s Mansion, better known in the state as the Government House, First Spouse Hogan carried out a remodeling and decorating project:

She started the project to renovate each different room and decided on each theme color and then made sure [the painters] used the right paintings and concepts...also [the First Spouse] chose furniture, fabric, chairs, tables, curtains, and small decorations...and she really did that for every corner of the Government House.

Few first spouses, three to be exact, alternatively, do not take on any form of remodeling or redecorating of the governors’ mansions. For instance, First Spouse Ted Daughety (KS), in a lighthearted manner, expressed that the most remodeling and redecorating of the Kansas Governor’s Mansion, Cedar Crest, he has initiated is informing a housekeeper when an old light bulb must be replaced.

### Event Hosting

In Iowa, there is a tradition that has lasted more than twenty years of a Victorian-themed tea party event hosted by the first spouses who, before 2017, had been exclusively female. This monthly event is called “Tea at Terrace Hill” and its purpose is to invite about 60-80 women to the Iowa Governor’s Mansion, also known as Terrace Hill, to enjoy delicate appetizers and fancy teas. When the first male first spouse assumed the position in 2017, Kevin Reynolds (IA), this feminine tradition did not cease, as one may expect. Becker (staffer, IA) explains:

He is the host because the first lady is always the hostess, so he comes to these teas and even serves the tea...he's the only man there and those women love to chat with him...he's really willing to take on all these roles that were ill-defined for a first gentleman.

Notably, Becker (staffer, IA) acknowledges first that hosting teas is largely understood as a traditionally feminine responsibility, and second that Reynolds' role as the first male first spouse of Iowa is imprecise. He overcomes the gender stereotypes associated with hosting teas and signals that male first spouses, too, are capable of continuing the traditions that were initiated by female first spouses who came before him.

Next, I find that most first spouses host events to advocate for initiatives or advance administrative political policies, as opposed to hosting events for pure entertainment and socializing. Wilburne (staffer, PA) provided me with an extensive list of annual events hosted by First Spouse Frances Wolf (PA), one being an Easter egg hunt at the Mansion. She adds that in addition to the First Spouse hosting a "fun event for the children," it is also an "opportunity to encourage the importance of early childhood education and access to pre-k programs." Here, Wolf capitalizes on her hostess role as a form of advocating for education development in Pennsylvania.

As previously mentioned, about 20% of the first spouses do not engage in hostess roles, specifically this event hosting role, one of whom being Trudi Inslee (WA). Munez Carter (staffer, WA) describes the event-planning responsibilities that she, herself, carries out, which are duties that most first spouses fulfill themselves, with the help of their staffers. Munez Carter adds that the First Spouse, though, "doesn't plan a lot of social events," and "leaves it all up to [Munez-Carter]," adding that she and the Governor "both show up as guests" to events at the Mansion.

### Cooking

About 25% of the first spouses who fulfill the role as host/hostess define it in terms of cooking duties, but I must emphasize that they do not carry out cooking responsibilities because of obligation but rather because of interest. First Spouse Janet Holcomb (IN), in addition to

“planning and hosting of social and business events” at the Mansion, according to Beck (staffer, IN), “is an excellent cook and sometimes takes on the food preparation...for smaller, more intimate luncheons or dinners.” Similarly, Clarey (staffer, OH) explains that First Spouse Fran DeWine (OH) “enjoys cooking and baking and often did so when hosting large events.” Based on my interview conversations, neither of the two male first spouses engage in cooking for guests at the mansions. Also, I did not identify any biographical or scholarly accounts of presidential first ladies cooking for guests within the White House. This suggests that female first spouses at the state level act on their passions for cooking as an extension of their first spouse role as hostess.

### Gardening

Less than 25% of the first spouses who fulfill the role of host/hostess define it in terms of gardening, and they do so in unique forms. Becker (staffer, IA) explains that Kevin Reynolds (IA), before becoming first spouse, “was a big gardener” which, as a result, Becker believes, became his “favorite and most carried out duty” as first spouse. She adds that Terrace Hill, “has a lot of gardens because of him,” which are filled with rhubarb, corn, lettuce, spinach, zucchini, beets, and other vegetables. He harvests these foods himself, sometimes with the assistance of the grounds crew, and “gives [the vegetables] to [the Mansion’s chef] to use for meals that she prepares for guests and events.” Becker expresses, also, First Spouse Reynolds’ passions for canning these vegetables and making his “famous salsa that he gives away to guests as favors after some events.” Here, he provides not only the chef with fresh food to prepare but also the guests with a small gift of courtesy for visiting his home.

Where First Spouse Reynolds grows vegetables, First Spouse Kristin Cooper (NC) grows flowers. Grimes (staffer, NC) shares Cooper’s passion for environmental sustainability which, as a result, led her to plant the North Carolina Governor’s Mansion’s first bird and pollinator-friendly garden, filled with the state’s native plants. As a result, Governor Roy Cooper declared

the final week of October “Native Plants Week,” when First Spouse Cooper encourages families throughout the state to also grow native plants to support wildlife. Moore (staffer, NC) adds that tour groups are led through the First Spouse’s garden, and that “she might even come out and say hello to the tourists.”

Further, Beck (staffer, IN) describes First Spouse Janet Holcomb’s engagement with the gardens of the Indiana Governor’s Residence. She, however, does not mention if the First Spouse manages or grows the flowers herself, but explains that the floral arrangements displayed at Mansion events “come from the cutting gardens and are created by” First Spouse Holcomb (IN).

### **Political Partner**

To reiterate, I define a ‘political partner’ as a spouse of an elected official who is active in politics and participates in campaign activities. First, I ask the interview participants if they deem the first spouses as a political partner in terms of campaigning, and then ask if the first spouses influence policymaking. I find that 11 participants consider the first spouse to be a political partner, and five do not. More specifically, I find that of the 11 ‘political partner’ spouses, only one influences policy, in addition to participating in the governor’s campaigns.

#### *Political Partner: ‘Yes’*

Each of the 11 interview participants believes that the first spouse is a political partner because of their dedicated commitment to campaigning for their spouses on past campaign trails. Each first spouse’s experience on these trails differs: some have greater influence than others, some deliver kick-off speeches to large crowds, and others engage in intimate connections with potential voters. For example, Clarey (staffer, OH) exclaimed that First Spouse Fran DeWine (OH) is “absolutely” a political partner. She recounts DeWine’s experiences on the campaign trail during her husband’s 2018 gubernatorial race. Specifically, she says, “the First Lady visited all of Ohio’s 88 counties in the summer before the election,” and that “her signature campaign activity

is to create a cookbook that is passed out on parade routes, during county fairs, and at their annual Ice Cream Social.” Wilcher (staffer, MS) explains that the Reeves family began their life in politics in 2003, and since then, First Spouse Elee Reeves (MS) has “always been and continues to be very active in campaigning for her husband.” Wilcher adds that “over the years and throughout five campaigns,” First Spouse Reeves “has traveled the state campaigning and speaking on her husband’s behalf.” Not only do they travel together as husband and wife to complete this political partnership but also with their three daughters, prompting Clarey (staffer, OH) to comment that “life on the campaign trail is a family affair for the Reeves family.”

Only one staffer discusses both the first spouses’ contributions to campaign work as well as policymaking. That is First Spouse Pamela Northam (VA), whom Harlow (staffer, VA) describes as “an extension” of her husband who together make a “political unit.” Harlow says that it was during Governor Northam’s 2017 campaign for governor when Pamela Northam decided to step down from her career because “it became very intense time- and commitment-wise for her.” Cary (staffer, VA) believes that she “was a full-time surrogate” to her husband on the campaign trail and traveled with him through Virginia, introduced him on campaign stages, and participated in press interviews when called on.

In terms of her policymaking influence, Cary (staffer, VA) describes First Spouse Northam as an “informal cabinet member” to her husband. Prior to becoming First Spouse, she was a former pediatric occupational therapist and biology teacher for elementary and high school students. Because of her background in these fields, Cary explains that Governor Northam (VA) decided that pre-k and early childhood education would be a “top issue if they won” and, together, agreed that she would “be the one to lead it.” Conclusively, Cary says she has since been “designated as the public face of pre-k and early childhood education policy, and every discussion on the topic begins and ends with her.”

*Political Partner: 'No'*

Five first spouses do not consider themselves to be political partners, such as Ted Daughety (KS). He says in 2017, his wife Governor Kelly began campaigning for governor, “which required her to travel all over the state politically, but [he] was never a part of it.” He mentions one exception: She invited him “when the campaign event was close to a [National Park] that she thought [he] might enjoy coming out to see,” but he “rarely joined on these occasions, and when [he] did, it was not in a political role.” Daughety also adds, in terms of political influence, in general, that he is “a good listener,” but that Governor Kelly’s cabinet members and chief of staff are who she “really expects to get her political influence from.”

Similarly, Becker (staffer, IA) explains that First Spouse Kevin Reynolds (IA) has “no political influence whatsoever.” Specifically drawing on conversations about Governor Reynolds’ campaign in 2016, Becker recalls that “the campaign team was constantly trying to get him to travel with [the Governor], but he said, ‘no way’...he just doesn’t like it.”

Notably, of the 16 first spouses whom I analyze in my interviews, 11 are political partners, and five are not, and of these five include the only two male first spouses in my analysis. This signals that male first spouses are less inclined to be political partners which, in turn, means they are less likely to participate in campaign activities or influence policymaking.

Other participants who do not identify the first spouses as political partners explain the spouses’ lack of political influence, in general. For instance, Wilburne (staffer, PA) says that First Spouse Frances Wolf (PA) “doesn’t actively seek out political roles,” and “from the beginning” of her husband’s governorship in 2014, has said, “everyone elected Tom, they didn’t elect me.” Despite this, the First Spouse is “supportive of everything that he does,” while she carries out her own initiatives that “amplify the work of the administration,” in addition to her roles as Mansion hostess, caretaker of her two grandbabies, and professional artist. Also, First Spouse Yumi Hogan

(MD) has a similar outlook on the lack of political influence that she wields. An unnamed staffer of Yumi Hogan (MD) says that there is a “clear border between the Governor’s role versus her role,” and Hogan has said several times, “My husband is the expert and I’m not,” (similar to Wolf’s comment: ‘everyone elected Tom, they didn’t elect me’). The unnamed staffer of Yumi Hogan (MD) also mentions that “every time [the First Spouse] is asked political questions on and off the campaign trail, she has wisely avoided them.”

Next, I briefly revisit the subjects of first spouse websites and Twitters from my analyses in Chapter 3. I asked most interview participants to comment on the first spouses’ website statuses and social media presences and to expand on details where I saw fit on an individual basis. At the end of this chapter, I combine my Twitter and website analyses with my interview findings on the subjects to test the validity of my theories and draw conclusions about how we can understand the roles of first spouses based on their various levels of public engagement.

### **Website**

As outlined in my website analysis, I coded three of 44 first spouses from the population as having an “Independent First Spouse Website.” I analyzed one of the first spouses from these three states, First Spouse Pamela Northam (VA), in my interview sample and asked her two staffers how this separate page came to fruition. Cary (staffer, VA) explained that Northam “wanted it to be a little more substantive, which is why it ended up that way.” Despite an unnamed staff member building the website on Northam’s behalf, Cary adds that “the site reflects all of her ideas and how she wanted it to be laid out.” Notably, Harlow (staffer, VA) outlines that she did not advise the unnamed staff member to create a separate page, but the immense detail that she wanted to be featured would be “too much to fit” on a single page dedicated to her on Governor Northam’s website. I find no further relationships between websites and roles, as the majority of staffers had little to say about the first spouses’ website presences.

## Twitter

The benefits of carrying out interviews also allowed me to ask most participants to expand and comment on each spouse's Twitter presence, or lack thereof. As indicated in Table 4, the majority of first spouses, nine to be exact, whom I analyze in my interviews do not have Twitter profiles. Additionally, six have "First Spouse Dedicated" Twitter profiles, and one has a "Personal with Mention of First Spouse" Twitter profile. I learned that most of the seven first spouses with Twitter accounts have strictly personal and apolitical Tweets, consisting of "Happy Birthday" wishes to their children or pictures of their family pets, for example, while less than half are a mix of apolitical and political messages. Significantly, none of the participants described the spouses' Twitters as exclusively political. For example, Grimes (staffer, NC) explains that she and other staff members within the Office of the First Lady create Kristin Cooper's Tweets on her behalf, which exclude campaign or political content. Though I would expect that political posts would be more likely to appear on the first lady designated profile than a personal profile, Grimes adds that Cooper "has a personal Facebook page dealing with the political end."

First Spouse Tammy Snyder Murphy (NJ) has the third most Twitter followers at 19.6k, trailing behind First Spouse Jennifer Siebel Newsom (CA) at 50k and First Spouse Casey DeSantis (FL) at 23k, as of April 25, 2021. When discussing First Spouse Tammy Snyder Murphy's active Twitter presence, and her large following base, Lagos (staffer, NJ) commented:

We've worked on growing the account for a while and are happy with its success... it's a tool to provide information to people, especially when we're working with maternal and infant health. There are a lot of resources out there on the subject that we would love people to access and without having that platform, it's a little harder. Her Twitter is a tool for outreach.

Notably, I find that only a few spouses write their own Tweets. More than half of the first spouses from my sample, including Kristin Cooper (NC) and Tammy Snyder Murphy (NJ), do not compose the Tweets themselves.

Additionally, I find that the nine first spouses from my sample do not have a Twitter presence for various reasons. Some are too busy, some are private and avoid social media platforms in general, some do not want to overstep the governors' communications team, and some share the governors' accounts. First Spouse Ted Daughety (KS) does not have a Twitter account and when I asked him if this was a personal choice that he made, he responded:

Absolutely. I'm too busy for social media and wouldn't presume to have a social media voice when [his wife, Governor Kelly's] staff in her communications department is doing that and molding that to fit the administrative message that she wants to get out.

In this case, Daughety (KS) does not have a Twitter account not only because he has a full-time, demanding career as a medical doctor but also because he feels that it is best if his wife's communications team manages the public-facing presence of her political initiatives.

Next, First Spouse Kevin Reynolds (IA) does not have a Twitter account, according to Becker (staffer, IA), because he is a "very private person and prefers to stay away from all social media." She adds that "he dislikes being in the public eye, and doesn't have any type of social media, not even a personal page." I find that state level spouses' wishes to remain out of the spotlight are often respected because they receive little public pressure and act on a smaller, state level playing field compared to presidential first ladies who carry out their positions nationally.

Next, First Spouse Tracey Carney (DE) does not have a Twitter profile, but for reasons very different from First Spouses Ted Daughety (KS) and Kevin Reynolds (IA). Hershman (staffer, DE) explains that First Spouse Tracey Carney (DE) uses Governor Carney's page because his Twitter "has thousands of followers," and so Hershman and her team "want to put her there so that she can be seen." Governor Carney, as of April 25, 2021, has 36k Twitter followers, and so First Spouse Tracey Carney and her staff use his large following base to promote positive, uplifting apolitical Twitter posts in her voice.

Moving forward, it is important to acknowledge that I carried out these interviews, and

my entire thesis from start to finish during the COVID-19 pandemic. This past year has brought tremendous uncertainty and unexpected changes to many peoples' careers, and the first spouses are no exception. Several interesting conversations surfaced when interview subjects discussed how their roles changed during the pandemic.

### **COVID-19 Response: Challenges, Resiliency, and New Initiatives**

I find that prior to the pandemic about 75% of the first spouses I interviewed traveled to various underserved communities to carry out initiatives as part of their typical weekday schedules. Generally, these first spouses met with vulnerable individuals: children, victims of human trafficking, domestic violence survivors, patients with health challenges and mental health issues, veterans, and homeless individuals. I find that about half traveled directly to schools and daycare centers to read stories and participate in collaborative projects and learning activities with children. Yet, these travels came to an immediate hiatus once the pandemic hit the states. How did they respond and adapt? I must mention that I did not explicitly extend questions to the interview participants on the subject of the pandemic, but each participant naturally acknowledged the changes that the pandemic has brought to the typical role of the first spouse.

Wilburne (staffer, PA) explained that in Fall 2020 amidst the pandemic, 17 first spouses, including First Spouse Frances Wolf, advocated for the extension of United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) school feeding program waivers. These waivers have been successfully extended through June 30, 2021 and allow school feeding programs to navigate health and safety concerns, staff limitations, and other barriers caused by the pandemic. Ultimately, 17 first spouses worked together to ensure that despite the recent challenges and food insecurities faced by communities, children nationwide have access to nutritious school meals ("Governor Tom" 2020).

Overall, I find that repercussions of the pandemic changed the typical weekdays of the first spouses: About 66% of the roles became less demanding, 33% more demanding, and only

one continued in the same high intensity but transitioned from in-person to virtual platforms. Munez Carter (staffer, WA) explains that First Spouse Trudi Inslee (WA) experienced a shift: Her first spouse duties, especially those that are public-facing, have been “scaled back tremendously.” Munez Carter adds that Inslee’s focus during the pandemic is geared toward her three grandchildren as their full-time caretaker, a responsibility that was unnecessary when her grandchildren attended in-person learning before the pandemic and when she traveled and attended events “nearly every day” as first spouse. Inslee’s son and daughter-in-law work full-time, and she now visits her son’s home frequently, assisting her grandchildren in virtual learning and homework. Further, Munez Carter (staffer, WA) comments that “because the First Lady’s job is mostly volunteer, she has this freedom to take a break,” highlighting the flexibility of the First Spouse’s ‘job’ compared to her son and daughter-in-law’s unidentified careers.

First Spouse Kristin Cooper (NC), too, scaled back her role, not because she engaged in another role separate from her first ladyship but because the North Carolina travel restrictions implemented by her husband, Governor Cooper, limited her public outreach. Grimes (staffer, NC) explains that prior to the pandemic, First Spouse Cooper was “constantly moving around the state” interacting with non-profits, children’s groups, and the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. Grimes adds that she, the First Spouse, and Moore (staffer, NC) are “on a 100-county tour and [the First Spouse] has been to 83 counties and it's [their] goal to get her to 100.” They are hopeful that she will reach her goal when in-person events resume.

As opposed to the frequent traveling of First Spouses Inslee (WA) and Cooper (NC) before the pandemic, First Spouse Fran DeWine (OH) particularly enjoyed remaining at the Mansion, to carry out traditional hostess roles. Yet, because social gatherings are discouraged, she has neither guests to host nor children to teach. Clarey (staffer, OH) further describes how the effects of COVID-19 altered First Spouse Fran DeWine’s (OH) role and routines:

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the First Lady enjoyed hosting meetings and events at the Ohio Governor's Residence and Heritage Garden... [Clarey and the First Lady's team] are hopeful that this will be possible one day in the future. The First Lady also has hosted summer camps for underprivileged children to teach them about where food comes from and utilizing these fresh foods to share her passion for cooking.

Similar to First Spouse Kristin Cooper's (NC) optimistic goal to continue her 100-county tour soon, Clarey (staffer, OH) believes that First Spouse DeWine (OH) will be able to continue her hostess roles in the future. Although COVID-19 brings sudden changes, there is hope that these two first spouses will overcome its challenges and return to their desired goals and routines.

Generally, first spouses engage with the public inside the mansions during various events, luncheons, and dinners, but the pandemic prohibited social gatherings. This did not come as a limitation for about 20% of the spouses who used event cancellations as a productive benefit. For example, Hershman (staffer, DE) explains that First Spouse Tracey Carney (DE) and her staffers acted on the absence of Mansion guests and initiated a remodeling project where they can "use this time and clean it up" in anticipated preparation for guests to return once restrictions are lifted.

The pandemic has also encouraged first spouses to initiate projects that directly link to spreading awareness and resources on COVID-19 relief. For instance, Wilburne (staffer, PA) describes a new Pennsylvania statewide project *One Lens: Sharing Our Common Views* organized by First Spouse Frances Wolf in partnership with the PA Historical and Museum Commission, the Library of Accessible Media for Pennsylvanians, and the PA Council on the Arts to highlight the state's vulnerable experiences and stories amidst the pandemic. Wilburne (staffer, PA) adds that the *One Lens* virtual events "allow the First Lady to connect a little deeper with Pennsylvanians. There was one on mental health service providers and another on small businesses to highlight how they've been resilient and creative to meet cliental needs and stay safe." First Spouse Frances Wolf, too, built resiliency: COVID-19 did not set back or limit her public outreach but, rather, strengthened and '[deepened]' it.

Additionally, in April 2020, during the early emergence of the pandemic in the U.S., an unnamed staffer of Yumi Hogan (MD) explains that First Spouse Yumi Hogan (MD) not only secured COVID-19 test kits from South Korea but also mobilized Asian Americans in Maryland to donate 560,000 pieces of PPE to the state government. Once these tests and PPE equipment were in the hands of health care workers, First Spouse Hogan helped to provide underserved communities with equitable access to COVID-19 testing. This unnamed staffer of Yumi Hogan (MD) concludes:

Her role was something more than sending out a message. She was part of active plans and the Governor’s COVID-19 response team. She didn’t hold an official position, but she provided ideas and became an unofficial advisor to the Governor as his closest advisor.

Notably, the unnamed staffer of Yumi Hogan (MD) explains how the First Spouse’s critical participation in Maryland’s COVID-19 response led her to ‘[become]’ Governor Hogan’s ‘closest advisor’, thus strengthening their political partnership and her contributions to his administration.

The previous examples that I have outlined trace how a select number first spouses’ roles have changed for various reasons, some ultimately becoming less busy, and others more busy. Alternatively, Lagos (staffer, NJ) describes how First Spouse Tammy Snyder Murphy’s (NJ) role has mostly remained at its high-intensity status. She says, “Honestly, before and during the pandemic, the First Lady works almost the identical amount of hours as the Governor, so she is incredibly busy...she has a full schedule.” Lagos adds that typically, the First Spouse will deliver about five speeches and visit one school weekly, and the “only aspect of change is that before they were, obviously, in person, and now they’re on Zoom or even pre-recorded.”

### **5.3 Conclusions**

Now that I have laid out the theory of the website and Twitter analyses and measured the dependent variable—how first spouses define their roles—I can consider whether there is a connection between the various levels of engagement in the analyses and the roles of the first

spouses. I find in my interview conversation with First Spouse Pamela Northam's (VA) staffers that it was not the First Spouse's decision to have an independent website, but rather a staffer's choice, who thought it was the most appropriate means to communicate details of her position. I discover that she is the only first spouse in my interview analysis who directly influences policy, specifically pre-k and early childhood education policy, which signals the importance of her role. I would not have gained this insight from her website, along with the other findings that contribute to how she defines her role. Interestingly, First Spouse Northam (VA) is the only first spouse with a stand-alone, independent website and the only first spouse actively engaged in policymaking. These findings seem like they could be related, but I am unsure if her political partner status transpired first, and then the website, or the other way around.

Regarding my Twitter analysis, I find that nine first spouses whom I analyze in the interviews do not have Twitter presences for various reasons—and most are not a reflection of the role that they play as first spouse. For example, I find that First Spouse Kevin Reynolds (IA) plays a significant and important host role in continuing state traditions and, in many ways, one that is more demanding than first spouses who have Twitter presences. This suggests that I cannot conclude based on his lack of Twitter presence that he takes on a less influential role, or less engagement with the public, than other first spouses. Further, I find that First Spouses Frances Wolf (PA) and Yumi Hogan (MD) do not have Twitter profiles, but took on two extremely critical and public-facing roles during the COVID-19 pandemic and are influential hostesses. Additionally, I find that many first spouses whom I analyze in my interviews do not manage their Twitters, but rather a staffer creates the Tweets and controls the posts, such as First Spouses Kristin Cooper (NC) and Tammy Snyder Murphy (NJ).

Next, First Spouse Tracy Carney (DE) embraces a critical role of addressing gendered stereotypes as both a hostess and political partner but does not have a Twitter profile dedicated to

her position. I theorize in my Twitter analysis that she would be an example of a first spouse who takes on a limited, less influential role as first spouse, but my interview conversations with her staffer reveal precisely the opposite. She and her staffers take advantage of Governor Carney's (DE) large following base and communicate her voice on his page, as Hershman (staffer, DE) explains, "so that she can be seen." Significantly, she takes on a crucial role in engaging with the public in ways that my Twitter analysis does not explain.

I find one case that aligns with my theory; however, and that is First Spouse Ted Daughety (KS), who takes on a limited role as first spouse and rather devotes his time to his full-time career as a doctor and does *not* have a Twitter. Despite this, the key takeaway from analyzing both the website and Twitter analysis as well as the interview analysis is that the presence of a website and Twitter in and of itself is not a strong signal or predictor of the role that the first spouse plays in either influencing governors' administrations or engaging with the public.

Altogether, my research has focused on the role of first spouses at the state level, looking at the demographics of age, gender, and region across 20 years, their engagement with the public, and, most significantly, the roles that they play. The first critical takeaway from my thesis is that the role of first spouse at the state level is more informal than at the presidential level. I attribute this first to the absence of the cultural model role at the state level, and second to the discovery that most first spouses prefer to be called by their first name, as opposed to the title of "first lady," "first gentleman," etc. Presidential first ladies experience national pressure to define the roles that the public sees fit, whereas state level spouses do not have this same large-scale pressure, which allows them to define their roles as they wish.

Second, first spouses at the state level can continue their careers while taking on first spouse responsibilities, which we have not seen on the presidential level until 2021 with Dr. Jill Biden. This is important because it highlights state level first spouses' independence and ability

to continue their passions, which might not be political. Presidential first ladies have been traditionally bound to ending their careers and altering their lives when their husbands became president to carry out first lady precedents, traditions, and responsibilities. But, at the state level, we see not only first spouses continue their careers while carrying out first spouse responsibilities (i.e., Fran DeWine (OH) and Elee Reeves (MS)) but also those continue their careers without taking on first spouse responsibilities (i.e., Ted Daughety (KS) and Diana McTeague Scott (VT)).

Third, with respect to gender, the roles of the two male first spouses whom I examine in my interviews, Kevin Reynolds (IA) and Ted Daughety (KS), illustrate that there is no one way to be a first gentleman. Reynolds embraces a variety of traditional host/hostess roles, while Daughety has no interest in being a political influencer or partner. I would expect both men to wield political influence because of the masculinity that surrounds gubernatorial power, but they both take a backseat to politics. Daughety, especially, is adamant about his disinterest in politics: He chooses not to campaign with his wife or travel with her to political events. I would also expect, considering the feminine traditions of the host/hostess role, that male first spouses would not carry on this role, but I learn that Reynolds willingly breaks through these gendered barriers and carries out his host role through hosting teas and smaller, more intimate dinners with his wife, as well as leading tours and managing the gardens at Terrace Hill. These two male first spouses carry out opposite roles in terms of their responsibilities as hosts and political influencers.

Overall, the ambiguous nature of the first spouse position at the state level is such that it allows those who inhabit the role in 2020 to define it in individualistic and unique ways. The in-depth examination and analysis of first spouses of different ages, genders, and regions that I have proposed in this thesis yields the conclusion that the vague nature of the first spouse position generates the freedom and flexibility for spouses to define their roles as they see fit individually. In the end, I find a pattern, and that is, precisely, that there is no pattern. Each first spouse

interprets the unofficial and undefined public role not as a limitation but as an advantage.

## **Chapter 6 Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

The first cautionary note of my interview findings is that I was only able to talk to the staffers of two male first spouses. Drawing generalizable conclusions with respect to gender presents itself with challenges because of the limited number of male first spouses in 2020. There are seven males of the 46 total first spouses which, proportionally, very closely translates to my interview protocol numbers—two males out of 16 first spouses. Even though my sample is representative of the population, it is irresponsible to make conclusions about gender based on the data from two men and 14 women. My initial research goal was to understand how first spouses of different ages, genders, and regions inhabit the role of first spouse and, ultimately, what type of role they play in governors' administrations. I realized in the early stages of my research that the former goal of looking specifically at gender, age, and region was impractical, while the latter goal of identifying, more generally, the spouses' roles in the governors' administrations was, rather feasible. What I am really interested in—how various genders, ages, and regions impact how first spouses carry out their roles—cannot easily be done right now. I need more time and data. But, more importantly, the country does not have the data that I need to test the variables of gender, age, and region as much as I would have hoped. In other words, we must wait for more women to be elected as governors and for more men to fulfill the position of first spouse. This, in turn, will lead to more gender balance in different regions of the country.

Also, it is important to remember that I have addressed my research question within the bounds of the year 2020. I am confident in my findings with respect to the first spouses of 2020, but what I find does not necessarily apply to either the roles that the first spouses inhabited historically or those that they will carry out in the future.

Conclusively, this project revealed more questions than it answered. There are many areas

where I can see my project evolving in the future if I were to extend it, or if I were to start a new project that is tangentially related. First, if I wanted to analyze the trajectory of a first spouse's career, I could look at the handful of state level first spouses who have advanced to a higher level of the executive to become presidential first ladies, such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Roslyn Carter, Nancy Reagan, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Laura Bush. In addition to thinking about gender, age, and region, I could also think about partisanship. Does a first spouse of a Democratic governor influence the role in different ways than a first spouse of a Republican governor?

Beyond my Twitter, website, and interview analyses, it is important to mention that my project effectively ended on November 3, 2020 – I do not analyze the newly elected governors and first spouses who have taken over the position thereafter. Nevertheless, this Tuesday in November brought us presidential level first spouses that add noteworthy dimensions to conversations that I have posed with respect to roles of the first spouses, both at the state and presidential level in two ways. First, it brought us First Lady Jill Biden who, according to various mainstream news sources, made history as the country's *first* first lady to continue her career, or to hold a paid job outside of the White House (Kindelan 2021). I find with respect to the modern first ladies in Chapter 1, that each woman has taken on the all-consuming role as first spouse full-time, but First Lady Jill Biden breaks this mold. Second, this election brought more groundbreaking changes to the discussions in my thesis when Kamala Harris became America's first female vice president. She brought forth with her another historic first: her husband, Doug Emhoff, who became the country's first Second Gentleman. How will Emhoff define this role and, possibly, set precedents for the men who will come after him? In what ways will he alter traditional perceptions of the role of second spouse, especially with respect to gender?

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. What do you perceive the role/responsibility of First Spouse [first and last name] to be?
2. Can you describe a typical weekday for the First Spouse?
3. Does the First Spouse have a career/job beyond that of being the first spouse? If so, what career(s) or job(s)? Did he/she continue this career as first spouse?
4. To what extent does the First Spouse exercise political influence?
5. To what extent does the First Spouse assume a host/hostess role (i.e., planning or hosting social events, steward/stewardess of the Mansion, remodeling/redecorating the Mansion, etc.)?
6. Do you consider the First Spouse to be a “political partner” (i.e., campaigning, rallying, etc.) to the Governor? Can you expand on why or why not?
7. Does the First Spouse participate in the Governor’s staff meetings? If so, does he/she influence policymaking? If not, was this a decision that the First Spouse made?
8. In general, does the First Spouse remain in the background or the forefront of the Governor’s term?
9. Does the First Spouse have a social media presence? Why or why not?
10. Does he/she prefer the title, “First Lady [first and last name]”/“First Gentleman [first and last name]” or another title?
11. How old is the First Spouse? Are they 40 or younger, between 40-60, or 60 or older?
12. How does the First Spouse identify their gender? Are they a woman, a man, or another gender identity?
13. Is there an official office of the First Spouse? Does he/she have a chief of staff or executive assistant?

## Appendix B: Interview Participants

Table 3: Interview Participants

State	Name of First Spouse	Name and Title of Participant	Date and Mode of Interview
DE	Tracey Carney	Emily (David) Hershman, Communications Advisor of the Governor	March 25, 2021; Zoom
IN	Janet Holcomb	Kaylee Beck, Executive Assistant of First Lady; and Marianna Molony, Chief of Staff to the First Lady/Residence Manager	March 12, 2021; Email <sup>4</sup>
IA	Kevin Reynolds	Diane Becker, Administrator/Assistant to the First Gentleman	March 24, 2021; Zoom
KS	Ted Daughety	Ted Daughety, First Gentleman	March 18, 2021; Zoom
MD	Yumi Hogan	Unnamed staffer, Chief of Staff to the First Lady	February 24, 2021; Zoom (non-video)
MS	Elee Reeves	First Lady Elee Reeves; Shelby Wilcher, Administrative Assistant; and Ann Beard, Chief of Staff to the First Lady	March 15, 2021; Email
NJ	Tammy Snyder Murphy	Stephanie Lagos, Chief of Staff to the First Lady	March 16, 2021; Zoom
NC	Kristin Cooper	Caitlyn Grimes, Press Secretary to the First Lady; and Gregory G. Moore, Chief of Staff to the First Lady	March 4, 2021; Zoom
ND	Kathryn Burgum	First Lady Kathryn Burgum; and Joey Ness, Policy and Communications Manager of the First Lady	March 12, 2021; Email
OH	Fran DeWine	Emily E. Clarey, Ohio Governor's Residence & Heritage Garden Residence Manager	March 12, 2021; Email
PA	Frances Wolf	Jennifer Wilburne, Chief of Staff to the First Lady	March 1, 2021; Zoom
UT	Jeanette Herbert	Unnamed staffer, Director of Scheduling for the First Lady	February 18, 2021; Email
VT	Diana McTeague Scott	Tracy Delude, Executive Scheduler of the Governor	March 29, 2021; Email
VA	Pamela Northam	David Cary, Assistant Secretary of Early Childhood Education and Chief of Staff to the First Lady; and Bailey Harlow, Executive Assistant to the First Lady	March 8, 2021; Zoom
WA	Trudi Inslee	Frances Munez Carter, Executive Mansion Administrator/Assistant to the First Lady	March 9, 2021; Zoom
WI	Kathy Evers	Stephanie Weix, Chief of Staff to the First Lady	April 4, 2021; Email

<sup>4</sup> For email interviews, the dates are the last day of correspondence.

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