There are many reasons that Hillary Clinton lost her historic bid to be the first female president of the United States; and it turns out that a lot of it was due to her failure to follow James Carvel’s 1992 slogan: “it’s the economy, stupid.” But Clinton could have added her own version of that slogan: “it’s the misogyny, stupid.” In addition to the other issues discussed by our GSWS colleagues here, including racism, xenophobia, and homophobia, plain old misogyny is a rationale that too many feminists have avoided talking about. In particular, voters hate her because they see her as dishonest.

How can that be? Donald Trump has still not provided access to his tax returns or his health records. He was accused of defrauding students at Trump University, for which he recently paid a $25 million settlement. He promoted the “birther movement” that challenged President Obama’s citizenship and then repudiated it by blaming the rumor on Clinton, a lie so outrageous that even Fox News called him out on it. His disparaging remarks about women have been breathtaking. Yet Clinton is the one who is seen as not trustworthy.
The trope of the dishonest woman goes back millennia, from ancient Greece and Rome, through the middle ages, to Enlightenment figures like Rousseau, to 20th and 21st century rape discourse. Women will trick a man into marriage by getting pregnant, have affairs behind their husbands’ or boyfriends’ backs, and even pass off their lover’s child as their husband’s. And today we are all too familiar with the discourse surrounding rape, which assume women are lying that they didn’t consent to sex.

Clinton’s use of a private email server and her potential conflicts of interest with the Clinton Foundation may have added fuel to this trope, but they did not create this narrative, one that is tied up with a widespread unease about women exercising power. It’s such a familiar narrative that we don’t recognize the double standard when we apply it ourselves: hence the frequent blasé attitude about her candidacy, her labeling as “flawed” (as if anyone who ever ran for office wasn’t), the focus on her “stamina” and appearance. Electing Clinton might have helped change that historical narrative, but we’ll never know.

What we do know is that many issues of importance to the Penn GSWS community, from abortion rights and reproductive health to LGBTQ safety and equality to the recent expressions of racial hostility against our African-American students to the feared deportation of our international and immigrant students, are all likely to come under attack from the incoming administration and Congress. Now, more than ever, it is vital that we continue the work we do in research, publishing, teaching, mentoring, and service, though it will face tough challenges that we need to face head on, and forcefully. The GSWS Program and the Alice Paul Center stand with you as a resource and network for productive collaboration. Because as Secretary Clinton has repeatedly reminded us, we are stronger together.