Gender, Context, and Television Advertising: A Comprehensive Analysis of 2000 and 2002 House Races

Virginia Sapiro, Katherine Cramer Walsh, Patricia Strach, and Valerie Hennings

Abstract
Are men and women portrayed differently in campaigns? Much scholarship and commentary expects that this is so, yet previous studies provide ambiguous evidence on the extent of gender difference. The authors provide a comprehensive analysis of gender differences in television advertisements in congressional races in 2000 and 2002 with data that allow them to take into account the frequency of airings, the sponsorship of the advertisements, partisanship, and competitiveness of the race. Although some gender differences emerge, the analysis reveals undeniable similarity in the presentation of male and female candidates in television advertisements.

Keywords
campaign advertising, gender, elections, political communication, stereotypes

Do men and women run for office differently? Decades of research expect that they do. Much of the early blossoming of literature on women and elective office focused on gender difference—comparing the backgrounds of male and female candidates and gender-based stereotypes that could affect them (Bernstein and Bernstein 1975; Bullock and Heys 1972; Darcy and Schramm 1977; Dubec 1976; Feree 1974; Gertzog 1979; Hedlund et al. 1979; Karnig and Walter 1976; Merritt 1977; Van Hightower 1977; Welch 1978). Today, research on gender and campaigns revolves around a new set of questions of difference: whether men and women candidates present themselves differently (Dolan 2005; Herron, Lay, and Stokes 2003; Schaffner 2005), are perceived differently by the electorate (Koch 2002; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Streb et al. 2008), and whether these differences affect citizen engagement and electoral outcomes (Atkeson 2003; Fox and Oxley 2003). Despite scholarly conclusions and popular assumptions, there remains little clear evidence about whether there are gender differences in the way candidates present themselves, why they may persist, and the implications of these differences.

Before we can answer the question of whether and how gender differences in the way candidates present themselves and are presented by others affect public perceptions and votes, we first need to establish that there are in fact differences. This article focuses on that basic, persistent, important assumption.

There are a variety of reasons to expect that male and female candidates present themselves and are presented by others differently in campaigns. The first reason stems from expectations that men and women care about different issues. Though public opinion surveys show that these differences are actually quite small (Sapiro 2003, 606–10), there is a marginal tendency for men to care more about economics and women to care more about social issues. Furthermore, political elites are not immune from this political culture (Duester-Lahita and Kelly 1995).

A second reason to expect gender differences in candidate presentation is that just as gender stereotypes and expectations underlie public perceptions and vote choice (Dolan 2008; Falk and Kensi 2006; Fox and Oxley 2003; Koch 2002; Lawless 2004; Sanbonmatsu 2002, 2003), they likely also underlie the behavior of campaign strategists and candidates. The behavior of party leaders reflects gender stereotypes (Sanbonmatsu 2006). The behavior of members of the press reflects them as well (Devitt 1999; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005; Kittilson and Fridkin

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2008), although the treatment of women and men in news media is generally equitable. (For a review, see Atkeson and Krebs 2008; Bystrom et al. 2004, chap. 2). These biases may also appear in the way candidates are portrayed.

Third, whether or not candidates and campaign professionals are aware of their own gender stereotypes, they are aware of the stereotypes held by the electorate. Members of the electorate perceive that male and female political leaders have different areas of expertise (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Burrell 1994, chap. 2; Fridkin and Kenney 2008; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Kahn 1994, Lawless 2004; Rosenwater et al. 1987; Sapiro 1981-82, 1983, chap. 7). Male and female candidates may emphasize different issues, playing to perceptions of their competence and interests—what we might label “gender-based issue ownership” (Iyengar and McGraw 2007; see also Center for American Women and Politics 2001; Jamieson 1995; Niven and Zilber 2001). Whether playing to perceived strengths or compensating for perceived weaknesses is perceived as more advantageous remains to be seen (Herrnson et al. 2003).

A fourth reason that gender differences might appear is due to the medium candidates most commonly use to convey messages to the public: television. Television advertising continues to display disproportionately traditional gender roles. It attributes expertise and power more to men, through the greater use of men for voice-overs, for example (Bartsch et al. 2000; Coltrane and Messineo 2000; M. S. Larson 2001; see also the classic Goffman 1979). Previous work on campaign ads shows similar patterns (Bystrom et al. 2004).

For all of these reasons, political observers continue to assume that gender differences exist in the presentation of U.S. candidates. In this article we examine this simple yet fundamental assumption by analyzing the way television ads portray candidates for the U.S. House. Despite the increase of campaigning through the Web, direct mail, and other media, television advertising remains the way in which most members of the public encounter candidates for national campaigns (Pew Research Center 2004). Whether through their own ads or through ads sponsored by parties and interest groups, if gender differences in candidate portrayals exist, we can expect that they will appear in television ads. Looking at House races across the United States allows us to provide a much-needed comprehensive answer to the question, Do gender differences exist?

Furthermore, if differences do exist, previous research offers guidance about where we expect to see these differences. First, the literature suggests that gender differences may vary depending on who sponsors the ad. Advertisements produced by the campaign are more likely to reflect how candidates want to present themselves than is true of ads produced by parties or interest groups (Goldstein and Ridout 2004). Second, previous literature also suggests that we should expect differences along four dimensions: casting and setting, policy issues, candidate traits, and the tone and purpose of the ad (Bystrom et al. 2004; Dabelko and Herrnson 1997; Dolan 2005; Fox 1997; Kahn 1993, 1996). We examine characteristics within each of these areas while examining same-gender as well as mixed-gender races, candidate- and party/interest group–produced ads, and elections across multiple years. Such a comprehensive analysis has not been conducted to date and is necessary to test the assumption of gender difference that underlies much of the literature.

Though previous studies tend to focus on differences when they appear, the literature taken as a whole does not suggest these differences outweigh the similarities. For example, although a study on ads in 1998 congressional campaigns found some modest gender differences in campaigns that are consistent with gender stereotypes (Pangapopoulos 2004), a study of campaign advertising in House, Senate, and gubernatorial races from 1964 to 1998 found that apparent gender differences in “outsider” imagery and appeals to “feminine” issues (primarily social welfare, environment, and women’s rights issues) were attributable to party and incumbency status—not to gender (Shames 2003). Also, while Herrnson et al. (2003) argued that female candidates “run as women” to their benefit, Dolan (2005) argued that there are few differences in how male and female candidates present policy preferences in their campaigns. Finally, despite the widespread assumption of gender difference, research on the presentation of candidates via media other than television ads finds similarity for the most part (Banwart and McKinney 2005; Dabelko and Herrnson 1997; Dolan 2005; Hill 2005; S. G. Larson 2001). A comprehensive answer to our two basic research questions—Do differences exist, and if so, where?—becomes all the more important given these inconsistencies.

In our analysis we look for whether differences exist on the four dimensions where scholars have theoretical expectations for gender difference but often conflicting results, as follows:

1. Casting and setting: In the most comprehensive study of the presentation of candidates in television ads to date, Bystrom et al. (2004) examined many aspects of “VideoStyle,” based on the expectation of gender difference. They examined gubernatorial and Senate candidate ads produced in mixed-gender races in the seven campaign seasons between 1990 and 2002. With respect to the casting and setting of
the ad, they found that female candidates speak more often for themselves than men do (37) and that men include their families more often (37) but found no significant differences with respect to setting (38) or in the use of endorsements (35). We examine who stars in the ad, whether sources such as newspapers are cited for support, who appears as a supporting actor in the ad, and where the ad is set.

2. Policy issues: Because of widespread stereotypes about women’s and men’s areas of expertise explained previously, scholars have looked for differential emphasis on gendered issues. Results show some evidence that women are more likely to emphasize stereotypical women’s issues (i.e., education, health care, senior citizens) and men are more likely to emphasize defense and crime; however, these differences are often small and inconsistent across studies (Byström et al. 2004; Dabelko and Hermson 1997; Dolan 2005; Fox 1997; Kahn 1993, 1996). Following this literature, we look for gender difference with respect to: the economy, education, the elderly, health (and the subset of women’s health), abortion, law and order, crime, gun control, and foreign policy. Because it is unclear whether candidates are playing to or against stereotypes, it remains to be seen whether men or women will emphasize each of these issues more often.

3. Candidate traits: Like the expectation for issues, research has long showed that people attribute men and women with different personality traits. Experimental research on voter perception shows that these stereotypes influence how people see candidates (Kahn 1994; Lawless 2004) and candidates may use awareness of these stereotypes strategically. For example, women emphasize toughness and strength more often while men emphasize sensitivity and understanding (Byström et al. 2004, 36-7). Based on this work, we look for gender difference with respect to an emphasis on the candidates’ backgrounds and political records and whether ads portray them as honest, tough, caring, or having integrity. We again investigate whether men and women are playing to or against stereotypes.

4. Tone and purpose: Finally, we expect to see that men’s and women’s advertising differs in the mix of policy and personal issues: whether it is positive, funny, and its purpose is to attack or its purpose is to contrast. Kahn (1993) found that among candidates for the U.S. Senate in 1984 and 1986, women were more likely to go negative. However, Byström et al. (2004, 32) found that whether men or women go negative more often varies from year to year. They did find evidence, however, of gendered strategies such as women using humor more than men.

The previous lack of comprehensive data on candidate portrayals across years, geographic area, a large number of races, and races that include candidates in mixed-gender as well as same-gender contests has limited the ability of studies to contribute to a consensus on the existence of gender difference along these four dimensions. To bring us closer to understanding whether or not gender differences exist, we need data that include same-gender as well as mixed-gender races, candidate- as well as party/interest group-produced ads, and that allow us to control for the factors that could shape the appearance of gender differences, such as the party of the candidate and the competitiveness of the race (Dolan 2005). In addition, we need a measure of the intensity of advertising. Most empirical studies of television advertising are based on archival data and appear to rely on samples of ads that were produced rather than those that were aired. These are different populations of ads from the point of view of campaign strategy and impact on the electorate (Prior 2001). A single ad aired once weighed equally with an ad aired a thousand times will give us a biased picture of the way in which candidates or campaigns/interest groups choose to portray candidates as well as the message the electorate is likely to take away.

**Data and Method**

The Wisconsin Advertising Project (WiscAds; which we explain in detail in the following) provides a unique opportunity to investigate the existence of gender differences through data from multiple years, many geographic areas, and mixed-gender and same-gender races while taking into account partisanship, competitiveness, and ad sponsor. We focus on races for the U.S. House in 2000 and 2002 because there is more variation in the presence of female candidates than in Senate elections. We undertook an intensive coding effort of the ads in the WiscAds database beyond the codes already contained in the WiscAds data to enable us to investigate gender difference in candidate portrayals.

The WiscAds data originated from the Campaign Media Analysis Group (CMAG), a commercial firm that uses advanced technology to track television advertising. These data derive from monitoring the transmissions of the national networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox),
twenty-five national cable networks (e.g., CNN, ESPN, and TBS), and local advertising in the country’s top 75 media markets in 2000, covering more than 80 percent of the population or 91 percent of House districts, and the top 100 media markets in 2002, reaching about 86 percent of the population. The small bias in these data toward districts in larger markets means we are missing information from the most rural districts and at-large seats in Montana and South Dakota. Although CMAG tracked advertising in markets comprising all or part of 396 districts, most House contests were uncompetitive and drew no advertising. In sum, our data represent nearly the population of ads run in competitive elections. The rich data to which we have access include storyboards for every ad aired derived from screen captures at 4-second intervals and the complete transcripts of the ads.5

To these existing data, we added further content analysis of the individual ads.6 We coded the 2000 and 2002 campaigns for an additional twenty-three questions based on our expectations about where gender differences might appear. We developed our coding variables from previous work in this area as explained previously, tested the coding instrument on all variables for a small sample of ads, revised and elaborated decision rules on the coding instrument based on interrater agreement and coder interviews, and created a Microsoft Access interface for coding (which minimized coder error) before we began coding. Two undergraduates coded the 2000 data and met once a week for reliability checks.7 Afterward, the Wisconsin Advertising Project used the same guidelines developed here to code the 2002 data.

Our first task after coding was to reorganize the data from its original state at the ad level to the candidate level. The result is a data set that represents candidates by (1) a set of airings of ads produced by their campaigns and (2) a set of airings of ads supporting them produced independently by parties and interest groups. Hereafter, we refer to ads sponsored by candidates’ campaigns as those in the candidate collection and those run by parties and interest groups as those in the party/interest group collection. Our dependent variables represent the proportion of all ad airings supporting the candidate within a given collection that reveal a particular attribute. Thus, these data represent the extent to which campaigns emphasizes certain attributes through advertising actually presented to the public.

We proceed by considering the impact of gender on campaign advertising in each campaign collection in multivariate (ordinary least squares) analysis that includes two crucial determinants of campaigning: the candidate’s party and the difficulty (competitiveness) of the race. Party-based issue ownership research shows the public may expect one party or the other to have more competence on certain issues or character and that context determines whether it is beneficial to violate these norms (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Benoit and Arme 2005; Damore 2004; Hayes 2005; Kaplan, Park, and Ridout 2006; Petrocik 1996; Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003; Schaffner 2005, Sides 2006). Furthermore, candidate and party/interest group behavior may vary according to the competitiveness of the election in a way that interacts with gender (Palmer and Simon 2005). The multivariate analysis probes whether the relationship between gender and campaign presentation is either spurious or masked by party and/or competitiveness. To this end we also introduce, in alternative models, two interaction terms: one for gender and competitiveness and one for gender and party. Thus, we consider a main effects and an interactive effects model for each dependent variable for each campaign collection:

\[ Y = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Gender} + \beta_2 \text{Competitiveness} \]
\[ + \beta_3 \text{Party} + \epsilon. \]  
(1)

\[ Y = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Gender} + \beta_2 \text{Competitiveness} \]
\[ + \beta_3 \text{Party} + \beta_4 \text{Gender} \times \text{Competitiveness} \]
\[ + \beta_5 \text{Gender} \times \text{Party} + \epsilon. \]  
(2)

In cases in which only one of these interaction terms appeared statistically significant, we reestimated the model using only the main effects and the significant interaction terms.

\[ Y = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Gender} + \beta_2 \text{Competitiveness} + \beta_3 \text{Party} \]
\[ + \beta_4 \text{Gender} \times \text{Competitiveness} + \epsilon. \]  
(3)

\[ Y = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Gender} + \beta_2 \text{Competitiveness} \]
\[ + \beta_3 \text{Party} + \beta_4 \text{Gender} \times \text{Party} + \epsilon. \]  
(4)

To reiterate, we are looking in a comprehensive way for evidence of gender difference in the presentation of candidates. Our analysis involves at least two different models run on forty different dependent variables across four aspects of television ads from four different campaign collections of ads (2000 campaign ads run by the candidates’ campaigns, 2000 ads run by parties or interest groups, 2002 candidate campaign ads, and 2002 party or interest group ads).6

Given the sheer size of the results, we do not show most of them here but instead in an online appendix (Appendix D) available at http://prq.sagepub.com/ supplemental/. We offer illustrative views of the multivariate analysis where the results warrant. Throughout the analysis, because of the small sample sizes we report findings statistically significant at the \( p < .10 \) level. This presents a particularly demanding test of the claim that there are no differences, which as we discuss in the following, is the pervasive pattern in our results.7
To be clear, we ask whether there are gender differences. We are agnostic on whether or not candidates are going to play to or against stereotypes but expect that if there are gender differences in the presentation of candidates, they will appear in some or all of the four areas we have specified. If gender shapes campaign style or presentation in contemporary congressional campaigns in a straightforward manner, gender differences on particular dimensions should recur in contiguous congressional elections, though they may not be consistent across candidate-sponsored and party- or interest group-sponsored ads.

**Results**

In our exposition of results, consistent with the literature, we pay careful attention to and explain in detail the presence of any gender differences we observe. However, the overall message that should be taken away from our analyses is actually the lack of gender difference. Despite the common expectation that women run for office differently than men, our comprehensive analysis finds little support for this conclusion. Table 1 demonstrates this. Due to the large number of dependent variables, multiple years, and ad collections across which we investigate, we present this table of bivariate results to highlight the scarcity of evidence of gender difference. Cells in which there was evidence of difference at the p < .10 level are in bold to enable the reader to observe both the dearth and inconsistency of difference. Our following explanations of the bivariate and multivariate results are organized by the four ad dimensions.

**Casting and Setting**

The first portion of Table 1 displays the various aspects of casting and setting that we investigated. If gender differences were operating in this realm, we might, for example, see women playing to stereotypical strengths by appearing with offspring more often than men or by compensating for perceived weaknesses by appearing with law enforcement officers. However, Table 1 shows that the campaign ads for male and female congressional candidates are indistinguishable with respect to most aspects of casting and setting in both 2000 and 2002 regardless of whether the ads originated from within the candidate’s organization or from parties and interest groups.

The multivariate analyses investigate these results further. When we take account of candidate party and competitiveness of the race through Models 1 through 4 described previously, the evidence that gender differences are scarce does not change. For the vast majority of the variables in the four campaign collections, neither gender nor gender in interaction with competitiveness or party has a statistically significant impact on the dependent variable. Moreover, considering the few cases in which gender, alone or in interaction, has any impact, never do we find a statistically significant gender impact within the same ad source (i.e., candidate or party/interest group) across the two contiguous elections or across the two ad sources in one year.

Looking specifically at the casting and setting differences we found in the bivariate analysis, only some of them hold up in the multivariate analyses. Consistent with our earlier findings, in 2000 party/interest group ads supporting women were more likely to cite newspapers than those supporting men (Model 1, \( \beta_{\text{woman}} = .177, SE = .076 \)). In 2002, candidate ads supporting women were less likely than men’s to show spouses (Model 1, \( \beta_{\text{woman}} = -.342, SE = .130 \)) or offspring (Model 1, \( \beta_{\text{woman}} = -.381, SE = .128 \)). In 2000, women’s candidate ads were not set in streets as often as men’s were (Model 1, \( \beta_{\text{woman}} = -.078, SE = .037 \)). Likewise, the finding that in 2002 candidate ads, women’s ads were more often set in homes and neighborhoods than men’s is reconfirmed (Model 1, \( \beta_{\text{woman}} = .193, SE = .059 \)), although the finding for home and neighborhood settings for party/interest group ads does not hold up (Model 1, \( \beta_{\text{woman}} = -.089, SE = .081 \)).

A few gender effects emerge in the multivariate analysis that were masked in the bivariate analysis. With respect to mentioning the opposing candidate, an interaction effect of gender and competitiveness occurs (Model 3, \( \beta_{\text{Woman} \times \text{Competitiveness}} = .158, SE = .063 \)) in 2000 party/interest group ads such that increased competitiveness of the race is related to a tendency to mention the opposing candidate in women’s but not men’s ads. In 2002 candidate ads, a Model 4 analysis finds a direct effect of gender (\( \beta_{\text{woman}} = .226, SE = .075 \)), and an interaction effect with party (\( \beta_{\text{Woman} \times \text{Democrat}} = -.406, SE = .105 \)) such that among Democrats women are less likely to mention their opponents than men are, and Republican women are more likely to mention their opponents; Democratic women are less likely to mention their opponents than Republican women. But these findings do not show up in any other campaign collection. A few other scattered interactive effects occur as well; for example, in 2000 candidate ads, there is an interaction between gender and party such that female Democrats are especially unlikely to show medical personnel in their ads (Model 4; \( \beta_{\text{Woman} \times \text{Democrat}} = -.109, SE = .060 \)).

In sum, gender differences in VideoStyle elements of the role of the candidate, using source support, or casting and setting are sparse and not consistent across contexts. Indeed, only one of the fourteen variables we examined is significant across both years within a campaign collection type: Candidates’ ads supporting women are more likely to be set in a home or neighborhood, and this effect appears only when including interactions between gender and party as well as competitiveness. (None of the variables

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Gender Differences in Four Aspects of U.S. House Television Advertisements in 2000 and 2002, by Source of Ad</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Casting: Star of the show?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is candidate central figure?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does candidate narrate?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opposing candidate identified?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any supporting actors?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Casting: Supporting sources</strong></td>
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<td>Cites newspapers?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting sources for claims?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Casting: Themes and appeals</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Children in ad?</td>
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<td>Elderly in ad?</td>
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<td>Teachers in ad?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medical personnel in ad?</td>
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<td>Law enforcement/military in ad?</td>
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<td>Family member or friend in ad?</td>
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<td>Spouse in ad?</td>
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<td>Offspring in ad?</td>
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<td>Parent in ad?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>In home or neighborhood?</td>
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<tr>
<td>In a natural environment?</td>
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<td>In a street?</td>
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<td>In a social service site?</td>
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<td>In a political setting?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Policy issues</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>Elderly</td>
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<td>Health</td>
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<td>Women's health</td>
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<td>Abortion</td>
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<td>Law and order</td>
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<td>Crime</td>
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<td>Gun control</td>
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<td>Foreign policy</td>
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<td><strong>Candidate traits</strong></td>
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<td>Candidate's background</td>
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<td>Candidate's political record</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honesty/integrity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is candidate caring?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is candidate tough/a fighter?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tone and purpose</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>At least party policy?</td>
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<tr>
<td>At least partly personal?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funny?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purpose to attack</td>
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<td>Purpose to contrast</td>
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Range of N (except spouse, parent, offspring variables) for
Men  190 to 194 84 to 89 183 to 184 89 to 90
Women 33 21 to 22 44 20

Note: Entries are differences in the proportion of female versus male advertisements with the respective characteristic. Differences that are significant are in bold and followed by p values in parentheses.

Source: Wisconsin Advertising Project/CMAG.
are significant across both years and both campaign collections.) If we were examining only one campaign collection, it would be possible to offer post hoc explanations based in the conventional literatures of stereotyping and gender communication for any one of the gender differences that emerge—for example, that women do not show their families as often because they must combat cultural expectations—but given the inconsistencies within year and across contiguous years and the nuances demonstrated by the occasional significance of interaction terms in the multivariate analysis, these explanations would seem ad hoc indeed. We are left with the conclusion that gender differences may emerge in casting and setting, but they depend on the context in ways that must be examined more qualitatively.

**Policy Issues**

Across the ten different issue areas that we investigated, the striking result we find is that issue emphasis for the most part does not depend on the gender of the candidate. We expected gender difference to appear in ways suggested by the literature, such as women emphasizing education more or men emphasizing the economy more. However, in addition to a lack of evidence of such differences, the very few differences that emerge show little consistency across either year or ad collection. For example, the electoral season of 2000 was marked by unusual emphasis on education; this was a major theme in George Bush’s presidential campaign. Curiously, in the congressional campaigns, our results show that although there are gender differences in emphasis on education, the nature of the difference depends on the source of the ad. In party-interest group ads, ads supporting women place less emphasis on education than men’s, whereas among candidates’ ads, ads supporting women place more emphasis on education than men’s.

The multivariate analysis of issues and contexts reveals a few instances of gender differences. Model 1 analyses show gender effects on education in 2000; female candidates are less associated with educational emphasis in party-interest groups (β<sub>woman</sub> = -1.60, SE = .079), and to a marginally statistically significant degree, female candidates are more associated with educational emphasis in their own campaign ads (β<sub>woman</sub> = .119, SE = .066).

With respect to gun control, a Model 1 analysis upholds the finding that gender affects emphasis on gun control in 2000 candidate ads (β<sub>woman</sub> = .090, SE = .037). Probing further, the more complex Model 2 shows that both interaction terms for gender/party and gender/competitiveness have statistically significant impacts on gun control emphasis (see Table 2). Women Democrats and men in competitive races are especially likely to emphasize gun control in comparison with all other kinds of candidates. This is the only ad collection in which gender emerges as a factor in determining emphasis on gun control in multivariate analysis, however.

The main effect of gender on foreign policy emphasis found in the 2000 party/interest group ads fades with multivariate analysis but emerges in 2002 candidate ads. Using Model 3, gender has a significant effect (β<sub>woman</sub> = -.177, SE = .074) as does the Gender × Competitiveness interaction term (β<sub>Gender × Competitiveness</sub> = -.086, SE = .030). Probing further shows that among women, the more competitive their races in the post-9/11 campaign of 2002, the less they emphasize foreign policy, while among men, a more competitive race is related to more emphasis on foreign policy.

The tendency for women’s candidate ads to emphasize the economy less in 2002 holds up in the multivariate analyses (Model 1, β<sub>woman</sub> = -.109, SE = .055), but the relationship between gender and abortion does not. However, using Model 2 to analyze abortion mentions shows that in 2000 candidate ads, the gender/party interaction term has an effect (β<sub>Gender × Party</sub> = .061, SE = .031) such that among Democrats women are more likely than men to emphasize abortion, while there are no gender differences among Republicans.

Interaction effects also emerged in analysis of the determinants of emphasis on women’s health issues in 2002 candidate ads. Using Model 4, both gender (β<sub>woman</sub> = .063, SE = .009) and the interaction with party (β<sub>Gender × Party</sub> = -.079, SE = .028) have significant effects such that women in general placed more emphasis on women’s health than men did in this year, all other things equal, but it was especially in the Republican party that women’s emphasis on women’s health outweighed men’s. Also in 2002, interaction effects emerge in party-interest group ads but only in Model 3, where both gender (β<sub>woman</sub> = .380, SE = .054) and the interaction with competitiveness (β<sub>Gender × Competitiveness</sub> = .147, SE = .023) are related to emphasis on women’s health such that women emphasized women’s health more, but among women (but not men), the more competitive the race, the more likely they were to emphasize women’s health.

### Table 2. Gender Effects on Gun Control Emphasis, 2000 Candidate Ads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>p</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>.644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitiveness</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman × Democrat</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman × Competitiveness</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.000</td>
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</table>

R² = .164, F = 7.99 (p = .000)
In summary, when looking at the impact of gender in two contiguous congressional elections drawn from two different sources, we find that the impact of candidate gender on ten separate issues is significant across years only for gun control in candidate ads but just in bivariate analysis, and even in that case the directionality is different across years.

Candidate Traits

Turning to candidate characteristics, again we see a similar story. The bivariate analysis displayed in Table 1 shows that only in 2002 party/interest group ads is there a significant gender difference in emphasis of candidates' backgrounds. Also, only 2002 candidate campaign ads show a gender difference in emphasis on political records—more emphasis among men's than women's. With respect to personality attributes, we see no indication that ads reflect traditional stereotypes. In 2000 candidate ads and 2002 party/interest group ads, there is more emphasis on honesty and integrity for men. However, only 2002 party/interest group ads show a gender difference in terms of attributions of being caring and compassionate, and it is men's ads that emphasize this trait.

Attributions of toughness show especially interesting variations, highlighting how any evidence of gender difference we observe appears highly contextual. Turning first to ads generated by the candidates' campaigns, in both years women are more likely to be described as tough, although the statistical significance in 2000 is marginal. In the party/interest group ads in 2002, on the other hand, women are less often described as tough.

In the multivariate analysis, gender emerges marginally with respect to discussions of candidate background in 2002 candidate campaign ads (Model 1, β Woman = -0.084, SE = 0.046). In the simple (Model 1) multivariate model, gender remains related to attributes of toughness in both 2000 (β Woman = -0.119, SE = 0.059) and 2002 (β Woman = 0.180, SE = 0.047). Extending the analysis using Model 3 in the 2002 candidate campaign data collection strengthens the impact of gender (β Woman = 0.314, SE = 0.086) and reveals a marginally significant interaction with competitiveness (β Woman × Competitiveness = 0.064, SE = 0.034) such that among women, those in tougher races are more likely to describe themselves as tough (Table 3). We suspect that women candidates often try to work counter to stereotype, convincing the voters that they are tough enough to withstand pressure and make difficult decisions, and this may be especially true in the toughest of races. Also, Democrats may work especially hard to appear tough to work against trait attributes of their party (Hayes 2005).

The results with respect to the attribute of “caringness” are not consistent, however. Bivariate analysis showed that 2002 party/interest group ads described women as caring less often than men, but that relationship disappears in multivariate analyses. However, the multivariate analyses reveal the opposite relationship in 2000 party/interest group ads (Table 4). Female gender is positively related with attributions of compassion, and both interactions emerge such that Republican (but not Democratic) women are more attributed with compassion. Yet another relationship emerges among 2002 candidate ads: The interaction between gender and party is significant such that female Democrats' ads are marginally more likely to emphasize “caringness” (Model 4, β Woman × Democrat = 0.084, SE = 0.046).

In sum, out of five candidate traits, women’s use of “toughness” is the one candidate attribute (and the only campaign element in our study) in which our analysis reveals any consistency across years by ad source in a manner that resonates with conventional findings on gender stereotypes. In both bivariate and multivariate analyses, women’s campaigns tend to highlight the candidate’s toughness more than men’s do.

Tone and Purpose

Once again, Table 1 illustrates few gender differences along this dimension. Previous work found evidence of women going negative (Kahn 1993) and women using humor more often (Bystrom et al. 2004, 33), but our analyses show these relationships are not consistent across contexts. Women’s campaign ads in 2000 are less likely to use humor than men's are, but that difference does not appear in the 2002 ads. There are no other differences in
candidate ads in either year. In 2002 party/interest group ads, those favoring women are more likely to be positive and less likely to attack.

In the multivariate analysis, some other gender effects emerge. The relationship between gender and whether the ads emphasized personal character of the candidates varies across ad source and year. Model 4 analysis of the 2000 candidate campaign ads shows that female gender is inversely associated with ads focusing on personal aspects of the candidates ($\beta_{\text{gender}} = -2.257, SE = .112$), and an interaction with party has a marginally significant impact ($\beta_{\text{gender} \times \text{party}} = .249, SE = .142$). Further analysis shows that among Republicans (but not Democrats) men were more likely to focus on personal character in their campaign ads. Also in 2000, gender emerges as relevant in party/interest group ads, but in this case (using Model 4), gender has no direct effects ($\beta_{\text{gender}} = .103, SE = .071$), though gender has significant interactive effects with competitiveness on personalistic framing ($\beta_{\text{gender} \times \text{competitiveness}} = .161, SE = .049$) such that in ads supporting women, the more competitive the race was, the more likely it was to focus on personal character. A similar effect appears in 2002 party/interest group ads (using Model 4) except that both gender ($\beta_{\text{gender}} = .537, SE = .243$) and an interaction with competitiveness ($\beta_{\text{gender} \times \text{competitiveness}} = .302, SE = .105$) have an effect. In other words, ads supporting women were more likely to focus on personal character generally, and as in 2000, in ads supporting women but not men, the more competitive the race was, the more likely it was to focus on personal character.

There is no direct trade-off between whether ads focus on personal matters or policy, and not surprisingly, the gender effects are different depending on the focus. In 2000, both candidate campaign ads and party/interest group ads show an interactive impact of gender and competitiveness for policy issues using Model 3 analysis, but the direction of the relationship is different across ad type. In candidate campaign ads, gender has no direct effect on policy focus, but gender has a positive interaction with competitiveness ($\beta_{\text{gender} \times \text{competitiveness}} = .058, SE = .026$), while in party/interest group ads gender has a marginally inverse effect ($\beta_{\text{gender}} = -1.01, SE = .058$), as does the interaction with competitiveness ($\beta_{\text{gender} \times \text{competitiveness}} = -.083, SE = .040$).

With respect to the use of humor, gender ($\beta_{\text{gender}} = .085, SE = .034$), the interaction with competitiveness ($\beta_{\text{gender} \times \text{competitiveness}} = .027, SE = .014$), and the interaction with party ($\beta_{\text{gender} \times \text{party}} = -.015, SE = .042$) are significant in 2000 party/interest group ads. Probing further shows that in ads supporting Republicans (but not Democrats), those supporting women are more likely to use humor than those supporting men. Also, in ads supporting candidates in competitive races, those supporting men are more likely to use humor than those supporting women.

Finally we turn to whether the ads are framed to contrast the candidates or to attack a candidate. Gender is linked to whether candidates frame their ads to contrast the candidates in both 2000 and 2002. Using Model 4, the coefficient for gender effects is similar in both years, suggesting that women’s ads are less likely than men’s to contrast, but it is statistically significant in 2002 ($\beta_{\text{gender}} = -.151, SE = .073$) and not 2000 ($\beta_{\text{gender}} = -.124, SE = .087$). The effects of interactions with party are similar and statistically significant in both 2000 ($\beta_{\text{gender} \times \text{party}} = .306, SE = .110$) and 2002 ($\beta_{\text{gender} \times \text{party}} = .320, SE = .102$). Probing further, we find that in both 2000 and 2002, among Democratic candidates, women’s ads are more likely to contrast than men’s, while among Republicans, women’s ads are less likely to contrast than men’s.

We find no direct effects of gender on the tendency to produce attack ads in either year or ad source in Model 1 analysis. In 2002 candidate campaign ads, however, Model 4 analysis shows an impact of gender ($\beta_{\text{gender}} = .107, SE = .063$) and an interaction with party ($\beta_{\text{gender} \times \text{party}} = -.239, SE = .088$) such that among Democrats but not Republicans, men are more likely to air attack ads than women.

In bivariate analyses, in the six variables we looked at to examine tone and purpose we found gender differences by campaign collection or for a particular year but no consistent gender differences across years for either candidate-sponsored or party/interest group-sponsored ads. In multivariate analyses, two subtle results appear that are consistent across years within a campaign collection: Across 2000 and 2002, in candidates’ ads, there is a significant interaction of gender and party such that ads supporting Democratic women are especially likely to contrast. Secondly, across both years, in party and interest group ads, there is a significant interaction of gender and competitiveness such that ads supporting women in competitive races are especially likely to emphasize personal character.

**Conclusion**

This research analyzed television advertising from the congressional campaigns across two contiguous elections and two different sources of campaign advertising. It investigated four different types of campaign elements, covering a total of forty different variables. This affords at least 320 possibilities for detecting gender differences. We tested for gender differences in every case using simple bivariate difference of means tests as well as at least two different multivariate models looking for direct and interaction effects.

In other words, we looked in a detailed way for evidence of gender difference in campaign advertising. Nevertheless, the overwhelming conclusion from this
comprehensive analysis is that straightforward gender differences in the presentation of candidates for national level office in the United States are extremely scarce. When gender differences do appear, they do so in a way that is highly dependent on context.

If gender differences appeared on the same campaign elements across contiguous elections, and especially across ad sources, there would be a strong case for arguing that gender is a clear-cut component of the presentation of candidates in congressional elections. That did not happen. If there were consistency across the years in party/interest group ads but not in candidate congressional campaigns, we could conclude that although cultural gender stereotypes continue to shape the presentation of candidates, the candidates themselves resist those frames. That did not happen. If there were many signs of gender differences but they varied across years, we could say that women candidates' presentation differs across the board from men, but the nature of this difference evolved over the time frame of our study. That did not happen because there were few signs of gender difference. Despite the large gender politics literature that expects men and women to differ in the issues and themes they find important and in their personal styles, our most important finding is a lack of consistent differences in these areas.

Of all the advertising elements investigated here, on only one did a similarly signed gender effect in candidates' campaigns appear across the two years: women's ads were more likely than men's ads to present them with the characteristic of toughness or strength. Even so, there is a twist in 2002 that did not appear in 2000: a significant interaction effect suggests that women in the more difficult races were more inclined to present themselves as tough. Research literature on gender and leadership continues to show that women face difficulties with respect to perceptions of their leadership abilities, and this finding may be a reflection of that fact.

As with candidates' ads, gendered findings among the ads produced by parties and interest groups were sparse and dissimilar across the two years. Party/interest group ads in both years included more newspaper sourcing in women's ads, and in both years an interactive effect of gender and competition affected the degree to which ads were framed around personal matters.

We therefore conclude that at least in television advertising in the contested congressional elections of this era, gender plays little generalizable role in shaping basic campaign presentation, and what role it does play is contextually shaped and moderated.

These findings do not force the conclusion that gender makes no difference in electoral campaigns. We have looked only at the presentation of candidates in television advertising. We have not investigated all possible contexts in which gender may have systematic effects on the way campaigns are run or candidates present themselves or others, such as the news media, present candidates.

To say that gender does not seem to have widespread, across-the-board influence on how candidates present themselves does not diminish the fact that under certain circumstances, candidates may well attend carefully to gender performance in their advertising. It is not difficult to find congressional races in which gender issues, sometimes enmeshed with issues of sexuality, are important parts of the textured details of the campaign story. There are certainly famous instances in which women running for office must grapple with attacks that are clearly based in gender politics. And most importantly for the question of whether gender is relevant to electoral campaigns, research continues to show that the public perceives men and women, their characteristics, interests, and activities, differently and values them differently. Our analysis suggests that scholarly research ought to think in terms of the varying ways that gender is used in any given election by any particular candidate rather than what "women" do or what "men" do across the board. To develop new hypotheses to study these gender effects further requires more in-depth and qualitative research approaches.

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Notes
1. Party and interest group ads may also be mass produced to be used in multiple campaigns and thus may be less likely to differ in significant ways by candidate gender.
2. Men may use different strategies depending on whether they face a male or female candidate (Dolan 2005). When we estimated our models controlling for candidate and opponent gender, this did not alter the substantive findings reported here.
3. For more information on the data and technology, see Goldstein and Freedman (2002), and for more discussion of the data quality, see Ridout et al. (2003). See also Online Appendix A at http://prq.sagepub.com/supplemental/ for more description of the number of races and candidates in the data.
4. Please see Online Appendices B and C at http://prq.sagepub.com supplemental/ for the coding frames used to conduct additional coding beyond the Wisconsin Advertising Project (WiscAds) data and the portions of the WiscAds data code frame that are relevant to our analyses, respectively.

5. Following Bystrom et al. (2004), we used the Holsti statistic (North et al. 1963) to compute intercoder reliability. For the 2000 ads, these statistics ranged from 0.73 to 1 for the individual questions, with an overall agreement of 0.90. For 2002, the range was 0.65 to 0.98, with an overall agreement of 0.87.

6. The number of valid cases for the party and interest group ad data is smaller in each year than the number of cases in the candidate ad data because not all candidates had party or interest group ads run on their behalf.

7. Although the data we are analyzing are almost equivalent to the entire population of U.S. House ads run in the general election campaigns of 2000 and 2002, we undertake significance tests because we are conceptualizing the appearance of ad characteristics in the 2000 campaign as manifestations of a stochastic process. The significance tests address how likely it is that the relationships we observe would be found if a larger number of candidates for Congress had run ads in 2000. We are grateful to Charles Franklin and James Druckman for clarifying this point. For a similar discussion, see Gilens (1996, 521, fn 8).

References


