

Gender and Campaign Communication: TV Ads, Web Sites, and Media Coverage

By Dianne Bystrom
Carrie Chapman Catt Center for Women and Politics
Iowa State University

From the time a candidate contemplates her candidacy to the day of the election, she will be engaged in some aspect of communication. Analysis of female candidates' communication—primarily their television commercials and web sites—during political campaigns reveals their styles and strategies in running for public office and offers a comparison with male candidates. Similarly, by looking at the media coverage of female and male candidates for political office, we can see how both are presented to voters and speculate on how differences in coverage may affect their support from voters.

This paper focuses on the three major communication channels through which voters see candidates—their newspaper coverage, television commercials, and web sites. In today's political campaign, the media are powerful and important sources of information, not necessarily because they influence voting behavior, although there is some evidence that they do, but because they draw attention to the candidates and their campaigns. Moreover, candidates—especially for federal and statewide elected office—have found that the media provide efficient ways to reach potential voters and, thus, focus their campaigns on getting their messages out through television ads, web sites, and newspaper coverage.

Media Coverage of Women Political Candidates

Women forging new political ground often struggle to receive media coverage and legitimacy in the eyes of the media and, subsequently, the public. According to some observers, journalists often hold women politicians accountable for the actions of their husbands and children, though they rarely hold male candidates to the same standards. They ask women

politicians questions they don't ask men, and they describe them in ways and with words that emphasize their traditional roles and focus on their appearance and behavior.

For example, in 1992's "Year of the Woman" campaign, in which record numbers of women ran for and were elected to political office, news stories nonetheless commented on their hairstyles, wardrobes, weight, and physical appearance. For example, a story in the *Washington Post*, described unsuccessful U.S. Senate candidate Lynn Yeakel from Pennsylvania as a "feisty and feminine fifty-year-old with the unmistakable Dorothy Hamill wedge of gray hair . . . a congressman's daughter [with] a wardrobe befitting a first lady . . . a former full-time mother."¹

In 1992, the *Chicago Tribune* described Carol Moseley-Braun, who was elected to the U.S. Senate from Illinois, as a "den mother with a cheerleader's smile."² Six years later, the *Chicago Tribune* was still focusing on Moseley-Braun's personality and appearance, as this story from her 1998 re-election campaign shows: "Though she boasts that her legislative record is one of the best in the Senate, it is not her votes that make many of her supporters go weak in the knees. It is her personality, featuring a signature smile that she flips on like a light switch, leaving her admirers aglow."³ Similarly, in 1998, the *Arizona Republic* described incumbent gubernatorial candidate Governor Jane Dee Hull as a "grandmotherly redhead dressed in a sensible suit."⁴

It does not seem to make a difference—in terms of stereotypical media coverage—if two women are running against each other, rather than a male opponent, for elected office, as these excerpts from stories in the *Seattle Times* covering the 1998 U.S. Senate campaigns of incumbent U.S. Senator Patty Murray and challenger U.S. Representative Linda Smith illustrate: "Murray has been airing soothing television commercials that make her look so motherly and nonthreatening, in her soft pinks and scarves, that voters might mistake her for a schoolteacher."

And, Murray and Smith are different “in style as well as politics. Even the shades of their blue power suits hinted at the gap between the women. Murray’s was powder blue; Smith’s royal.”⁵

Although there seems to have been less emphasis on the physical appearance and personality of women political candidates in the 2000, 2002, and 2004 campaigns, there were still examples of such coverage. For example, the weight, wardrobe, and hairstyles of former first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, who successfully ran for U.S. Senate in New York in 2000, were a constant source of media comment. An article in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* declared that Clinton had “whittled her figure down to a fighting size 8” by “touching little more than a lettuce leaf during fundraisers.”⁶ An article in the *New York Times*, reflecting on her victory, was titled “First Lady’s Race for the Ages: 62 Counties and 6 Pantsuits,” and referred to retiring U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan as walking the newly elected Sen. Clinton “down the road to a gauntlet of press like a father giving away the bride.”⁷

In the 2002 campaign, the *St. Petersburg Times* had this to say about Katherine Harris, a Republican from Florida who was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives:

The first thing many people mention about Katherine Harris is her size. She’s much smaller than she looks on TV. Her driver’s license pegs Harris as 5-foot-4-inches. Most people know her as the rigid, heavily made up woman reading statements on CNN or even a crazed floozy played by a Saturday Night Live actor.⁸

The same story described Harris as she appeared in the Sarasota Memorial Day parade, “sporting a red, white and blue lei and American eagle earrings with pearls.” The story also noted that Harris had married a Swedish businessman at Notre Dame in Paris and that she had a 20-year-old stepdaughter.

Such examples of the media's attention to the appearance of women political candidates are backed by more than 25 years of research by scholars from political science, journalism, and communication. Even though media coverage has improved, women and men in politics are still treated differently by the media, suggesting that gender stereotypes continue to pose problems for female politicians.

For example, women candidates who ran for election in the 1980s and 1990s were often stereotyped by newspaper coverage that not only emphasized their "feminine traits" and "feminine issues," but also questioned their viability as candidates. In an experiment where fictitious female candidates were given the same media coverage usually accorded to male incumbents, they gained viability.

In the mid- to late 1990s, women political candidates began to receive more equitable media coverage, both in terms of quantity and quality, when compared with male candidates. For example, in the 1998 election, female and male candidates for governor received about the same amount of coverage. Although women's media coverage also was more neutral in 1998 as compared to previous elections studied, they continued to receive less issue-related coverage than men did.

Women running for their party nominations for U.S. Senate and governor in the 2000 primary races and general election received more coverage than men, and the quality of their coverage—slant of the story and discussion of their viability, appearance, and personality—was mostly equitable. For example, the *Detroit Free Press* treated Democratic challenger Debbie Stabenow as a viable candidate in every article printed concerning her 2000 race for the U.S. Senate in Michigan.⁹ This is notable since she was running against an entrenched incumbent, Republican Senator Spencer Abraham. Stabenow went on to win the race.

Still, women candidates in 2000 were much more likely to be discussed in terms of their gender, marital status, and children, which can affect their viability with voters. However, a gradual evolution seems to be taking place within newspapers' coverage of women running for political office. While some stereotyping does exist, the playing field for female candidates is becoming more equal.

The 2000 campaign also provided a rare opportunity to analyze the media's treatment of a woman campaigning for a major political party nomination for president. During her seven-month campaign in 1999, Elizabeth Dole received less equitable coverage in terms of quality and, especially, quantity as compared to her male opponents. Polls consistently showed Dole as a distant runner-up to George W. Bush for the Republican nomination for president, but she not only received significantly less coverage than Bush, but also less coverage than Steve Forbes and John McCain, who at the time were behind her in the polls.

In terms of the quality of coverage, Dole received less issue coverage than Bush, Forbes, or McCain. However, Dole's issue coverage was balanced between such stereotypical "masculine" issues as taxes, foreign policy, and the economy and such stereotypical "feminine" issues as education, drugs, and gun control. Dole also received more personal coverage than her male opponents, including references to her appearance and, especially, personality.

However, the media coverage of women political candidates did continue to improve in the 2002 and 2004 elections, especially in terms of the number and length of stories written about their campaigns. For example, the newspaper coverage of women and men candidates running against each other for U.S. Senate and governor in 2002 was about even in terms of quantity, with 35% of the articles focusing on men and 34% on women.¹⁰

However, in terms of the quality of their coverage, we find that gender stereotypes still exist. For example, in 2002, the media paid significantly more attention to the backgrounds of female candidates and to the competence of male candidates. And the media continue to link some issues—particularly those that resonate with voters—with male candidates more often than female candidates. For example, male candidates were linked significantly more often with taxes in 2002. Perhaps not surprisingly, women candidates continue to be linked more often than men with so-called “women’s issues”—such as reproductive choice—than male candidates, and sometimes in a negative manner.

The newspaper coverage of the 2004 campaign of Christine Gregoire for governor of Washington reveals the gender stereotypes not only of the media, but also of voters. “I don’t think in the end voters really got to know Chris Gregoire,” she told the *Seattle Times* as she was sworn in as the state’s 22nd governor after a closely contested election with several recounts and a 129-vote victory margin. “I’m a mom. I’m a spouse. I’m a breast cancer survivor. I came from very humble beginnings. I’m the first in my family to have gone to college. I bet that most people don’t know that today.”¹¹

It’s not that she didn’t try. Gregoire’s television commercials emphasized her humble roots and her success, as Washington’s attorney general, in suing big tobacco companies. However, the media portrayed her differently than her roots and experiences as a woman would indicate, emphasizing her “reputation for being tough,” appearing “stern,” being “high-powered and full of ambition,” and “more lawyerly, more self-assured—and some people don’t know what to make of that.”¹² In the end, Gregoire said, “I’m not going to say I haven’t been advised, ‘In light of all this, maybe you should be a little more low-key and softer in your approach.’ I have rejected that.”¹³

As we approach the 2006 and 2008 elections, we find that the media coverage of female and male candidates is mostly equitable in terms of quantity as well as quality, e.g., assessments of their viability, positive versus negative slant, and mentions of their appearance. However, the media continue to associate male candidates more often with the “masculine” issues and images and female candidates with “feminine” image traits. Women candidates also continue to receive less equitable coverage than men through their characterization in terms of their sex and marital status.

The differences that remain in the media coverage of female versus male candidates may entangle with gender biases within the electorate to create an untenable position for women candidates. By reinforcing some of the traditional stereotypes held by the public about men and women and their roles in society, the media may have an impact on the outcome of elections and, thus, upon how the nation is governed.

Televised Political Advertising of Women Candidates

Because women political candidates are often framed in stereotypical terms by the media, television advertising—and the control it affords candidates over campaign messages about their images and issues—may be even more important for female candidates. Over time, we find both differences and similarities in the ways in which female and male candidates use this campaign communication medium.

In the 1980s, female candidates’ political ads were more likely to emphasize social issues, such as education and health care, while men were more likely to focus on economic issues such as taxes in their political spots. As far as image traits, women were more likely to emphasize compassion and men to stress their strength, although sometimes both sexes emphasized stereotypical “masculine” traits such as competence and leadership. In their

nonverbal communication, men were more likely to dress in formal attire and women preferred “feminized” business suits and office or professional settings.

From the 1990s to the present, as more women ran for political office, we find that female and male candidates were strikingly similar in their uses of verbal, non-verbal, and film/video production techniques, though some differences were found.¹⁴ In terms of their verbal communication strategies, female and male candidates were similar in the use of negative spots, employing attacks in about one-third of their total ads. Female and male candidates were increasingly similar over time in the issues discussed in their ads and, especially, in the image traits emphasized and appeal strategies used.

The similarities and differences that did emerge over the past 15 years are interesting from a gender perspective. For example, although female and male candidates have been similar recently in their use of attacks, they differ in the purpose of the attacks and strategies employed. Both female and male candidates now use negative ads primarily to attack their opponents on the issues. However, the ads of women candidates are significantly more likely to criticize the opponent’s personal character. And, although negative association was the preferred attack strategy in the ads of both women and men, the spots of women are significantly more likely to use name calling.

Attacking the opponent’s character, rather than his or her stance on the issues, and calling the opponent names are seen as much more personal. Here, female candidates may be taking advantage of voter stereotypes, which portray women as more caring and compassionate. That is, female candidates may be given more latitude than male candidates to make personal attacks as they enter the race with the stereotypical advantage of being considered kinder. Of course, defying stereotypical norms also may backfire for women candidates as they may be labeled as

too aggressive, rather than assertive, by the media. Male candidates, on the other hand, may feel more constrained by expectations that they treat women with some degree of chivalry by refraining from attacks on the personal characteristics of their female opponents. So, instead, they lash out significantly more often at their opponent's group affiliations, which is a more acceptable and indirect way to question their opponent's character as a member of certain organizations.

Although female and male candidates are increasingly similar in the issues they discuss, image traits they emphasize, and appeal strategies they use in their ads, the differences that did emerge are interesting from a gendered perspective. For example, the top issue in the ads by women candidates running for office between 1990 and 2002—and one that was discussed significantly more often in females' spots than in the ads for male candidates—was the stereotypically “feminine” concern of education and schools.

Democrat Kathleen Sebelius, in an open seat race for governor of Kansas in 2002, typified the use of this “feminine” issue in her campaign. Sebelius frequently discussed education in her ads in an attempt, according to media accounts, to woo moderate Republicans. In one ad, titled “Dedicated,” a male voiceover announced: “Kathleen Sebelius. As governor, [she will be] dedicated to our schools, lift teacher pay from 40th in the nation, cut government waste to get more dollars into the classroom, and promote local control so parents and educators decide what's best for their schools.” At the conclusion of this ad, Sebelius personally delivers her message that, “As Governor, I'll always put our children and schools first.”

The ads of female candidates between 1990 and 2002 also discussed issues considered “feminine” because they are more commonly associated with women -- health care, senior citizen issues, and women's issues -- significantly more often than the ads of their male

opponents. As with the issue of education, women candidates may be conforming to stereotypical expectations that consider them to be experts on such concerns. However, female candidates also were more likely than male candidates to discuss the economy, which is usually associated more with men than with women and therefore can be considered a “masculine” issue.

In 2004, U.S. Senate candidate Patty Murray (D-WA) and U.S. House of Representatives candidate Katherine Harris (R-FL), both incumbents, demonstrated how “masculine” issues, like the economy, could be interwoven with “feminine” issues, such as education and health care, within the same commercial. In an ad titled “America,” Murray is pictured in an orchard behind a cart of red and green apples. She narrates the ad, stating:

I grew up and raised my family here in Washington state. It’s been an honor to serve you in the U.S. Senate. But, today, I’m very concerned about the direction of our country. We need to take care of our own people. Invest in American business. Create American jobs. Improve our own local schools. Lower the cost of health care right here at home. I’m Patty Murray, and I approved this ad because it’s time to change priorities and put America first.

Harris sounded a similar tone, though from a different political perspective, in her 2004 ad titled “Promise.” Harris narrates the ad, stating:

I went to Congress to restore the promise of security. Here’s a report. Social Security is secure, and safe and affordable drugs are on the way. We’re providing tax relief while creating a million and a half new jobs and opening the American dream to more families than ever. I’m proud of that. We’re securing ports, strengthening first response, and

letting our troops and veterans know we honor courage. I'm Katherine Harris, and I approved this message because we will never be free if we're not secure.

The only issues discussed significantly more often in the ads of male candidates, compared to female candidates, were crime and prisons, a more “masculine” issue, and welfare, a more “feminine” issue. However, some of the male candidates discussing welfare took a hard-line approach, focusing on limiting the number of families receiving such benefits.

Even fewer differences are evident between female and male candidates in the images they emphasize and appeal strategies they use. However, the traits they choose to emphasize both defy and underscore stereotypical expectations about the roles and behaviors of women and men in today's society. The top traits emphasized in the ads by women candidates between 1990 and 2002 were aggressive/fighter, toughness/strength, past performance, leadership, and action-oriented—commonly considered “masculine” attributes—and honesty/integrity, more commonly considered a “feminine” quality. The top traits emphasized in the ads by men candidates were past performance, leadership, aggressive/fighter, action-oriented, toughness/strength, and experience in politics—all “masculine” attributes. Of these traits, women candidates were significantly more likely to emphasize toughness/strength than men candidates, and men candidates were significantly more likely to discuss their experience in politics than women.

An ad from Sebelius' successful run for governor of Kansas in 2002 illustrates how women candidates balance “masculine” and “feminine” image traits in their television advertising. Although she frequently discussed what have been considered “feminine” issues—health care, education, and senior citizen issues—she did so within a framework of masculine

traits and appeals. For example, when discussing health care, she would emphasize her past accomplishments as Kansas Insurance Commissioner and also her toughness and strength, stating that she “crack[ed] down” on HMOs and “block[ed] an out-of- state takeover” of Blue Cross/Blue Shield. In addition to portraying her strong business image, Sebelius was able to incorporate images of being sensitive in similar discussions of her past accomplishments, for example, patting a senior citizen’s arm while he sat in a chair and she bent down to talk with him. When discussing education, she did so within the framework of taking strong, decisive stands, yet coupled the verbal message with a visual of a classroom and children at work, while Sebelius turned to the camera, smiled, and crossed her arms.

The appeal strategies used in female and male candidate ads were closely related to the traits they emphasized and, thus, also are interesting from a gendered perspective. Both female and male candidates were equally as likely to use all of the elements of “feminine style”—which is characterized by an inductive structure, personal tone, addressing the audience as peers, relying on personal experiences, identifying with the experiences of others, and inviting audience participation. Male candidates did rely on statistics—a “masculine” strategy—significantly more often than female candidates, and female candidates were significantly more likely to make gender an issue in their ads—an indication that at least some women are campaigning as female candidates and not political candidates who happen to be women. The fact that both women and men candidates used elements of feminine style in similar proportions may suggest that this style works best for 30-second spots on television.

In the nonverbal content of their television ads, it is interesting to note that female candidates were more likely to dress in businesslike, as opposed to casual, attire and to smile significantly more often than men did. Both of these nonverbal characteristics reflect gender-

based norms and stereotypical expectations. For example, the choice of businesslike attire reflects the gender-based norms that society imposes on women as they face the challenge of portraying themselves as serious and legitimate candidates. In their everyday life, smiling is regarded as a nonverbal strategy that women use to gain acceptance. Perhaps women candidates are more likely than men candidates to smile in their ads for the same reasons—to gain acceptance from viewers in the traditionally male political environment.

Because society's gender stereotypes more often associate women with families and children, it is interesting to note who is pictured in female and male candidate ads. Interestingly, women candidates distanced themselves from their roles as wives and/or mothers by picturing their families in only 9% of their ads, while male candidates showed their families in 20% of their ads between 1990 and 2002. In picturing their families or not, both male and female candidates are confronting societal stereotypes. Women candidates may want to show voters that they are more than wives and/or mothers and to dismiss any concerns voters may have over their abilities to serve in political office due to family obligations. Men candidates, on the other hand, may want to round out their images beyond business and politics with voters by portraying themselves as loving husbands and/or fathers.

When female and male candidates are compared by their political party affiliation, differences also emerge in their television advertising strategies. For example, television ads tended to be more negative in races between female Democrats and male Republicans than in races between female Republicans and male Democrats. Female Democrats were more likely than other candidates to use negative advertising, to attack the opponent's personal qualities and background, and to discuss education and school issues, taxes, and health care. Male Democrats were more likely than other candidates to attack their opponents' issues stands and group

affiliations; voice their dissatisfaction with government; and emphasize their experience in politics, leadership, and past performance. Female Republicans were more likely than other candidates to discuss the economy and emphasize their toughness/strength and qualifications. Male Republicans were more likely than other candidates to talk about crime/prisons and emphasize their trustworthiness.

Winning female and male candidates also use different strategies from losing female and male candidates. Specifically, female candidates who ultimately won had discussed issues more frequently—taxes, health care, senior citizen issues, and women’s issues, in particular—and emphasized being aggressive/a fighter more often than other candidates. Male candidates who won had discussed crime and prison issues more frequently and emphasized their leadership and experience. Women candidates—both winning and losing—used attacks in almost half of their ads. Losing males were the most negative and winning males the least negative of all candidates in their campaigns.

Overall, it is notable that female candidates who won tended to be those who emphasized “masculine” traits and both “feminine” and “masculine” issues (although more “feminine” than “masculine” issues). Winning candidates, both female and male, used substantial issue discussion in their advertising, but this was particularly true of the ads of winning female candidates. Winning male candidates, however, incorporated a mix of “feminine” and “masculine” strategies to ensure their success.

In addition to the content of their television ads, it is interesting to look at the effects these appeals have on potential voters. At first, researchers and campaign consultants thought that “masculine” strategies (aggressive, career)—rather than traditional “feminine” (non-aggressive, family) strategies—worked best for women candidates in their political ads.

However, it now seems that women are most effective when balancing stereotypical “feminine” and “masculine” traits. Also, neutral—as opposed to emotional—appeals for women candidates seem to trigger the greatest audience recall, especially for issue stances. Women are more effective when communicating about stereotypical “feminine” issues such as women’s rights, education, and unemployment than such stereotypical “masculine” issues as crime and illegal immigration.

Based on the research, then, women candidates should be advised to emphasize both stereotypical “feminine” and “masculine” images and issues in their television commercials. Voters will perceive a woman candidate as more honest and trustworthy than a man, and just as intelligent and able to forge compromise and obtain consensus. However, especially in a climate of international terrorism, homeland security, and the war in Iraq, a woman candidate will need to emphasize her ability to lead the nation during a crisis and to make difficult decisions.

Issue emphasis will vary with the context of the campaign. In the 1992 through 2000 elections, the economy, education, and health care were the top issues. According to survey research, voters rate female candidates about the same as, or more favorably than, male candidates on these issues. However, women candidates are considered less able to handle such issues as law and order, foreign policy, and governmental problems. In elections like those of 2002 and 2004, when war and terrorism emerge among the top voter concerns, women candidates must demonstrate their competency on such issues. Clearly candidates like U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and U.S. Rep. Katherine Harris (R-FL) were successful in demonstrating that they could handle these issues—though from opposite political viewpoints—in winning re-election in 2004.

Web Sites of Women Political Candidates

In recent years, the Internet has provided political candidates and officeholders with an important means of communicating with voters and constituents—and researchers with another way to look at the political communication of female and male politicians. In the November 2002 elections, all candidates in gubernatorial races with a woman running against a man, 83% of candidates in mixed-gender U.S. Senate races, and 66% of candidates in mixed-gender U.S. House races hosted web sites.

Web sites, like television advertising, represent a form of political communication controlled by the politician, rather than interpreted by the media. When we examine web sites to compare ways that female and male politicians present themselves, we find that the strategies employed are mostly similar.¹⁴ For example, in 2000 and 2002, both female and male candidates discussed “feminine” issues much more frequently than “masculine” issues on their web sites. Both female and male candidates were equally as likely to discuss the “feminine” issue of education. On so-called “masculine” issues, male candidates were only slightly more likely to discuss taxes, whereas female candidates were slightly more likely to discuss the economy.

Certainly the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks on September 11, 2001 stimulated increased discussion of international issues and homeland security on both female and male candidate web sites in the 2002 and 2004 campaigns. For example, Democrat Jeanne Shaheen, a candidate for U.S. Senate from New Hampshire in 2002, headlined “Enhancing Security” as an issue category on her web site, followed by the issue heading of “Ensuring Our Safety After September 11.” The text on the site indicated that Shaheen—in her past position as governor of New Hampshire—had acted to secure the state by “stepping up patrols of our harbors and bridges and increasing inspections along our highways.” Similarly, the re-election

web site home page of U.S. Representative Anne Northup (R-KY) in 2004 had a link to “Operation Iraqi Freedom” with sub-links on “support our troops,” “resources for military families,” and “White House: Iraq information center.” Overall, female and male candidates discussed mostly the same issues on their web sites as they did in their television ads, suggesting, once again, that issue emphasis is more related to the context of the particular political campaign than to the gender of the candidates.

Both female and male candidates attempted to establish similar images on their web sites, highlighting performance and success, experience, leadership, and qualifications—all stereotypical “masculine” traits. For example, Democrat Jimmie Lou Fisher, a woman running for governor of Arkansas in 2002, noted on her web site: “Jimmie Lou Fisher is the only person in the race for governor with this kind of experience.”

Recalling that in their television advertising, female and male candidates emphasize both “feminine” and “masculine” traits, the focus on masculine traits on web sites seems significant. This difference in emphasis suggests that candidates recognize that the intimacy of television requires evidence of a more “feminine” style, with traits such as sensitivity, honesty, and cooperation accentuated in their messages. Because web sites—as opposed to attack and rebuttal/response ads—do not generate responses, candidates may perceive less need to balance their toughness and aggressiveness, which may be highlighted in an attack ad, with sensitivity and honesty.

Although it may be premature to suggest that web sites are a more “masculine” medium, it does seem that web sites are still a neutral institution that call for the emphasis of traits commonly associated with political office—qualifications, experience in politics, leadership, and knowledge on the issues. Surveys show that those looking for information online—and

particularly from candidate web sites—may only be seeking clarification, reinforcement, or simply convenience, so it is not surprising that both female and male candidates would choose to focus on the traits commonly associated with political office on their web sites.

Candidates, especially men, were also more likely to launch attacks on their web sites than in their television ads. In 2002, 56% of women's and 86% of men's web sites contained attacks. Again, the greater use of attacks on candidate web sites, as compared to television ads, underscores the difference between the media. As web sites are most often accessed by people already supporting the candidate, it is "safer" to include attacks. Television ads, on the other hand, have the potential of reaching all voters, who may be turned off by attacks.

Similar to their political ads, women candidates were most likely to appear in business attire on their web sites; in fact, they were in such dress in 92% of the photographs used. Differing from their televised advertising, however, male candidates were more likely to be seen in business attire (71%), as opposed to casual attire (29%), on their web sites. Women's dominant use of business attire is characteristic of female candidate self-presentation; that is, women choose such attire in order to establish a professional appearance that emphasizes their competence and the seriousness of their candidacy in order to convince voters of their legitimacy. However, on a web site—as opposed to television—male candidates also clearly feel the need to appeal to more traditional political expectations by establishing an image of a serious, viable political candidate.

Most of the photographs on candidate web sites included a combination of the candidate and other people, whether they were located on the candidates' home pages or in their biography sections. Male candidates were slightly more likely (68%) than female candidates (54%) to include pictures of just themselves in their candidate biography section, while female candidates

were slightly more likely (73%) than male candidates (64%) to include pictures of themselves with other people, perhaps seeking to illustrate that many are supportive of their campaigns. When others were shown in the photos, female candidates were significantly more likely (92%) than male candidates (64%) to have men in their photos and, in many instances, these were men in positions of power and prestige, a strategy undoubtedly designed to lend legitimacy to the female candidate's campaign.

For example, Jennifer Granholm, Democrat candidate for governor of Michigan in 2002, featured photos of herself with former Vice President Al Gore at a rally; with Muhammad Ali, who was noted as "helping [her] get out the vote"; and with Senator Carl Levin from Michigan. Dianne Feinstein, Democrat candidate for U.S. Senate in California in 2000, included photos of herself and former President Bill Clinton. Republican Anne Northup pictured herself with U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert and Majority Leader Tom Delay on her web site in her 2004 re-election campaign.

Female candidates also were more likely to feature women in their photos (85%) than male candidates (68%), and children and senior citizens played popular roles as well. Although 59% of male candidate sites included photos of their families, only 46% of female candidate sites included such images. It seems that some female candidates choose not to associate themselves with their families in hopes of not being linked with motherhood and domestic responsibilities, which can diminish their political credibility. For male candidates, however, the presence of "family" can evoke notions of stability and tradition, suggesting that because he has a family to protect, he will govern in ways that will protect the viewer's family as well.

One advantage that web sites have over television ads is the potential for interaction with Internet users, allowing the candidates to appear more personal as well as to raise money and

recruit volunteers. Female and male candidates seem to be trying to take advantage of the opportunity for interactivity, although in rather limited forms. Female and male candidates in 2002 attempted to include more links from their home pages, as compared to previous election cycles, although male candidates were more likely to offer more links overall than female candidates. Almost all candidates provided a link from their home page to a candidate biography section, issues section, contribution section, and get involved section. Male candidates were more likely to link to a calendar of events section, which requires more frequent updates and attention than a well-established biography section, contribution section, or even issues section. So male candidates either are more aware of the need to have their web sites current and up to date, or they may simply have the financial ability to pay someone to do so.

Overall, the web sites of candidates running in U.S. Senate and gubernatorial mixed-gender races in 2000 and 2002 were largely similar. Notably, few gender differences emerged. Thus, it appears that the strategies used in political candidate web site design are in response to expectations for the medium rather than candidate sex. The ability to present an unmediated message to potential voters makes the campaign web site an appealing venue for female candidates in particular.

Conclusion

An examination of how female and male candidates are presented in their campaign news coverage, political advertising, and web sites perhaps suggests more questions than answers. Nonetheless, there are several recurring trends that help to guide our expectations for the future role of gendered campaign communication.

Candidates do not have complete control of how the news media decide to cover their campaigns. In the past, female candidates have suffered in this particular genre of campaign

information. However, it appears that the stereotypical news coverage trends of the last century are no longer dominant. In more recent campaign cycles, female candidates have achieved sufficient status as candidates to be given equal and sometimes greater coverage in newspapers than their male opponents. In fact, in 2000, female U.S. Senate candidates received more total coverage than males. Since 1998, women candidates have also been getting their share of positive coverage, and there are no longer great differences in the viability or electability quotient accorded to female candidates.

There are some areas where news coverage remains troublesome for female candidates. The tendency to emphasize candidate gender, appearance, marital status, and masculine issues in news coverage still haunts female candidates. Candidate gender is still mentioned more frequently for women, reporters still comment more often on a female candidate's dress or appearance, and journalists still refer to a female candidate's marital status more frequently.

Although neither male nor female candidates can directly control news coverage, they can have considerable influence on it. For example, by focusing on a mixture of "masculine" and "feminine" issues, a female candidate can achieve a balance that helps to ensure the media will not leave her out of a discussion of "masculine" issues. Female candidates also can use their controlled communication media—television ads and web sites—to influence their news coverage. For the past three decades, particularly since the 1988 presidential campaign, the news media have increased their coverage of candidate television advertising. So women candidates can influence their news coverage by producing high quality ads that will attract media attention. It is also likely that, as web campaigning becomes more popular and more developed, news media will expand their coverage of candidate web sites as part of the campaign dialogue.

Television commercials and web sites also provide female candidates with tremendous opportunities to present themselves directly to voters, without interpretation by the news media. Political television advertising is still the dominant form of candidate communication for most major level races in which female candidates must compete with male opponents. However, female candidates are successfully establishing their own competitive styles of political advertising. For example, women candidates have overcome the stereotypical admonition that they must avoid attacks. Even as challengers, they have been able to adopt strategies typical of incumbents to give themselves "authority." Female candidates who win also seem to have been successful at achieving a television "videostyle" that is overall positive, emphasizes personal traits of toughness and strength, and capitalizes on the importance of "feminine" issues such as education and health care while also discussing such "masculine" issues such as the economy and defense/security. Winning female candidates also top their male opponents by keeping their attire businesslike and their smiles bright.

When it comes to self-presentation in the newest campaign medium, the Internet, research shows fewer differences between male and female candidates. Both men and women candidates' web sites are characterized by significant amounts of issue information. And, unlike the balance between "feminine" and "masculine" issues observed in their television commercials, web sites for both sexes seem to focus on "masculine" issues. Both female and male candidates also focus on past accomplishments on their sites.

Perhaps the "newness" of this medium has not provided sufficient development of different styles for female and male candidates. Neither sex has taken full advantage of the web's ability to provide message segmentation for different types of groups. Although the 2002 campaign web sites provided some additional use of links to solicit contributions and volunteers,

both sexes are still lagging behind commercial development trends in providing interactivity and personalization on their web sites.

The web may be the best venue for female candidates wanting an equal competition with male candidates, especially in situations where resources are limited. A female candidate can do much more for much less on the web than through television advertising. Female candidates should develop sophisticated web sites that provide more specialized messages to specific groups, use innovative types of interactivity, and generate a more personalized presence with voters (e.g., through audio/visual presentations by the candidate and by providing opportunities for citizens to "tune in" for personal chats and question-and-answer sessions with the candidate or campaign representatives)

Despite continuing stereotypes held by voters and the media, women candidates can manage campaign communication tools in ways that improve their chances of success. Women candidates who present themselves successfully in their television ads and web sites may be able to capitalize on these controlled messages to influence their media coverage for a synergistic communication effort.

Endnotes

¹Linda Witt, Karen M. Paget, and Glenna Matthews. 1995. *Running as a Woman: Gender and Power in American Politics*. New York: The Free Press.

²Witt, Paget, and Matthews 1995

³Michael Dorning. October 22, 1998. Carol Moseley-Braun for Senator, Image is Asset and Curse: Though She Stresses her Record, the Democrat Finds her Personality and a Series of Missteps in the Spotlight. The Chicago Tribune.

⁴James Devitt. 1999. Framing Gender on the Campaign Trail: Women's Executive Leadership and the Press. Washington, DC: The Women's Leadership Fund.

⁵Devitt 1999.

⁶Jennifer L. Pozner. March 13, 2001. Cosmetic Coverage.

<http://www.alterntet.org./story/10592>>

⁷Pozner 2001.

⁸Adam C. King. 2002. Harris Could Have Last Laugh. *St. Petersburg Times*.

http://www.sptimes.com/2002/06/02/State/Harris_could_have_the.shtml> 6 December, 2004.

⁹Dianne G. Bystrom, Mary C. Banwart, Lynda Lee Kaid, and Terry Robertson. 2004. *Gender and Candidate Communication: VideoStyles, WebStyles, NewsStyles*. New York: Routledge. Throughout this paper, references to specific findings and statistics, unless otherwise referenced, are from the research in this book.

¹⁰Bystrom, Banwart, Kaid, and Robertson. 2004.

¹¹David Postman. January 9, 2005. Governor-Elect Says the Voters Never Got to Know Her. *The Seattle Times*.

¹²Joni Balter. November 11, 2005. Two Women, Two Campaigns, Two Very Different Outcomes. *The Seattle Times*.

¹³Postman 2004.

¹⁴Bystrom, Banwart, Kaid, and Robertson. 2004.