An analysis of female political candidates:
Does gendered issue focus affect support?

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Abstract

A review of relevant literature shows both the problems associated with and possible causes of low female political representation, particularly in legislative bodies in the United States. The focus is on gender stereotypes and gender traits in political science research. In this paper, an experiment and survey are used in the study of gendered issue focus in political campaigns. In the experiment, the theory is tested that expected gender traits affect voter support of female political candidates. Preliminary findings show that gendered issue focus is effective when females capitalize on “female” political issues such as education. Additionally, the gender of the voter is an important element in the explanation of female candidates and support among the electorate. Future research is needed in order to further understand the concept of gendered issue focus beyond the preliminary findings in this paper.
Introduction

The Lack of Female Representation in U.S. Government

Of the 535 members of the 111th Congress, 92, or just over 17 percent, are women. There are 75 female members of the house and 17 female senators (Center on Congress, 2009). There are 1,788 female members in state legislative bodies; women account for just 24.2 percent of all state legislators in the nation (National Conference on State Legislatures, 2009). When women make up approximately 50 percent of the population, these figures are hardly representative of the American citizenry.

Policy Implications of Female Representation

Why are these numbers significant? Michele Swers in her book “The Difference Women Make: The Policy Impact of Women in Congress,” (2002) described the differences in policy objectives between male and female legislators, and asserted that women better represent the interests of women, children and families in state legislatures than do men. Swers examined roll call votes, bill sponsorship and committee activities in order to ascertain the link between female representatives and their focus on gender-related issues (1-19).

The gender-related issues she studied belong to three legislative subsets: social welfare, feminist, and antifeminist bills. Social welfare legislation pertains to welfare, health care and education. Feminist bills seek to attain gender role equity. Antifeminist bills restrain changing gender roles in defense of the traditional family structure (11).

Swers found that women are more likely to support social welfare and feminist legislation than their male counterparts, and are less likely to support antifeminist bills.
This preference is illustrated by female legislators’ activities on the House and Senate floors as well as in committees. Swers controlled for such factors as political party alignment; because more women in Congress are Democrats, she hypothesized that they would automatically be more likely to vote for social welfare bills, a fact that would skew the results. The conclusion that women do support social welfare and feminist bills more often than men provides evidence for the assertion that increasing numbers of women in elected positions will result in significant differences in the governing process (132-134).

Swers’ research provides the foundation for this paper. The lack of female representation in government is not merely an issue of numbers; it has significant effects on the governing processes in the United States. It is important to ascertain the causes behind this lack of representation.

Current Explanations: Gender Bias, Self-Selection, and the Role of Media

Why are women an underrepresented segment of the population in government in the United States? Prior research has answered this question from a variety of perspectives and hypotheses. Surveys and experiments have shown gender bias among the electorate in perceptions of male and female candidates (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; O'Connor 2008).

Other researchers have asserted that gender bias, while it may exist, does not keep women from holding elected office, but that women impose restrictions on themselves; qualified female candidates do not run for office as often as men, and are therefore underrepresented (Jenkins 2007).
Research on media coverage of campaigns shows that women are discussed in news stories as often as men, but women are highlighted for their personal attributes while men are more often discussed in the context of their political platforms (Devitt 1999). While these sources will be discussed in more detail in the literature review, it is clear at this point that further research is necessary in ascertaining the level of support among voters as it relates to gender bias towards female candidates.

"Gendered Issue Focus" in Preview

In this paper, I will examine prior literature on the topic of women’s representation, focusing primarily on gender bias research. A summary of major research questions and hypotheses will follow. I hypothesize that gender bias is an important part of the answer when examining female political candidates and their strategies and successes in campaigns, based on findings from the review of relevant literature. In particular, this paper will rely on research on the electorate’s perception of gender traits, and the effects of such perceptions on support for female political candidates.

I studied student responses to a female political candidate through the use of an experiment. Each of six student groups viewed one of three different speeches on video by the same female political candidate and was asked to respond based on their support of the candidate, and their perception of her qualifications for office. Students were also asked which presidential candidate they voted for or would have voted for in the 2008 election, their level of political activity, whether they consider themselves to be liberal or conservative, and which is their home state.
In this paper, I will analyze overall support for the candidate, as well as differences based on the three different speeches given. Differences based on the demographics provided in the survey will also be analyzed.

A research methods section will be included, with a more thorough explanation of the experiment and survey utilized in this study. The survey is attached in the appendix to this paper.

The analysis and conclusions sections of this paper will yield important recommendations for women running for elected office, as well as their opponents, based on how potential voters responded to different frames utilized by the candidate.

A Review of Relevant Literature

The History of Women in Politics

In 1917, Jeannette Rankin, a Republican from Montana, was the first woman to serve in the United States House of Representatives. She and three other women ran with major party endorsements in 1916, but she was the only one to succeed. She held office before the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote, was passed in 1920. Between 1917 and 2001, just 200 women served in Congress. In the early to mid 20th century, many of these women were congressional widows, socioeconomic elites and/or political notables (Gertzog 2002 100-101).

Women, now more than ever before in American history, are represented in the halls of government. Between 1917 and 1970, women never made up more than five
percent of the U.S. Congress. Today, the Congress is 17 percent female. These numbers appear to show a promising trend. In reality, the number of female political leaders is low in the U.S. compared to similar developed nations around the globe (McGlen, O'Connor 1998 78-80).

In 1992, however, women made such gains that it became known as the “Year of the Woman.” More women than in any prior election cycle gained seats in both the House and Senate (McGlen, O'Connor 78). Today, congressional widows and elites do not make up nearly as high a percentage of female political officeholders. Strategic politicians, those that are ambitious, progressive, experienced and professional, now account for three-quarters of the female membership in the U.S. House. During the 1990s, the successes of female political candidates were highlighted by increasing numbers of African American women in the House. This evidence points to an increased and improved role of women in politics. Some of the barriers that kept women out of office in the early 1900s have weakened (Gertzog 96-115).

Nevertheless, the percentage of female officeholders is still a problem as has been outlined earlier in this paper. Scholars have written extensively on the types of barriers that have kept women out of office in the U.S. (McGlen, O'Connor 80). This paper will explore those that address gender bias among the electorate and gender framing in the media and campaigns in an effort to provide background for the experiment that will be discussed in more depth below.
Gender Bias and the Electorate

Research on gender stereotypes.

Scholars have, since the 1950s, analyzed the role of gender stereotypes. Through surveys and experiments, it has been determined that gender stereotypes are prevalent in American society. The research concludes that the stereotypes are fairly straightforward; men are perceived as “bold, rational and unemotional,” and women are considered to be more sensitive, empathetic and passive (Woodall, Fridkin 2007 70). In this paper, the relationship between such established gender stereotypes and the electoral process will be examined.

The research on gender stereotypes has been applied to the field of political science. Generally, male and female candidates are expected to be competent in different policy areas based on the gender stereotypes discussed above. Voters perceive female candidates to be more effective in the areas of “poverty, education, the environment, child care, and health care policy,” otherwise known as “compassion” issues (Woodall, Fridkin 70).

Men are expected to excel in the policy areas of “male issues, such as the economy, foreign policy, and other defense issues,” (Woodall, Fridkin 70). In one example of this research, Jennifer Lawless studied respondents’ attitudes toward male and female candidates in distinct policy areas. Respondents were more likely to refer to the female candidates in the study as compassionate. In addition, respondents were more likely to refer to the male candidates as tough. The same study showed that 61 percent of respondents believed a male candidate would be more effective at handling a military crisis. Sixty-two percent said a female candidate would be more effective in improving children’s welfare (Lawless 2004).
The “gender trait” approach.

Additional research ties the concept of gender stereotypes to perceptions among the electorate. In L. Huddy and N. Terkildsen’s “Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates,” (1993) the authors analyzed voters’ expectations of male and female candidates. The study concluded that women are expected to be better at “compassion” issues and men are expected to be better at “military and defense related issues,” (119-120). Because this much has already been well-documented in the field of political science, the authors sought an explanation of this observable fact (125-126).

Huddy and Terkildsen hypothesized that voters perceive male and female candidates to be competent in gendered issue areas because of the traits they infer the candidates to possess (126).

The study utilized a research method similar to the one to be used in this paper. Two hundred and ninety-seven students at the State University of New York at Stony Brook read a short introduction to a male or female candidate with either feminine or masculine traits and were surveyed for their reaction to the candidate. The seven feminine traits were: “warm, gentle, feminine, sensitive, emotional, talkative, and cautious,” (127). The masculine traits were: “assertive, coarse, tough, aggressive, stern, masculine, active, rational, and self-confident,” (128).

Students were asked to circle from a list the traits they perceived the candidates to possess. The researchers found that students inferred traits that were not explicitly stated about the candidates in the study, something which did not always fall along predicted gender lines. For example, if female candidates were described in masculine terms, they were perceived as more “tough and ambitious,” (128). Typically feminine
traits, however, were significantly tied to a perception of compassion and trustworthiness (128).

When perceptions of the aforementioned traits were compared with the belief that the candidates could or could not handle a range of policy areas: compassion issues, the military, the economy, and women’s issues, it was found that gender trait stereotypes affected the respondents' level of confidence. Candidates described as feminine by respondents were more likely to be seen as capable of handling issues of child care, health care and other social issues. Candidates described as masculine were more likely to be seen as capable of handling issues of the military (129).

In their conclusion, Huddy and Terkildsen stated that both traditional gender stereotypes as well as gender trait stereotypes are responsible for explaining voters' belief that males and females are competent in different issue areas (131).

Huddy and Terkildsen's study differs from the study in this paper in that they did not test for students' support of candidates. Students were surveyed based on their understanding of the candidates' capability in a particular issue area, but it is still unknown whether the students would vote for the candidate, or think the candidate is qualified for elected office. "Gender Stereotypes" does, however, provide a strong foundation for my research in that it has been established that students have some gender bias towards candidates based on masculine and feminine traits as well as strictly on gender. It is unclear at this point, however, whether that bias has an effect on political support.
Framing Issues from a Gendered Focus

Framing in the media.

It has been established in the review of relevant literature that gender stereotypes and gender trait stereotypes affect the electoral process. Though it is unclear whether such stereotypes affect the level of support candidates receive, it is important to note that the electorate’s perceptions of gender traits are linked to issue area competency. While voters gain some of their knowledge about candidates from campaign literature, additional knowledge is gleaned through the lens of the media: radio, television, and newspapers (Devitt 1999 4). It is this information that aids voters in their decision making; the media can significantly affect the electoral process.

In J. Devitt’s “Framing Gender on the Campaign Trail: Women’s Executive Leadership and the Press,” a different type of gender bias was considered: media bias towards candidates. Devitt studied state newspapers’ coverage of male and female gubernatorial candidates in order to discern said bias.

The study found that in news coverage, male and female candidates are treated equally with regards to the number of times they appear in stories. Men, however, were more likely to be discussed on the basis of their political views and women were more likely to be discussed based on personal attributes.

Reporters were more likely to write about female gubernatorial candidates’ “age, marital status, and family...personality, appearance, and qualifications,” than their male counterparts (6). Male candidates were more often discussed on the basis of their “positions or record on the issues...such as education, transportation, and tax policy,” than female candidates (6). Additionally, females were less likely than males to be
quoted in newspaper articles, providing support and reasoning for their political arguments (6).

The study does not specify whether “male” or “female” issue areas were highlighted in the newspaper stories. If this paper finds, however, as the author expects, that it is more effective for women to focus on specific political issues rather than their personal lives in order to garner support, then it would be possible to conclude that the media plays a damaging role in its coverage of female political candidates, contributing to an explanation of the problem of a lack of representation of female members in legislative bodies in the United States.

Framing on the campaign trail.

In large part because these gender stereotypes and perceptions of competency in “gendered” issue areas exists, research has been conducted on the types of issues male and female candidates tend to focus on in their campaigns.

In Karen O’Connor’s “Taking Stock and Setting a New Agenda,” (2008) she wrote that women are just as likely as men to win political office if they choose to run, and that there is parity in media representation of female political candidates. It seems as though this conclusion points to no gender bias among the electorate, but she discussed research on the framing of issues on the campaign trail; men focus on “male-dominant issues,” while women focus on “female-dominant issues.” What would be the result if candidates did not maintain these gendered roles in campaigns?

For the purpose of this paper, O’Connor’s emphasis on the different strategies between men and women on the campaign trail served as a valuable resource for recreating the way in which political messages are framed. She asserted that men focus
on topics such as national security and economic issues, while women focus on health care and other social issues.

The author does not study the effect these strategies have on the voters, which is something this paper seeks to address. In the design of the experiment, this book has been consulted; the female political candidate presented to the students will speak on three different topics: personal life/family, female-dominant issues and male-dominant issues.

While it is clear, according to O'Connor, that the set of “male” issues is not commonly evoked by women on the campaign trail, it is the purpose of this paper to analyze the gender bias towards female candidates who address those issues. Do voters consider women to be less able to formulate and implement strategies in male-dominant issue areas?

Additional research by Dianne Bystrom and Lynda Lee Kaid in their “Are Women Candidates Transforming Campaign Communication?” (2002) addresses the role of gender in political campaigns. Bystrom and Kaid studied the changes in political advertisements aired on television produced by male and female candidates in the 1990s. The researchers analyzed U.S. Senate races from 1990, 1992, 1994, and 1998. They looked for verbal, nonverbal and production content in order to ascertain the role of gender in political campaign communication (146-147).

The researchers concluded that in the beginning of the decade, women utilized communication stereotypical of the female gender, while men did the same for the male gender. Significant changes took place during the decade, however, in the content of political advertisements on television. In the early cohorts (1990, 1992), “women were
more likely to discuss social issues and policy, such as education and health care,” and that men were “more likely to discuss economic issues such as taxes,” (167).

As the study progressed, the researchers found that women and men are now more likely to emulate one another in their campaign strategies; male and female candidates blending “feminine” and “masculine” images in their advertisements is a common campaign theme (167). While the candidates may continue to discuss gendered policy areas, their approach has changed significantly.

In this research, it is clear that gender plays an important role in the campaign process. Male and female candidates are aware of the different perceptions the electorate has based on gender stereotypes. What is not clear, however, is what effect different campaign communication content has on support of female political candidates.

In reviewing the literature on gender stereotypes, gender traits, and gendered issue focus framing both in the media and on the campaign trail, it is clear that gender in the political arena has been studied extensively. The research supports the conclusion that male and female political candidates are perceived as competent in gendered issue areas. Males are expected to be capable in handling issues of foreign affairs, defense, and the economy. Females are expected to be capable in handling issues of social welfare, education, and health care.

Male and female candidates frame themselves on the campaign trail based on these perceptions by focusing on gendered issues. While they have borrowed attributes from the opposite gender in order to appeal to a wide range of voters, candidates continue to focus on specific issues that meet expectations of gender traits among the electorate.
What is unclear based on the research is the level of support candidates receive based on the gendered issue focus. If voters perceive female candidates to be more capable of handling education then economic issues, how will they react when the candidate expresses her viewpoints on the economy? The experiment and survey designed for this paper will attempt to answer this important question. It will examine the gendered issue focus with one female political candidate through three different frames: personal, "feminine" issue focus (education), and "masculine" issue focus (the economy).

Research Questions

A series of research questions helps outline the direction of this paper and provides the foundation for the hypotheses, which will follow. The research questions will be answered through an experiment and survey which will be discussed in more depth in the Research Methods section.

Assessing Support of the Female Candidate

The first two research questions address the amount of support the candidate will receive. The main hypothesis of this paper is addressed in RQ2. The question of "frames" refers to the three different speeches given by the candidate. Frame 1 is the speech in which the candidate speaks about her personal life. Frame 2 is the speech in which the candidate speaks on a female-gendered issue, that of education. Frame 3 is the speech in which the candidate speaks on a male-gendered issue, that of the economy.
**RQ1**: Will voters support the female political candidate? How much support will the candidate receive? Does support mirror typical election results?

**RQ2**: Does this support differ from one frame to another? Does the candidate receive more support when discussing her personal life, education policy, or economic policy?

**Analyzing Differences based on Demographics of the Respondents**

Questions 3-6 address differences among potential voters. These research questions presuppose that the level of support the candidate will receive may be influenced by such factors as the political party, ideology, level of political activity and gender of the voter.

**RQ3**: Do attitudes among potential voters differ based on their political party?

**RQ4**: Do liberals, moderates and conservatives respond in the same way to the candidate?

**RQ5**: Do males and females respond in the same way to the candidate?

**Hypotheses**

The hypotheses correlate generally with the Research Questions section of this paper. They have been formulated on the basis of the literature review, on research within the field of political science on gender stereotypes and gender traits.

The fundamental question of this paper is whether voters respond to a female candidate based on the issue area addressed by the candidate. The student respondents in this experiment will be presented with three different speeches, or frames.
will emphasize personal attributes, Frame 2 will emphasize the candidate’s stance on
education, and Frame 3 will emphasize the candidate’s stance on the economy. Frame 2
is the “female” issue area and Frame 3 is the “male” issue area as is explained in both the
Literature Review and the Research Methods section in detail.

H1: Students will respond most positively to the female candidate when she
addresses education.

H2: Students will respond somewhat positively to the female candidate when she
addresses her personal attributes.

H3: Students will respond least positively to the female candidate when she
addresses the economy.

H4: Students who voted for President Obama will be more likely to vote for the
candidate.

H5: Students who identify themselves as ideologically liberal will be more likely
to vote for the candidate.

H6: Males will be less likely than females to vote for the candidate.

Research Methods

The Candidate

In investigating the relationship between potential voters and female political
candidates, an experiment was conducted. The fundamental question of the research
was whether female candidates emphasizing different aspects of themselves from their
personal lives to their policy stances on traditionally “female” and “male” issues received different levels of support.

In the experiment, six different groups of freshman in Intellectual Inquiry classes at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia were subject to three different speeches given by the same female political candidate. Seventy-one students were surveyed in the experiment. The candidate was a previously elected and current sitting Congresswoman, Cathy McMorris Rodgers, running for re-election. Rodgers, a moderate Republican, did not identify her political party in any of the speeches. A moderate Republican was chosen in order to prevent partisan bias from skewing the results.

Rodgers currently represents Washington’s fifth congressional district, and has held office since January 2005 (Cathy McMorris Rodgers, A Biography 2009). Recently elected to the U.S. House, it was expected that the students would not have prior knowledge of the candidate due to media exposure associated with prolonged service. The candidate was chosen because she is a female who represents a district that is geographically separated from the students in the sample, who attend school in Southwestern Virginia and are largely residents of either Virginia or states in the North Eastern region of the country. In this way, it was expected that the students were unfamiliar with Rodgers based on proximity.

Additionally, Rodgers is Caucasian, a factor that was important in the decision because the researcher did not want to introduce any racial bias into the experiment, possibly skewing the results.
Gendered Issue Focus in Frames 1, 2, and 3

The students in the first two groups listened to a speech by the candidate on personal matters. This will be referred to as Frame 1. The third and fourth groups listened to a speech by the candidate on a traditionally “female” political issue, that of education. This will be referred to as Frame 2. The students in the fifth and sixth groups listened to a speech by the candidate on a traditionally “male” political issue, that of the economy. This will be referred to as Frame 3.

In the introduction to the video, I explained to the students that they would be answering questions on a survey afterward. I noted that they should use the video the decide whether or not to vote for the candidate, and I explained to them that in the limited time (5-10 minutes per class) I would be unable to give them any additional information about the candidate, nor would they have information about the candidate in opposition.

In each video, Rodgers was seated against a plain backdrop, looking directly into the camera, and addressing the viewers. Each video was no more than three minutes long in order to allow time for students to respond to the survey.

In Frame 1, the personal life/family speech, Rodgers gave a Father’s Day greeting to constituents and visitors to her web site. She gave a brief history of Father’s Day and explained why it is of such importance to her. Rodgers then gave an outline of her personal history, explaining that she grew up on an orchard in Washington, and her family encouraged her to obtain an education and later run for political office.

In Frame 2, the education speech, Rodgers said that as a member of the House Education and Labor Committee she was aware of the importance of education, as well as challenges of affording college in the U.S. She said that America’s competitiveness
was important and that she will work to make sure that the U.S. continues to be a leader in education. She also emphasized that just one in three students graduate from high school, and that the numbers troubled her. In a final note, Rodgers stated that she was a mother of a special needs child and that all children deserve to reach their full potential through education.

It should be noted that education is being utilized as the “female” issue as a result of the review of relevant literature. It has been found through research on gender stereotypes and gender traits in the field of political science that the electorate expects female candidates to be more capable of handling “compassion” issues such as education and health care (Huddy, Terkildsen; McGlen, O’Connor).

In Frame 3, the economy speech, Rodgers explained that she is committed to working on the challenges that small businesses face in the current economy. She emphasized that small businesses are the engines of the U.S. economy and that they often struggle to keep their doors open and provide health insurance to their employees. She said she would work with Republicans and Democrats in order to find solutions in the face of the recession and a prolonged credit freeze. She asked that constituents contact her if they needed any kind of assistance.

The economy was chosen as a result of the literature review as the “male” political issue because due to research on gender stereotypes and gender traits, male candidates are expected by the electorate to be more capable of handling “strength” issues such as the military and the economy (Huddy, Terkildsen; McGlen, O’Connor).

The students, after watching the short speeches, were asked to provide their support for the candidate and their perception of the candidate’s level of qualification for office as well as their own gender, which candidate they voted for or would have
voted for in the 2008 presidential election, political ideology, level of political participation, and state of origin.

In the next section, I will analyze the responses given by the students in an effort to discern bias based on the candidates' discussion of gendered issues. I will examine the level of political support among students for women who present different aspects of themselves in their political campaigns, or who are presented by the media as focusing on a specific set of issues.

First, overall support for the candidate will be analyzed. Does the candidate receive a wide range of support? Are there differences in frames 1, 2, and 3? This will be studied based on the correlation between the prevalence of "yes" votes for the candidate in each of the three groups.

Second, support for the candidate based on the respondents' characteristics (gender, political party, political ideology, level of political activity, and geographic region) will be analyzed. I expect that there will be differences among student groups based on these factors.

The student group may not be representative of the general public, but it is hypothesized that students provide a good sample for this type of research because they are slightly more educated than the public, and slightly more advantaged, from a socioeconomic standpoint. These factors suggest that students are somewhat representative of the voting public. Additionally, gender research in political science has been done with student groups by other scholars (Huddy, Terkildsen). It should be noted, however, that fewer students participated than I originally anticipated. Because some of the professors teaching the freshman courses from which I drew the sample
chose not to participate and attendance was not 100 percent, the sample was 71 students rather than the 100 expected.

The analysis will take place in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), which has since been re-branded Predictive Analytics SoftWare (PASW) version 18. Correlation will be determined by use of the cross tabulation function, and a test of regression will be utilized in order to determine the relationship between the multiple variables.

Analysis

This section of the paper will address the data analysis of the experiment and survey. In general, the analysis supports the hypotheses, though correlation found is not always supported by a standard level of significance. The results will be reported here in the order of the hypotheses which can be found above.

Overall Support

One of the research questions in this paper was the amount of support the female candidate would receive overall from students. Including data from all three frames, 47.9 percent of students responded that they would vote for the candidate, while 52.1 percent said that they would not.

One common response in the “Why or why not?” section of the survey was that not enough information was presented. This answer was often accompanied by the statement that more information about the candidate's opponent would also be needed.
This result does not appear to show any gender bias towards the candidate; the results mirror typical election results.

**Support by Frame**

Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3, which refer to respondents’ support of the candidate by individual frames (personal, education policy, and economic policy), are initially supported by the data. Students who answered “Yes” to the question “Would you vote for the candidate?” (vote_for, dependent variable) were as follows for each speech (frame, independent variable): Frame 1 (personal) 44.4 percent, Frame 2 (education policy/female issue area) 65 percent, and Frame 3 (economic policy/male issue area) 37.5 percent.

I hypothesized, in the first/education hypothesis that the candidate would receive the most support when discussing a “female” issue area, that of education. I have also asserted in this paper that respondents would be more confident in the candidate’s abilities when she spoke on a “female” policy issue, such as that of education. In the crosstabulation analysis, both of these arguments are supported. There is obviously a positive correlation between the discussion of education and the perception of the candidate’s level of qualification for office. In the significance test, however, the chi-square test yields a p-value of .173, which falls outside of the range (<.10) for significance.

Further strengthening the education hypothesis, I performed a crosstabulation test between the recoded frame variable explained above and the qualification variable. The qualification variable measured the level of qualification students perceived the female candidate to have for congressional office. The variable was measured on a scale
of one to ten, and then recoded based on a means test. Students who responded one through five were re-coded as zero, indicating that the candidate was not qualified. Students who responded six through ten were re-coded as 1, indicating that the candidate was qualified.

Students in the education frame stated that the candidate was qualified for congressional office at a rate of 75 percent. Students in the other two frames stated that the candidate was qualified for congressional office at a rate of just 43 percent. The chi-square test revealed a p-value of .016; the correlation is significant.

As is illustrated in the multiple crosstabulation tests explained above, hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 are supported. Students perceived the candidate to be more qualified and were more likely to vote for the candidate when she addressed education policy than when she addressed her personal life or economic policy.

**Support by Political Party, Ideology**

It was hypothesized that students who identified themselves as Democrats or liberals would be more likely to support the female political candidate. It was also asserted that students would be more likely to perceive that the female political candidate was qualified if they identified themselves as Democrats and/or liberals. Support for this assertion comes from the fact that the majority of female political candidates and office holders are Democrats. Additionally, researchers have confirmed that the path to political office is more difficult for women in the Republican Party hierarchy than in the structure of the Democratic Party (Swers).
In a crosstabulation test between presvote, a variable measuring whether students voted for or would have voted for Barack Obama or John McCain for president in 2008 and the qualification variable discussed above, this relationship was tested.

Forty-seven percent of students who chose Obama said that the female candidate was qualified. Fifty-five percent of students who chose McCain said that the female candidate was qualified. This calculation accounts for students who viewed all three of the speeches. The analysis initially provides support that would force a rejection of the hypothesis about political party identity and support (hypothesis 5). This relationship, however, is not statistically significant; the p-value is high at .537.

When I performed the same test between independent variable presvote and dependent variable vote_for, the results were quite different from those discussed above. In this case, students who chose Obama were more likely to say they would vote for the candidate, at a rate of 54.8 percent. Students who chose McCain said they would vote for the candidate at a rate of just 45 percent. This relationship, however, was not statistically significant. In this way it is impossible to either accept or reject the hypothesis that Democrats are more likely to support the female political candidate.

In hypothesis 6 I argued that students would be more likely to support the candidate if they identified themselves as ideologically liberal. In a crosstabulation test between independent variable ideology (0=liberal, 1=conservative) and dependent variable vote_for, this hypothesis is supported. Liberal students said they would vote for the candidate at a rate of 52.8 percent, while conservative students said they would vote for the candidate at a rate of just 42.9 percent. These percentages, however, are not statistically significant; the p-value is high at .403.
Gender and Support for the Candidate

I hypothesized that females would be more likely to support the candidate than males would be. This hypothesis was made on the basis that females would be more likely than males to identify with the candidate. With independent variable gender and dependent variable vote_for, female students were more likely to say they would vote for the candidate than were male students. Sixty-three percent of female students said they would vote for the candidate, while just 40 percent of male students responded similarly. This correlation was statistically significant with a p-value of .078.

I performed one final test in the analysis of the experiment and survey that is relevant to the discussion of gender. In a logistic regression with all of the independent variables (frame, gender, ideology, political activity and presidential vote) and dependent variable vote_for, the one variable with a significant p-value (.073) was gender. This provides evidence for the hypothesis that the gender of the voter plays an important role in determining whether or not the female political candidate will receive support.

While the logistic regression test lessens the degree to which other independent variables that have been discussed in this analysis contribute to the amount of support the female candidate received in the experiment, it is impossible to reject the hypotheses supported above. Limitations such as sample size have been addressed earlier in this paper and will be discussed in more detail in the conclusions section.
Discussion

Conclusions

In general, gender stereotypes and gender trait research support the hypotheses that have been established in this paper. Male and female candidates are perceived as competent in different, gendered issue areas. Men are perceived by candidates as being capable of handling issues that require strength and rationality such as foreign affairs, the military and the economy. Women are expected to be competent in social issues such as health care and education, due to gender stereotypes which attribute personality traits to females.

In this paper, the relationship between such gender stereotypes and perceived traits and support of female political candidates was tested. A female candidate provided groups of potential voters with three different frames: personal, education policy, and economic policy. In both the personal and education policy frames, feminine stereotypes were expressed. Women are expected by voters to be more warm and compassionate than males. In the economic policy frame, the female candidate expressed male stereotypes in that she addressed an issue which voters associate with male candidates.

In support of the hypotheses, the female candidate received more support in both the personal and education policy frames than she did in the economic policy frame. When the female candidate addressed a typically female issue, students responded most favorably. The other major conclusion that can be drawn from the research in this paper is that the voter's gender plays an important role in determining support of female candidates. This was not a large part of the either the foundation or hypotheses of this
paper and is therefore not explored in depth in the literature review. This was a side hypothesis which in turn provided the most significant findings in the research.

**Future Research**

Because the sample size was relatively small, many other relationships could not be addressed. For example, gender within the individual frames could not be analyzed. The number of females in each group was too small to be statistically significant. It would be interesting to perform future research on the role of the voter's gender in responding to gendered issues addressed by female political candidates. Another relationship that could not be addressed was that of the political party or ideology of female voters and the amount of support for the female candidate.

The findings in this paper are thus preliminary. This paper provides the foundation for future research into the area of gendered issue focus and female political candidates. A larger sample size would provide the basis for more conclusions to be drawn. Perhaps even a focus group of all female respondents would be interesting as females seem to be more supportive of female political candidates. Women may provide a strong voter base for future female candidates. They may even serve as fundraising and volunteer resources upon which female candidates may draw.

**Recommendations for Female Candidates, their Opponents**

Based on the findings in this paper, the most important element in female candidates' political campaigns should be their appeal to women voters. Female voters respond more favorably to female candidates than do males and candidates should thus utilize resources in order to mobilize and attract female voters to their campaigns.
For male candidates running against female candidates, it is important that they utilize resources in order to mobilize and attract female voters. The female vote is a key element in such political battles because it tends to work in favor of the female candidate. The major hypothesis of this paper, that gender stereotypes and gender traits play a role in the issue areas that male and female candidates effectively address with voters, has preliminary support. More research is needed in this area in order to draw complex conclusions.

Based on the assumption that the preliminary findings in this paper are accurate and will hold in future experiments and surveys, it is important that female candidates focus on issues the voters respond most favorably to. Health care, education and other social issues are areas in which women are considered more competent than their male opponents. This does not mean that women should not address “male” issue areas such as the military and the economy, however. More research is needed in order to analyze the way in which voters respond to female candidates addressing such issue areas. It is possible that the strategy used in addressing those issue areas is flawed.

In conclusion, the issue of gender on the campaign trail is a very important area of research. The role of women in the governing process has important implications for public policy, through bill sponsorship, committee activities and voting patterns (Swers). This research paper has provided a framework upon which future research on gendered issue focus may be built.
Works Cited


The Center on Congress at Indiana State University. 2009. Members of Congress. Last accessed on October 20, 2009 at: <http://www.centeroncongress.org/learn_about/feature/qa_members.html#women>

Woodall, Gina Serignese and Kim L. Fridkin. 2007. “Shaping Women’s Chances:
Stereotypes and the Media.” In Rethinking Madam President: Are We Ready for a Woman in the White House? ed. Lori Cox Han and Caroline Heldman.

Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
Appendices

- Data output from SPSS

- Survey/Study Information Sheet
Appendix, Part A

**Hypotheses 1-3:**

Vote_for (students who would vote for the candidate)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>.48</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.503</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
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<td>52.1</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (yes)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Vote_for * Frame (1=personal, 2=economy, 3=education) Crosstabulation**

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<th>Frame</th>
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<th>2 (Economy)</th>
<th>3 (Educ.)</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
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<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Frame</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (Yes)</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Frame</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>65.0%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Frame</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Chi-Square Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.58.

### Vote_for * Frame_ed Crosstabulation

<table>
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<td>.00</td>
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<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote_for</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Count</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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### Chi-Square Tests

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<th>Exact Sig. (1-sided)</th>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.58.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table
### Qual_2 * Frame_ed Crosstabulation

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<td>% within Frame_ed</td>
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### Chi-Square Tests

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<td>.016</td>
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</table>

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.58.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

### Ideology hypothesis: Vote_for * Presvote Crosstabulation

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<td>Vote_for 0 Count</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Presvote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Count</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Presvote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Count</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Presvote</td>
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</table>
Chi-Square Tests

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
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<th>Exact Sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact Sig. (1-sided)</th>
</tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.000</td>
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<td>.855</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fisher's Exact Test</td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 14.38.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

---

Gender Hypothesis:

**Vote_for * Gender Crosstabulation**

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<th></th>
<th></th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Total</td>
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</tr>
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<td>37</td>
<td></td>
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<td>37.5%</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote_for 1</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
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<td>% within Gender</td>
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<td>40.4%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Gender</td>
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<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
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### Pearson Chi-Square and Contingency Table Analysis

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<th>Exact Sig. (1-sided)</th>
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</thead>
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<td>.080</td>
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<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11.49.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

### Logistic Regression: Variables in the Equation

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<th>Variable</th>
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<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
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<td>.073</td>
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<td>.930</td>
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<td>.470</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.920</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>.379</td>
<td>2.248</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.144</td>
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<td>.704</td>
<td>.789</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Frame_ed, Gender, Ideo_2, Home2, Pol_act, Presvote.
Appendix, Part B
Roanoke College Study Information Sheet
A Study of Female Political Candidacy

Information
You are invited to participate in a political science study about female political candidacy. You will watch a short video clip and respond to it in a survey. The duration of your participation is 15 minutes. Neither your name nor other identifying information will be collected in this study.

Contact Information
For questions about participation in this study, please feel free to contact the researcher:
Sarah Seufer
Campus Box 1753
Roanoke College
221 College Lane
Salem, VA 24153
828.467.4744
sbseufer@roanoke.edu

Or the Institutional Review Board:
Institutional Review Board
Roanoke College
Administration 209
221 College Lane
Salem, VA 24153

Participation
Your participation in this research study is voluntary, and you may end your participation at any time with no penalty.

Please answer the following questions:

In an election, would you vote for the candidate?

___ Yes

___ No

Why or why not?
How qualified do you consider the candidate to be?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
Not qualified  Somewhat qualified  Very qualified

Please indicate your gender:

___ Male

___ Female

Who did you vote for in last year's presidential election? If you were not eligible to vote, or did not vote, who would you vote for, if given the option now?

___ John McCain

___ Barack Obama

___ Other (Please specify): ______________________

Do you consider yourself to be political active?

___ Yes

___ No

Why or why not?

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

On a scale of one to ten, ranging from liberal to conservative, what is your ideological identification?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
Liberal  Moderate  Conservative

Which state is your home state?

____________________