

Georgia State University

**ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University**

---

Political Science Theses

Department of Political Science

---

8-16-2015

## **Running as Women Online: Partisanship, Competitiveness, and Gendered Communication Strategies in Congressional Campaign Websites**

Elizabeth Felker

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/political\\_science\\_theses](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/political_science_theses)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Felker, Elizabeth, "Running as Women Online: Partisanship, Competitiveness, and Gendered Communication Strategies in Congressional Campaign Websites." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2015. [https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/political\\_science\\_theses/66](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/political_science_theses/66)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Political Science at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Political Science Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gsu.edu).

RUNNING AS WOMEN ONLINE: PARTISANSHIP, COMPETITIVENESS, AND  
GENDERED COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGN  
WEBSITES

by

ELIZABETH FELKER

Under the Direction of Sarah Gershon, PhD

ABSTRACT:

Many studies have noted that the conflict between gender and party stereotypes may disadvantage Republican female candidates among some voters. On the other hand, gender and party attachment may also prove advantageous for Republican women in competitive races where moderate and independent voters play an important role. In this paper, the author examines how partisanship and race competitiveness impact how, and if, female candidates choose to emphasize their gendered identity, highlight women's interests, and pursue a feminine trait strategy on their campaign websites. The author gives special attention to Republican female candidates running in competitive races, and argues that these candidates may have an extra incentive and ability to connect with voters by emphasizing gender. This study uses data collected through a content analysis of the campaign websites of 162 female candidates in the 2014 Congressional midterm election.

Key words: Gender; Partisanship; Web-sites; Congressional elections; Political communication

RUNNING AS WOMEN ONLINE: PARTISANSHIP, COMPETITIVENESS, AND  
GENDERED COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGN  
WEBSITES

by

ELIZABETH FELKER

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2015

Copyright by  
Elizabeth Felker  
2015

RUNNING AS WOMEN ONLINE: PARTISANSHIP, COMPETITIVNESS, AND  
GENDERED COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGN  
WEBSITES

by

ELIZABETH FELKER

Committee Chair: Sarah Gershon

Committee: Amy Steigerwalt

Jeffrey Lazarus

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

December 2015

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my sister and best friend, Dorothy Felker. I could not have done this without you. Words fall short of how much thanks I owe you. I love you, friend.

A very warm thanks to my wonderful parents, amazing brothers and sisters and dear friends all their support during this journey. I would like to especially thank Natalie Rogol and Valerie Ibarra for their friendship and help.

Finally, I would like to thank my heavenly Father. Soli Deo Gloria.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to my brilliant committee chair, Dr. Sarah Gershon. Her help, patience, and encouragement made this project possible. I cannot thank her enough.

I am very grateful to the other members of my committee, Dr. Amy Steigerwalt and Dr. Jeffrey Lazarus, for their help on this project and encouragement throughout my graduate studies. I am truly thankful to have studied under them.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.1 Gender Stereotypes and Women in Politics.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.2 The Interaction of Party and Gender .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1.3 Women Running as Women.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>1.4 Campaign Websites.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2 A THEORY OF PARTY AFFILIATION, RACE COMPETITIVENESS, AND RUNNING AS WOMEN.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>2.1 The Impact of Race Competitiveness on Campaign Communication.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.2 Hypotheses .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>3 PARTY AFFILIATION, COMPETITIVENESS, AND RUNNING AS WOMEN: DATA, METHOD, AND RESULTS .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>3.1 Data Collection .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>3.2 Variables and Operationalization of Variables .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>3.3 Dependent Variables .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>3.4 Control Variables .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>4 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>4.1 Feminine Identity .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>4.2 Female Identity Regression Results.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>4.3 Women’s Interests.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>4.4 Women’s Interests Regression Results.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>4.5 Feminine Trait Strategy: Empathy .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>4.6 Feminine Trait Strategy: Bipartisanship .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>4.7 Discussion.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>4.8 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>WORKS CITED.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>APPENDIX: CONTENT ANALYSIS CODE SHEET.....</b>	<b>48</b>



**LIST OF TABLES**

<b>Table 1 Logit Regression of Feminine Identity in Biography and Issue Section .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Table 2 Women’s Interests in the Biography and Issue Sections.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Table 3 Logit Regression of Trait Strategies .....</b>	<b>38</b>

## 1 INTRODUCTION

“Sometimes the “best man for the job” to fight for women is a woman, and I’ll wake up fighting for women in this community every day.” – Martha McSally (Republican candidate for Arizona’s 2<sup>nd</sup> congressional District)<sup>1</sup>

How does partisanship effect the way that women running for Congress present themselves and decide whether or not to highlight their identity as women, emphasize women’s interests, or use a feminine trait strategy? There are a number of factors that determine what politicians talk about. In this paper, I focus on the intersection of gender and party, and specifically how that intersection influences the way Republican women campaign for office. Studies show that voters use gender as a means of evaluating candidates (Burrell 1994; McDermott 1997; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Sanbonmatsu 2002). At the same time, party affiliation is a powerful voting cue that communicates a candidate’s ideology and issue priorities (Dolan and Sanbonmatsu 2009; Hayes 2011). Scholars often note that these two sets of stereotypes conflict for female Republican politicians, potentially placing them at a disadvantage compared with Democrats (Sanbonmatsu and Dolan; Shaffner 2005; Koch 2000; 2002; Matland and King 2003; Thomsen). However, the conflict between gender and party stereotypes could also uniquely benefit female Republicans running in competitive races where a candidate’s ability to woo independents and moderates plays a significant role.

Understanding how Republican women campaign is important because, while the number of Democrat women in Congress has increased steadily over time, Republican women remain in the minority (Thomsen 2014b). One reason for this disparity may be that Republican women face more challenges in shaping their messages to appeal to voters. Studies find that voters believe women are more liberal than men (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Koch 2000) and Matland and King (2002) find that Republican voters believed a female Republican candidate

---

<sup>1</sup> Martha McSally, “Issues: Fighting for Women,” <https://mcsallyforcongress.com/category/issues/> (accessed October 16, 2015).

would be more liberal than a Republican male candidate. Perhaps for this reason, Republican voters are generally less supportive of Republican female candidates than similar Republican male candidates (Matland and King 2003). In an increasingly polarized political environment being seen as moderate could hurt a candidate, especially in primary elections where ideologically extreme voters tend to dominate (Lawless and Pearson 2008; Thomsen 2014). Studies also show that some Republican voters penalize female politicians with young children as well as childless Republican female politicians (Pew 2008; Stalsburg 2010). Scholars argue that this is due to the social conservatism of the Republican Party and its focus on the nuclear family (Schreiber 2012; Stalsburg 2010). In light of this evidence, it is important to understand how Republican female candidates are choosing to campaign in general elections.

This study examines three different ways that female candidates can run “as women” or make their gender part of their campaign strategy. First, it looks at whether or not female candidates talk about their identity as mothers and women; secondly, whether or not female candidates highlight women’s interests and issues. Finally, I examine if female candidates pursue feminine trait strategies by emphasizing empathy and bipartisanship.<sup>2</sup> Using data from 162 congressional campaign websites, I find mixed results. Republican and Democrat female candidates differ little in mentioning their identity as women. Democrat female candidates talk about women’s interests and issues significantly more than Republican women and are more likely to mention being bipartisan. I find that Republican female candidates in competitive districts are not more likely to emphasize ‘female’ messages than other candidates, including Democrat female candidates in competitive districts.

---

<sup>2</sup> Though bipartisanship and empathy are traits that are not exclusively emphasized by women, see Fenno (1978) and Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin (2009), studies show that people are more likely to associate them with female leaders and expect female leaders to have these traits (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; 1993b; Jamieson 1995). Studies show that female politicians are aware of these expectations and will structure their campaign messages in response (Dittmar 2015; Dolan 2014; Kahn 1996; Niven and Zilber 2001a).

This study adds to the literature on women in politics by expanding our limited knowledge of Republican women. It explores the challenges that they may face based upon their party and gender as well as the benefits they enjoy by virtue of their identities. Since more Democrat women have served in politics, much of the research that exists on women can only be generalized to Democrats. This study adds to the growing number of studies seeking to tease out the differences between Republican and Democrat candidates.

### **1.1 Gender Stereotypes and Women in Politics**

It is important to understand the political environment that female candidates face because it helps explain their communication choices. One of the well-documented findings in the study of gender in American politics is that voters believe there are differences between men and women, and, consequently differences between male and female politicians (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Fox and Smith 1998; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; 1993b; Kahn 1996; McDermott 1997). Gender stereotypes are based on traditional ideas about female traits and the role of women in society (Darcy et. al. 1994; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Jamieson 1996). Voters identify women as more honest and compassionate, but also less decisive, more emotional, and less competent than men (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Jamieson 1996). People often see women as more concerned with and better equipped to handle issues related to gender or children or other “compassion issues” (Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Niven and Zilber 2003).

Gender stereotypes can hurt female candidates since voters tend to prefer leaders that have male traits (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). Furthermore, gender stereotypes may undermine perceptions of their competence (Fulton 2012; Kahn 1996; Matland and King 2003). For example, female candidates often emphasize masculine traits and issues in order to overcome expectations that, because of their gender, they are less qualified for office or only qualified to

talk about issues that relate to women and children (Bystrom et. al. 2004; Niven and Zilber 2001a). However, this strategy can backfire for a female candidate, since voters may reject her if she acts too masculine and goes against social gender norms (Jamieson 1995; Schreiber 2012; Lawrence and Rose 2010). This “double bind” creates an environment in which women must pay careful attention to how they behave (Jamieson 1995). For Republican female candidates, gender stereotypes are also compounded by the expectations of Republican voters. Candidates are likely aware of voter stereotypes and therefore, these expectations shape the messages they communicate while campaigning for office.

## **1.2 The Interaction of Party and Gender**

As mentioned previously, scholars argue that party and gender cues conflict for Republican female candidates (Hayes 2011; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009). One reason for this is that voters believe Republicans and Democrats are better at handling different sets of issues (Petrocik 1996). Voters associate Republicans with “masculine” issues such as crime, defense, and the economy. Democrats have developed a reputation for handling “feminine” or compassion issues like healthcare and education (Darcy et. al. 1994; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b; Dolan). Thus, voters may have a more difficult time making inferences about the issue expertise and positions of Republican female candidates (Koch 2000). Additionally, even though the Republican and Democrat Parties hold similar positions on the traditional family and women’s equality in the workplace and society (Sanbonmatsu 2002), they have developed different reputations in regards to women’s issues, such as abortion. Democrats are more likely to support abortion rights and gender equality, while Republicans tend to oppose abortion and are less likely to promote women’s issues. This divide over women’s issues is reflected in demographic voting patterns as women tend to be more liberal than men and vote Democrat

more often – a trend known as the “gender gap” (Shaffner 2005). Due to this pattern, voters tend to associate the Democrat Party with women and the Republican Party with men (Winter 2010).

This conflict between gender and party stereotypes impacts Republican female candidates in different ways. As noted earlier, though all women face negative stereotypes of their competence (Jamieson 1995; Kahn 1996), there is evidence that Republican women face increased skepticism regarding their leadership ability and ideological positions (King and Matland 2003; Koch 2000; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009). As Thomsen (2014) argues, Republican female candidates are a “poor party fit.” In response, Republican female candidates may have to take extra care to avoid coming across as too liberal in their campaign messages—particularly on salient issues such as abortion (Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009). They may also avoid talking about personal details such as family and instead emphasize their competence.

### **1.3 Women Running as Women**

A few studies have focused specifically on how party impacts how female politicians choose to highlight their experience as women in connection with their experience in politics (Kunovich and Wall 2012; Schreiber 2012). Examining the online biographies of female members of Congress, Kunovich and Wall (2012) find that “women in the Republican Party were more likely to frame their roles as wives and mothers in ways that reassure conservative constituents...” (65). Also, when they talk about women’s issues or their work on behalf of women, Republican congresswomen do so in ways that also “demonstrate their commitment to conservative ideals” (2012:66). Kunovich and Wall find that Democrat congresswomen are more likely to relate their experience as women and mothers to their ability to represent women more generally (2012:20). The findings of this study support the hypothesis that party affiliation impacts the way that female politicians women talk about their experience as women.

Within the arena of political campaigns, Schreiber (2012) looks at how party and ideology impact how female candidates choose whether to talk about their experience as mothers and women on their campaign websites. Specifically, she examines whether female Republican candidates, endorsed by the Tea Party and/or dubbed “Mama Grizzlies” by Sarah Palin, differ from more liberal female candidates in emphasizing their identity as mothers. She finds that conservative Republican female candidates pursued similar campaign strategies as more liberal female candidates, but were less likely to talk about being women or emphasize female issues. One of the drawbacks of this study is that it does not look at differences in race competitiveness. I build upon Schreiber (2010) by examining how Republican and Democrat female candidates talk about their feminine identity as well as whether or not they pursue a gender consistent strategy by talking about women’s interests and emphasizing feminine traits. I control for race competitiveness since this may influence whether Republican female candidates run as women.

#### **1.4 Campaign Websites**

Numerous studies have used websites as a source of data for studying a variety of topics on candidate behavior including how politicians present themselves to their constituents (Gulati 2004; Kunovich and Wall 2012; Stanyer 2008; Niven and Zilber 2001a; 2001b; Bystrom et. al. 2004), what issues candidates focus on in their campaigns (Dolan 2005; Druckman et. al. 2010b), and how candidates link issues to minority and women’s issues (Gershon 2008). Since their major advent in the 1990s, campaign websites have revolutionized campaigning for candidates and become a staple in political communication (Panagopoulos 2009). Websites make fundraising and communicating with potential voters and supporters much easier, as well as providing candidates with a relatively cheap platform for presenting limitless amounts of information about themselves if they so desire (Druckman et. al. 2010b; Gulati 2004; Panagopoulos 2009). As Panagopoulos states, “For many campaigns, a key benefit of new media

and the web is the massive amount of information they can provide to potential voters at the click of a button (Panagopoulos 2009, 11; Gulati and Williams 2009, 56-57).

Websites also give candidates the opportunity to present themselves to the public without media influence. For candidates this allows them to frame themselves and their accomplishments and issue priorities however they wish (Niven and Zilber 2001b). Since the traditional media (newspapers and television news) pays closer attention to major candidates, websites give less viable candidates a means of presenting their ideas and having their voices heard (Druckman et. al. 2001b). Both of these considerations are important for female candidates. Studies show that the media may cover female candidates in ways that reinforce traditional gender stereotypes and, potentially, trivialize them in the eyes of the public (Kahn 1996; Lawrence and Rose 2010) Additionally, Niven and Zilber (2001b) found that overwhelmingly female candidates felt that the media relegated their interests and issue priorities to “women’s issues” rather than covering their full issues range (2001b). For female candidates, websites provide a space where they can highlight what is most important to them without the media’s filter.

Based upon Goffman’s (1959) theory of self-presentation and Fenno’s (1978) idea of a politician’s “home style,” several studies have looked at how elected officials use websites as a means of introducing themselves to constituents and voters (Gulati 2004; Kunovich and Wall 2012; Stanyer 2008). While websites do not allow politicians to form the same one-on-one relationship that Fenno describes in *Home Style*, they do act as a medium through which candidates can talk about their qualifications and issue stances, as well as their families and personalities (Gulati 2004; Stanyer 2008). Since they are completely controlled by candidates and their staff, websites are a good measure of a candidates’ messages, priorities and campaign strategies.



## **2 A THEORY OF PARTY AFFILIATION, RACE COMPETITIVENESS, AND RUNNING AS WOMEN**

The preceding literature establishes that female candidates face a complex electoral environment in which they must navigate voter expectations of party and gender. Establishing trust is important for all candidates. Fenno (1978) argues that all candidates establish trust with their constituents through demonstrating their “competence, identification, and empathy” (1978:58). One of the ways that they can establish a personal connection with voters is by sharing personal details or emphasizing relatable experiences. For a female candidate, a way that she can establish a connection with voters is by talking about her experience as a woman and mother. At the same time, women have good reasons to avoid this strategy. First, “feminine” experiences do not directly translate into political skill and may undermine voters’ perceptions of a candidate’s competence. Secondly, Republican and Democrat voters differ in their acceptance and support of women’s issues and interests (Matland and King 2003). Due to this, the choice to highlight feminine identities likely varies by partisanship.

For a female candidate, talking about being mother can be a way to establish trust and identification with one’s audience. In 1992, Patty Murray, a Democrat Senate candidate from Washington and later U.S. Senator, famously ran for the Senate as a “mom in tennis shoes.” In my sample from 2014, a number of women also included their experiences as mothers to establish their relationship with their constituents. For example, in her issue page on education, Democrat Elisabeth Jensen (Kentucky-06) states,

As the mother of a child with an ASD diagnosis and unique combination of special needs I understand the challenges families face in obtaining care and education for their children as well as finding opportunities for care, housing and community engagement as adults.

However, talking about being a mother can also have negative implications since studies show that they are already likely to receive news coverage focusing on personal details, which some scholars have argued, may detract from their overall professional image (Kahn 1996). Simultaneously, talking about being a mother decreases the support of conservative voters who hold more conservative views of a woman's place in politics (Stalsburg 2010). This is especially salient for candidates with young children who may face criticism for pursuing a career while their children are young (Kunovich and Wall 2012; Stalsburg 2010; Schreiber 2012). For these reasons female candidates may avoid talking about being mothers on their websites.

A female candidate might leverage her identity as a woman to establish her relationship with voters, as well as highlight women's issues. In all these, a woman has an advantage because, due to her gender, she can convincingly argue that she is qualified to represent these issues and interests. For example, Democrat Grace Meng (NY-06) linked her identity as a woman with the lack of descriptive representation in Congress, "As a woman, I am running to improve the woefully inadequate statistic of women comprising only 17% of Congress, yet over half America's population."

Female candidates often talk about being the "first woman." This discussion serves many purposes. First, it can imply leadership potential – as someone who overcame obstacles and reached a goal first (Kunovich and Wall 2012). Republican candidate Martha McSally (Arizona-02) placed special focus on her multiple "firsts" as a woman. She began her biography section by stating, "Retired Air Force Colonel Martha McSally is a pioneer, leader, servant, and fighter. She is the first female fighter pilot to fly in combat, and first to command a fighter squadron in combat in United States history."

Candidates can also use the position of being the "first woman" to place special emphasis on female issues. For example, by drawing attention to the fact that she could be the "first

woman” to represent that district or state, a female candidate could state or imply that women’s issues have been underrepresented by the current male leadership. Senate Candidate Alison Lundergan-Grimes (D) from Kentucky used this strategy throughout her campaign website. For example, her states that,

As Kentucky’s first woman Senator, I will continue being a staunch advocate for women and their families. I will seek common ground and work across the aisle for solutions that put Kentucky and our country back on the right track. The contrast with Mitch McConnell [the incumbent Senator] could not be starker.

Female candidates might also highlight their position as “the first woman” to argue that they are different from the corrupt political establishment (Kunovich and Wall 2010). This strategy could be advantageous in circumstances when public opinion is against Washington (Gulati 2004). The choice to emphasize being ‘first’ may also interact with party. For example, a Republican female candidate could benefit among Republican voters by suggesting that her outsider status will bring about desirable changes in a Democratic government. At the same time, some scholars argue that drawing attention to “first woman” status could potentially hurt female candidates by reminding voters of a candidate’s inexperience (Gulati 2004). Simultaneously, it might place an inordinate amount of attention on gender – which some female candidates might not want (Jamieson 1996; Kunovich and Wall 2010; Schaffner 2005).

### **2.1 The Impact of Race Competitiveness on Campaign Communication**

Female politicians are strategic actors and structure their campaign messages to appeal to voters and win office. Numerous studies show that female candidates are keenly aware of voters’ stereotypes regarding female leaders and Democrats and Republicans (Dittmar 2015; Dolan 2014; Kahn 1996; Niven and Zilber 2001a). Given what we know about partisanship in the United States and the issues and traits associated with the different political parties, I expect that race competitiveness will have a significant impact on whether or not female candidates choose to pursue a gendered strategy.

The literature on women in politics clearly demonstrates that voters hold certain stereotypes about the traits and characteristics female candidates possess, the issues they are most suited to handle, and their ideological leaning (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; 1993b; Koch 2000). Studies also shows that voters associate Democrats and Republicans with different traits, issues, and ideologies (Hayes 2005; Petrocik 1996). These two sets of stereotypes overlap for Democrat female candidates but not for Republican female candidates. The intersection of gender and party stereotypes present Democrat and Republican female candidates with different sets of considerations when structuring their campaign messages.

Overall, Democrat female candidates are more likely to emphasize their identity as women and talk about women's issues since these play to their party and gender strengths (Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003; Shaffner 2005). In contrast, Republican female candidates generally will be less likely to "run as women" because of the conflict between their gender and party, since being female suggests to voters that a candidate will be more liberal (Koch 2000; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009). In particular, if a Republican female candidate is running in a noncompetitive district, she will be much less likely to emphasize her gender because it will not advance her among solidly Republican or Democrat voters (Shaffner 2005). Rather than risk losing supporters by "issue-trespassing," a Republican female candidate would be more likely to strategically avoid discussing gender altogether in a non-competitive race (Shaffner 2005).

In competitive races, moderates and independents can determine an election's outcome. In these races, it is less likely that Democrat female candidates will highlight their gender due to the overlap between party identification and gender. Since being female suggests that a candidate is more liberal, Democrat female candidates may strategically downplay their gender in order to appeal to more moderate voters (Kahn 1996; Koch 2000). In contrast, for a Republican female politician, the presence of moderate voters in competitive elections could encourage her to

emphasize gender in hopes of presenting a more moderate image. For example, Matland and King (2003:595) find that, “Democrats and Independent voters were more likely to trust, think qualified, view as a leader, and vote for a female Republican (as contrasted with a male Republican).” Due to this, I expect that Republican female candidates in competitive races will be more likely to “run as women” by emphasizing their gender, talking about women’s interests and issues and using a feminine trait strategy than Republican female candidates in noncompetitive races and Democrat female candidates in competitive races.

I expect that in competitive districts, female candidates of both parties will also be more likely to talk about working across party lines and taking bipartisan action. In general, people expect that women are more relational and cooperative and, as leaders, will be more willing to compromise (Dolan 2014). This narrative of female leaders putting aside differences and coming together to solve problems while the men fight is popular in the media.<sup>3</sup> Compromise has both positive and negative connotations for politicians. For candidates running in noncompetitive races where one party dominates, emphasizing compromise could hurt their campaigns (Dittmar 2015). In competitive districts, independents and swing voters play an important role. Candidates from both parties have a special incentive to emphasize bipartisanship and take less extreme positions in order to appeal to these voters. I expect that a female candidate in a competitive race will be especially motivated to emphasize bipartisanship because it communicates to voters that she will maximize her perceived ability to cooperate. For this reason, I expect that both Democrat and Republican female candidates in competitive races will emphasize their bipartisanship and cooperativeness more than candidates running in noncompetitive races.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> For example see, Jonathan Weisman and Jennifer Steinhauer, (October 14, 2013), “Senate Women Lead in Effort to Find Accord,” in *The New York Times* (Accessed 7/26/15).

<sup>4</sup> Candidates of the opposing party running in a solidly Republican or Democrat race might have some incentive to emphasize bipartisanship in order to woo voters from the opposing party, I believe that their incentive is less than candidates running in competitive races.

Empathy is another female trait that female candidates may choose to emphasize when “running as women.” Empathy as a trait is related to a candidate’s ability to connect with voters and communicate that she is one of them and that she cares about their concerns and problems. While empathy is an important trait for any candidate (Fenno 1978), the literature suggests that voters are more likely to expect female candidates to be empathetic (Bystrom et. al. 2004; Schneider n.d.). As discussed previously, since Democrat female candidates have an advantage when running as women (Shaffner 2005), it is more likely that they will emphasize this trait in their campaign communication (Schneider n.d.).

## **2.2 Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1: Democrat female candidates will be more likely to employ a consistent "feminine" strategy on their campaign websites. Specifically, they are more likely to emphasize their identity as women, mothers and as the "first woman," talk about women's issues in their biography and issues sections, and use empathy and bipartisanship as trait strategies.

Hypothesis 2: Republican female candidates in competitive races will be more likely to talk about their identity as women and mention women's issues than Republican female candidates running in noncompetitive races and Democrat female candidates in competitive races.

Hypothesis 3: Female candidates in competitive races will be more likely to emphasize bipartisanship and cooperation than female candidates running in non-competitive races.

## **3 PARTY AFFILIATION, COMPETITIVENESS, AND RUNNING AS WOMEN: DATA, METHOD, AND RESULTS**

### **3.1 Data Collection**

For this study I conducted a content analysis of the official campaign websites of 162 Republican and Democrat female candidates running for Congress in the 2014 midterm election. In 2014, 185 female candidates ran for congressional seats. However, only 162 of these women

maintained official campaign websites and belonged to the two major parties. I identified female candidates based on a list made by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers University. This list included every woman running in U.S. congressional races for the 2014 midterm election. In order to find official campaign websites, I used Ballotpedia ([www.ballotpedia.com](http://www.ballotpedia.com)) and search engines such as Google ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)). 41.72% of the websites belonged to incumbents and 58.28% to challengers. While a majority of candidates had campaign websites, several incumbents only had official websites associated with their office. One explanation for this is that incumbents have less incentive to create campaign websites because they are already well known to their constituents and are secure in their reelection prospects. For the purpose of this study, I only included campaign websites. Candidate websites varied quite a bit in their length and the types of content that they included. All the candidates included some type of biography and most included an issue section.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, some candidates included other sections such as blogs, links to press releases, and pages for donations. For the purpose of this study, I only analyzed the biography and issue sections of these websites.

I collected all 162 websites between October 1, 2014 and November 2, 2014. I then conducted a content analysis of campaign websites using a code sheet based upon previous literature. The content analysis took place between December 2014 and April 2015. After finishing the content analysis, I had a group of five trained second-coders recode 13% of my sample using my code sheet. The overall inter coder reliability was 83%.

### **3.2 Variables and Operationalization of Variables**

The main independent variables in my study are candidate partisanship and race competitiveness. I also created an interaction for Republican female candidates running in competitive districts. I identified candidate's partisanship using the CAWP list of 2014 female

---

<sup>5</sup> Twenty-one candidates (seventeen incumbents and four challengers) did not include issue sections.

candidates running. Though most of the candidates running in the 2014 midterm elections clearly stated their partisanship in their websites, I verified each candidate's partisanship using the CAWP list as well as Ballotpedia.com. Party is coded as a dichotomous variable where 1 = Republican and 0 = Democrat. My sample is 31% (51) Republican women and 79% (111) Democrat women.

In this study I used the 2014 Cook Political Report measures of race competitiveness. Though a number of different measures exist to identify district level ideology and competitiveness, I believe the Cook Political Report measure of competitiveness is sufficient for my purposes. It captures the basic partisanship of the district and whether or not it is a competitive race. Cook's Report scores each race as either Solidly Republican or Democrat, Likely Republican/Democrat, Lean Republican/Democrat, and Toss-Up. For the purpose of this study, I made competitiveness a categorical variable. All the races that the Cook's Report labeled Solidly Republican/Democrat are considered "not competitive" and coded = 0. For the competitive categories the categories are as follows: likely Republican/Democrat = 0.33, lean Republican/ Democrat = 0.66, and toss-up = 1.<sup>6</sup> The Cook Report updates its race ratings periodically throughout the campaign. I used the Cook Reports House and Senate race ratings for October 17<sup>th</sup>. There are 39 races competitive and 123 noncompetitive races in my sample. 14 Republican female candidates ran in competitive races and 37 ran in noncompetitive. 86 Democrat female candidates ran in noncompetitive races and 25 ran in competitive races.

To identify whether or not Republican female candidates running in competitive districts behave differently than candidates running in noncompetitive districts, I created an interaction term, Republican\*Competitive, where 1 = Republican and competitiveness is either 0.33, 0.66

---

<sup>6</sup> This coded scheme is consistent with other studies, see Schneider (n.d.) and Gershon (2008).



or 1. When the interaction term Republican\*Competitive is included in my model it is important to note that the baseline comparison group is Democrat female candidates in noncompetitive races (Republican = 0 and competitiveness = 0). With the interaction term included, the variable for party, “Republican,” represents Republican women in noncompetitive races (1 = Republican, 0 = Competitive) and the variable “Competitiveness” represents Democrat women in competitive races (0 = Republican, 1 = Competitive). Thus, with the inclusion of the interaction term, we can compare Republican female candidates in competitive races and noncompetitive races and Democrat female candidates in competitive races against the baseline of Democrat female candidates in noncompetitive races.

### **3.3 Dependent Variables**

There are three main aspects of “running as women” that I examine in this study: feminine identity, discussion of women’s interests and issues, and trait strategies. Each of these areas includes two dichotomous dependent variables, for a total of six dependent variables. What follows is a detailed description of each of these three areas and operationalization of the dependent variables. It is important to note that, overall, female candidates running in the 2014 midterm election did not choose to emphasize their gender as often as one might have expected. Out of the 162 female candidates in my study, 74 candidates did not mention any women’s issues or interests or relate their feminine identity to running for office at all. Most of the candidates that did mention feminine identity only mentioned it once in either their biography or issue section. Only fifteen candidates, eight Democrats and seven Republicans, mentioned their feminine identity more than twice. Similarly, on average, discussion of women’s issues and interests made up roughly 13% of the issue discussion of Democrat female candidates and only

3.6% of Republican female candidate's total issue discussion.<sup>7</sup> 75 candidates did not mention women's issues or interests at all on their campaign websites. 49 candidates mentioned women's interests once, 19 mentioned it twice and only 23 candidates mentioned women's issues more than twice. Given the low variation in my dependent variables, I chose to code each of them as dichotomous variables.

The first aspect of running as a woman that I examined is "Feminine Identity." I operationalized this by coding whether or not a candidate related her identity as a mother or a woman to her qualifications for office or ability to handle certain issues. For example, in her biography page, Republican candidate Barbara Comstock (VA 10<sup>th</sup>) highlights having been "a working mom" while also working as a "trusted aide" to Congressman Frank Wolf. In her issue section, Ann Kirkpatrick (Democrat, Arizona-01) also exemplifies this type of strategy on her issue page dedicated to education, "As the mother of two daughters, I know that the roots of future success are found in a good education."

I chose to separate mentions of feminine identity in the biography section from mentions in the issue section. I believe that talking about one's feminine identity in the biography section is slightly different than talking about it in the issue section. The biography section is one of the first places that a voter visits to learn about the candidate. By talking about being a woman or a mother in her biography section, a candidate implicitly or explicitly communicates that her identity as a woman makes her uniquely qualified to run for office and is placing that identity at the forefront of her overall identity as a candidate. On the other hand, if a candidate only mentions her identity as a mother or a woman in her issue section, this may communicate that

---

<sup>7</sup> In order to calculate a proportion of women's issue and interest discussion, I follow the method used in Gershon (2008). I divided the total number of issues that mentioned women's issues or interests divided by the total number of issues that the candidate included on their campaign website. For example, if a candidate talked about women's issues in her education and her healthcare page, I would divide that by the total number of issue pages included on her campaign website.

this identity is less central to her campaign. I also chose to mention it in the biography and issue section because some candidates only had a biography section on their campaign website.

Since most candidates did not mention feminine identity more than once in their biography or issue sections, I made feminine identity a dichotomous variable where 1 = mentioned and 0 = not mentioned. For the biography page, I coded it 1 if the candidate mentioned her identity as a woman or mother at least once somewhere in that section. In the issue section, I coded it 1 if the candidate mentioned her identity as a woman or mother at least once in any of her issue pages. It is important to note that these two variables are not necessarily independent of one another. For example, a candidate that mentions her feminine identity in her biography section may be more likely to mention it in her issue section as well. In order to control for this relationship, I include each as a control variable in my multivariate regression of the other.

The second aspect of running as a woman that I examined in this paper is whether a candidate chose to talk about women's interests and issues. I created two dependent variables for mentioning women's issue and interests. The first looks solely at whether the candidate mentioned women's issues or interests at least once in her biography section and the second dependent variable just looks at whether or not the candidate mentioned women's issues or interests at least once somewhere in her issue section. For example, Barbara Jo Mullis-Wrobelski (Democrat, SC 3<sup>rd</sup>), in her discussion of the minimum wage links women's interests into her broader issue discussion, "...The new wage increase must also apply to tipped workers, whose hourly rate has been frozen at \$2.13 since 1991. These workers are primarily women and minorities making it especially urgent!"

My measure is based off Gershon (2008). I believe that looking at whether a candidate specifically mentions women and the interests and issues that are related and important to them

is a clear way to measure a candidate's commitment (at least in her campaign) to substantively representing women's interests. Other studies on gender and politics have examined female politicians' issue engagement by seeing if candidates talk about stereotypical female issues, like healthcare and education, or male issues, such as crime and the military (Sapiro et. al. 2011; Schneider n.d.; Schreiber 2011). However, merely looking at what issues a candidate talks about is problematic. Studies show that an issue's salience in a given year (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009) and party affiliation (Dolan 2005; 2014) rather than gender, are the most important factors determining which issues are included on a candidate's website.

By using Gershon's (2008) measure of gendered interests in general issue discussion, I am able to better capture the degree to which candidates made representing women's interest and issues a part of their campaign strategy. I coded these two dependent variables as dichotomous variables where 1 = mentioning and 0 = not mentioning. Again, there may be a relationship between whether a candidate mentions women's interests or issues in her biography section and whether she mentions it in her issue section. In order to control for this, I include each as a control variable in my multivariate regression of the other.

The last aspect of "running as a woman" that I examine in this paper is whether the candidate used a feminine trait strategy. As mentioned previously, the literature shows that voters believe female leaders are more bipartisan and empathetic than male leaders (Dolan 2014; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; 1993b). In order to capture bipartisanship as a trait strategy, I looked at whether or not a candidate talked about being bipartisan or willing to cooperate with the other party or work across the aisle. For example, in her biography, Republican Senator Susan Collins from Maine highlighted her cooperative leadership style, "Known for her work in facilitating bipartisan compromise, Senator Collins is a key leader in the U.S. Congress." I coded bipartisanship as a dichotomous variable where 1 = mention and 0 = not mention. I coded a

candidate as pursuing a bipartisan trait strategy if they mentioned bipartisanship or cooperation at least once somewhere in their biography or issue pages.

The second trait that I look at is empathy. I based my dependent variable for empathy on a measure used by Schneider (forthcoming) and a Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin (2009). I measured empathy as whether or not the candidate mentioned personal details such as the names of her children, parents, spouse or other personal details in her biography page. I coded this as a dichotomous variable where 1 = personal details and 0 = no personal details.

### **3.4 Control Variables**

I included a number of control variables which could also impact a candidate's choice to run as a "woman."<sup>8</sup> First, race and ethnicity is a factor which can impact a candidate's communication (Gershon 2008; Kunovich and Wall 2012). Kunovich and Wall (2012) found that, compared with Anglo women, minority congresswomen are more likely to highlight their status as "first women." My sample included 43 minority women. Of the African American female candidates, 20 were Democrats and seven Republicans. 11 Latino women ran for office – six Democrats and five Republicans. Only 4 Asian female candidates and one Pacific Islander ran for office – all Democrats. I created a dichotomous variable for race and ethnicity where 1 = minority candidates and 0 = non-minority candidates.

I also controlled for whether or not the candidate ran in a House or Senate race. The level of office could impact the campaign messages and strategies of female candidates because of the unique characteristics of both chambers. For example, the Senate a more prestigious position that deals with a great variety of issues, so a candidate might be less likely to talk about personal

---

<sup>8</sup> I originally included a variable for whether or not a candidate ran against a male or female opponent. Scholarship suggests that women running against men may be more likely to emphasize masculine traits and issues (Witt, Paget, and Matthews 1994; Dolan 2005). This variable did not have significant results, and since 15 women ran against other women, I chose to omit it from my final multivariate analysis.

details or mention being a woman since this strategy is sometimes considered risky (Druckman et. al. 2009). Out of the 162 women in my sample, fifteen ran for Senate: five Republicans and 10 Democrats. I coded this as a dichotomous variable (1= House, 0 = Senate)

Differences in candidate quality could explain some of the variance in campaign communication.<sup>9</sup> Druckman et. al. (2009) argue that less viable candidates, almost always challengers, are more likely to pursue risky strategies – like mentioning personal details or taking on issues where they have little expertise. Since candidates that raise more money are usually higher quality and have a higher viability (Jacobson 1989), I use campaign money as a proxy for candidate quality. Having more money might also impact the quality of a candidate’s campaign website. In order to control for this, I included each candidate’s ending cash on hand from the 2014 October quarterly report as reported on the Federal Election Commission website. I accessed this information using the Federal Election Commission website ([www.FEC.gov](http://www.FEC.gov)).<sup>10</sup>

Differences in district ideology could also impact whether female candidates choose to “run as women.” Since Democrats tend to view female candidates more favorably (Matland and King 2003; Dolan and Sanbonmatsu 2009), it is likely that female candidates running primarily Democrat districts would be more likely to strategically emphasize their gender in their campaign messages. In order to capture differences in district level ideology, I used the 2012 Presidential vote as a proxy for district ideology. I made ideology a dichotomous variable where

---

<sup>9</sup> For more on candidate quality and the circumstances that attract quality candidates, please see Jon R. Bond, Cary Covington, and Richard Fleisher (1985), "Explaining challenger quality in congressional elections," *The Journal of Politics* (47.02): 510-529.

<sup>10</sup> Another measure of candidate quality is whether or not a candidate has previously held office (Jacobsen 1989). Out of the 111 Democrats in my sample, 75 had previously held office and 36 had not. 28 Republican female candidates had held office previously and 23 had not. I ran my all my models using this measure as well as the measure for campaign money. Having previously held office was not significant in my models, so I decided to omit and just use campaign money as my proxy for candidate quality.

1 = Republican and 0 = Democrat. For example, where the Republican candidate, Mitt Romney, won a district, I coded that district 1 for Republican.

## 4 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 4.1 Feminine Identity

The first set of dependent variables that I look at in my analysis are whether or not women running for office promote their feminine identity by highlighting their role as women and mothers, especially in relation to their qualifications for office. First, looking at the data from the biography pages shows some differences between Republican and Democrat female candidates. 46% of Democrats mentioned their identity as women in their biographies compared with 41% of Republican candidates. In competitive races, 71% of Republican candidates and 57% of Democrats mentioned feminine identity. To test the statistical significance of the relationship between these variables and whether a candidate mentioned her feminine identity, I conducted Chi-squared tests.<sup>11</sup> The relationship between party and mentioning feminine identity was not significant. The relationship between being a Republican female candidate in a competitive race and mentioning feminine identity in one's biography was significant at the 0.05 level compared to the three other categories. Mentioning feminine identity in the biography and being a Democrat in a competitive race was not statistically significant compared to the three other categories.

Female candidates mentioned their feminine identity much less in their issue sections. Only 29% of Republican female candidates talked about their identity as women somewhere in their issue section. Half of these were candidates in competitive races. Only 12% of Democrat

---

<sup>11</sup> I used a Chi-squared test because my independent and dependent variables are categorical variables. For more on this see, Institute for Digital Research and Education, "What statistical analysis should I use? Statistical analyses using Stata," UCLA, <http://www.ats.ucla.edu/stat/stata/whatstat/whatstat.htm#exact> (Accessed 7/5/2015).

female candidates talked about their identity as women or mothers in their issue section. Half of the Democrat female candidates that mentioned their identity were candidates in competitive races. The relationship between party and mentioning feminine identity in the issue section was significant at the 0.05 level. The relationship between Republican female candidates in competitive districts and mentioning feminine identity in the issue section was not significant at the 0.05 level compared to the three other categories. The same was true of Democrat female candidates in competitive districts.

Since I want to understand the role of partisanship and competitiveness in predicting messages, while also controlling for other variables which shape campaign messages, I ran a multivariate model. Since my dependent variables are dichotomous, I used a logit regression for all my models. I used robust standard errors to deal with problems of heteroskedasticity between the dependent and independent variables. The table represents two sets of results for each dependent variable. The first model includes my two independent variables and the second includes the interaction variable, Republican\*Competitive, for Republican women in competitive districts.

#### **4.2 Female Identity Regression Results**

For my first model, feminine identity in the biography, the results are not significant. For feminine identity in the biography, party is negatively signed, supporting my expectation that Democrat female candidates will be more likely to talk about their identity as women. However, the coefficient fails to meet traditional levels of significance. The coefficient for female Republican candidates running in competitive races is positively signed, as hypothesized, but also fails to reach traditional levels of significance. Including the interaction term from my model did not significantly change the results.



For my second dependent variable, feminine identity in the issue section, the coefficient for Republican is significant at the 0.01 level and positively signed. This means that being Republican is associated with an increased likelihood of mentioning feminine identity in the issue section of the campaign websites. The variable for competitive races was not significant. In

**Table 1: Logit Regression of Feminine Identity in Biography and Issue Section**

Variables	Feminine Identity in Biography Page		Feminine Identity in Issue Section	
	Coefficient		Coefficient	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Republican	-0.298 (0.425)	-0.682 (0.463)	-1.302*** (0.484)	-1.421** (0.562)
Republican*Competitive		2.688 (1.662)		-0.566 (1.493)
Competitive	1.046 (0.711)	0.376 (0.764)	0.963 (0.842)	1.155 (0.964)
House Race	0.205 (0.860)	0.172 (0.815)	-1.762* (1.003)	-1.772* (1.008)
Incumbent	-0.0230 (0.479)	0.143 (0.461)	0.152 (0.525)	0.104 (0.515)
Minority	0.395 (0.407)	0.331 (0.422)	-0.913 (0.633)	-0.904 (0.635)
Campaign Money	6.10e-07 (5.13e-07)	5.71e-07 (4.45e-07)	-1.28e-07 (4.31e-07)	-1.39e-07 (4.32e-07)
Fem. Identity in Issue Section	-0.380 (0.507)	-0.419 (0.529)		
Ideology	0.0609 (0.360)	0.177 (0.378)	-0.106 (0.483)	-0.133 (0.491)
Fem Identity in Bio Page			-0.448 (0.511)	-0.415 (0.513)
Constant	-0.733 (0.856)	-0.693 (0.831)	-0.240 (1.069)	-0.264 (1.066)
Observations	143	143	143	143
Wald $\chi^2$	7.84	11.56	21.33	22.52
P-Value	0.449	0.239	0.006	0.007
Log pseudolikelihood	-92.853	-91.202	-59.344	-59.273
Proportional Reduction in Error	0.18	0.27	0.111	0.111

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

my second model for feminine identity in the issue section, adding in the interaction term only slightly changed my results by decreasing the significance of the variable for being Republican.

In the interactive model, neither competitive races nor the interaction term, for Republican female candidates in competitive races, are significant.<sup>12</sup>

### **4.3 Women's Interests**

In the 2014 midterm election, 41% of Democrats and 17% of Republicans candidates mentioned women's interests in their biographies. The differences between the relationship of party and mentioning women's interests in the biography section is significant at the 0.05 level.<sup>13</sup> Among candidates in competitive races, only two out of the 14 Republicans in competitive races mentioned anything having to do with women's specific interests or issues. The relationship between being a Republican female candidate and mentioning women's interests in the biography section was not significant compared with the three other categories. In contrast, 12 out of the 26 (46%) Democrats in competitive races talked about women's issues in their biography pages. This relationship was significant compared with Democrat and Republican female candidates in noncompetitive races and Republican female candidates in competitive races. In their issue sections, 33% of female Republican candidates mentioned women's interests in conjunction with their general issue discussion compared with 63% of Democrats. This is a significant relationship. Six of the fourteen (42%) Republican candidates in competitive races mentioned it and 19 out of the 26 (73%) Democrat candidates in competitive races mentioned women's issues. Neither of these relationships are significant at the 0.05 level.

### **4.4 Women's Interests Regression Results**

For the discussion of women's issues in the biography, Republican is negatively signed. This means that being Republican is related to a lower likelihood of mentioning women's issues in the biography section. This provides some support for my hypothesis that, all else equal,

---

<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that the N for these two models, 143, is slightly smaller than my total population. This is because several candidates did not have issue sections.

<sup>13</sup> Again, I used a chi-squared test since the variable for women's interests is a dichotomous variable.

Democrat female candidates will be more likely to talk about women's interests and issues since they have "ownership" of these issues. However, this relationship is not significant at traditional levels. My hypothesis that Republican female candidates in competitive races will be more likely

**Table 2: Women's Interests in the Biography and Issue Sections**

Variables	Women's Interests in the Biography		Women's Interests in Issue Sections	
	Coefficient		Coefficient	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Republican	-0.549 (0.458)	-0.687 (0.496)	-1.229*** (0.385)	-1.130*** (0.430)
Republican*Competitive		1.032 (1.566)		-0.677 (1.235)
Competitive	0.518 (0.760)	0.339 (0.785)	0.647 (0.644)	0.849 (0.754)
House Race	-2.302*** (0.746)	-2.286*** (0.742)	0.0455 (0.791)	0.0461 (0.807)
Incumbent	1.752*** (0.459)	1.805*** (0.463)	-0.570 (0.422)	-0.610 (0.430)
Minority	0.200 (0.451)	0.163 (0.456)	-0.346 (0.414)	-0.329 (0.415)
Campaign Money	-1.17e-06*** (4.02e-07)	-1.18e-06*** (4.03e-07)	1.51e-07 (3.62e-07)	1.62e-07 (3.68e-07)
Ideology	0.624 (0.390)	0.658* (0.390)	-0.424 (0.358)	-0.444 (0.361)
Women's Interests in Issue Sect.	0.984** (0.391)	0.989** (0.392)		
Women's Interests in Biography			1.014** (0.403)	1.025** (0.404)
Constant	0.379 (0.795)	0.358 (0.794)	0.511 (0.853)	0.500 (0.868)
Observations	162	162	162	162
Wald $\chi^2$	35.85	37.45	22.95	23.58
P-value	0.00	0.00	0.003	0.005
Log pseudolikelihood	-86.174	-85.996	-99.642	-99.513
Proportional Reduction in Error	0.09	0.108	0.186	0.159

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

to talk about women's issues than Republican female candidates in noncompetitive races or Democrat female candidates in competitive races is not confirmed. In my second model for women's interest in the biography section, the coefficient for the interaction between being

Republican and running in a competitive district (Republican\*Competitive) is negative. It is also not significant at traditional levels.

Some of my control variables are significant. Of note, running in a House race is related to a lower likelihood of mentioning women's issues in one's biography. Also, being an incumbent increases the likelihood of talking about women's issues in one's biographies. Having less campaign money is also related to a higher likelihood of talking about women's issues. Finally, candidates that mentioned women's interests and issues in their issue section significantly more likely to talk about women's interests and issues in their biography pages. All four of these results are significant at the 0.01 level.

My second dependent variable, mentioning women's interests or issues in the issue section, had somewhat similar results. Again, Republican was negatively signed – meaning that being Democrat is related to a higher likelihood of talking about women's issues in one's general issue discussion. It is significant at the 0.01 level. This provides some support for Hypothesis 1. Again, the interaction variable for Republican female candidates was negatively signed and not significant. This means that, contrary to my hypothesis, being Republican female candidates in competitive districts is related to a lower likelihood that a candidate will mention women's issues in her issue section. Finally, mentioning women's issues in the biography pages is significantly related to mentioning women's interests and issues in the issue pages.

#### **4.5 Feminine Trait Strategy: Empathy**

A majority of the women in my sample used empathy as a trait strategy. 98% of Republican women in my sample and 87% of Democrat women. 92% of Republican female

candidates running in competitive races used an empathetic strategy. All of the Democrat women running in competitive districts used an empathetic strategy.<sup>14</sup>

I expected that Democrat female candidates would be more likely to pursue a congruent “feminine” strategy and use an empathetic trait strategy. However, my logit model shows that this is not the case. In this model, Republican is significant and positively signed – implying that being Republican is related to a higher likelihood of talking about personal details such as mentioning one’s husband and children. In this model, competitiveness is not significant.

The interactive model slightly changed my results. The interaction term Republican\*Competitive is negative and significant at the 0.01 level. This means that Republican female candidates in competitive districts are less likely to use empathy as a trait than Democrat female candidates in noncompetitive races (the baseline comparison group). Including the interaction term made the variable for competitive races significant at the 0.01 level – meaning that Democrat female candidates in competitive districts are have a higher likelihood of using empathy. The variable Republican, which in this model represents Republican female candidates in noncompetitive races, is also positively signed and significant.

These results do not support my second hypothesis. I expected that Republican female candidates in competitive races would be more likely to use empathy as a trait strategy than Republican female candidates in noncompetitive races or Democrat female candidates in competitive races. These results are the opposite.

#### **4.6 Feminine Trait Strategy: Bipartisanship**

Consistent with my expectation, Democrat female candidates were more likely to pursue a bipartisan trait strategy. 42% of Democrat female candidates mentioned bipartisanship

---

<sup>14</sup> I used a chi-squared to test the significance of these relationships. This relationship between party and using an empathetic strategy was statistically significant. For candidates in competitive races, being Republican or Democrat was not statistically significant.

compared with 29% of Republican female candidates/ Democrat female candidates running in competitive districts were much more likely pursue this strategy than other candidates. 69% of these candidates talked about being bipartisan or “working across party lines” versus 42% of Republican female candidates in competitive races.<sup>15</sup>

My model for bipartisanship did not reveal many significant findings. Party is significant at the 0.05 level and negatively signed in my first model. This provides slight support

**Table 3: Logit Regression of Trait Strategies**

Variables	Empathy		Bipartisanship	
	Coefficients		Coefficients	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Republican	2.145** (1.047)	30.46*** (2.124)	-0.837** (0.404)	-0.634 (0.443)
Republican*Competitive		-96.35*** (5.493)		-1.770 (1.674)
Competitive	2.203 (1935)	51.30*** (2.612)	1.325* (0.718)	1.723* (0.939)
Incumbent	0.482 (0.708)	0.425 (0.745)	0.234 (0.426)	0.152 (0.425)
Minority	-0.175 (0.57)	-0.117 (0.583)	-0.521 (0.434)	-0.476 (0.431)
Campaign Money	-8.88e-07 (8.36e-07)	-1.19e-06 (1.01e-06)	3.97e-07 (3.92e-07)	4.21e-07 (3.82e-07)
Ideology			0.428 (0.366)	0.378 (0.369)
House Race			-0.431 (0.926)	-0.53 (0.936)
Constant	1.792*** (0.471)	1.78*** (0.51)	-0.334 (1.032)	-0.326 (1.026)
Observations	147	147	162	162
Wald $\chi^2$	13.47	1181.44	19.18	19.68
P-Value	0.193	0.00	0.008	0.12
Log pseudolikelihood	-44.126	-39.583	-95.32	-
Proportional Reduction in Error <sup>16</sup>	NA	NA	0.147	0.198

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

<sup>15</sup> I used a chi-squared test to check statistical significance. The relationship between party and using a bipartisan trait strategy was not significant at the 0.05 level. The relationship for Democrat female candidates in competitive districts was significant but not significant for Republican female candidates.

<sup>16</sup> I was not able to report the proportional reduction in error because the dependent variable lacked variation.

for my hypothesis that Democrat female candidates will more likely than Republicans to emphasize bipartisanship since it is a female leadership trait. The variable for competitiveness is positive and significant at the 0.1 level. This provides some support for Hypothesis 3, which expected that female candidates in competitive races would be more likely to emphasize bipartisanship. Including the interaction term did not change the signs of my variables, but it did make Republican no longer significant and decreased the significance of competitiveness. The variable for Republican female candidates running in competitive districts was not significant. The coefficient is negatively signed - contrary to hypothesis 2. One possible explanation for this is that Republican voters may be less supportive than Democrat voters of candidates that pursue compromise, and thus Republican candidates will be less likely to emphasize bipartisanship and compromise as traits.

#### **4.7 Discussion**

The results of this study are mixed and do not fully support my expectations. I expected that Democrat female candidates would be more likely to mention their identity as women, talk about women's issues and pursue feminine trait strategies. The results of my logit regression show little difference between Republican and Democrat female candidates in their decision to highlight their identity as women. I expected that Democrat female candidates would be more likely to emphasize this identity, however, that was not the case. Perhaps one explanation is that Republican voters are less hostile toward Republican female candidates than often portrayed by the media or reported in earlier studies (Dolan 2014).

My results do show that Democrat female candidates are more likely than Republican female candidates to mention women's issues and interests in their biographies and issue sections. This finding is consistent with Hypothesis 1. I believe that this difference between

Democrat and Republican female candidates is due to the Democrat Party's advantage among female voters and its support for abortion rights. The finding that Democrat women are more likely to mention women's interests in their general issue consistent with that of Gershon (2008).

I found that Republicans and Democrats differed in their trait strategies. I hypothesized that Democrats would be more likely to pursue a female trait strategy and construct messages that highlight their empathy and bipartisanship. I found that Republican candidates were actually more likely to have an empathy trait strategy present in their website. One of the explanations for this could be the way that I coded empathy. Using Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin's (2010) measure, I measured empathy by whether or not the candidate talked about her family, children, spouse or some other personal details. Perhaps Republican female candidates are more likely to talk about their children and husband than Democrats because of the Republican Party's association with traditional family structure and values (Stalsburg 2010). Maybe Republican female candidates feel a need to reassure their constituents that they have a traditional family life (Schreiber 2012:557).

My hypothesis about Republican female candidates running in competitive districts did not hold up under further scrutiny. Though my Chi-squared test showed that Republican female candidates in competitive races were more likely to mention their identity as women, my logit models show that Republican women running in competitive races were not significantly different from other women. Running in a competitive race did not increase the likelihood that a Republican female candidate would talk about women's issues or emphasize a feminine identity. The only significant result was that being a Republican female candidate was negatively related to the probability that a candidate would use an empathetic trait strategy. One explanation for this is that talking about one's family or mentioning personal details can be a risky strategy according to Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin (2010). By emphasizing personal details, a candidate



can detract from their overall appearance of professionalism. Perhaps in competitive races, where the stakes are higher, Republican female candidates are more likely to focus on emphasizing other aspects of their experience and identity. Overall, these findings imply that Republican female candidates are sticking closely to their party strengths rather than seeking to score points by appealing to voters in the middle.

There are several limits to this study. The small size of my sample is one of the main limitations of this study. Since there are only 51 Republican female candidates in my sample, it is difficult to draw strong conclusions about their campaign behavior. This is even truer of female Republicans in competitive districts. A study that includes a larger number of women running in competitive districts would be able to draw much stronger conclusions about the ways in which party and competitiveness impact the message choices of Republican female candidates. Another limitation of this study is that it only looks at one election and therefore the results may be time bound to the 2014 election. Future research could address this problem by including data from several elections.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This paper sought to further our understanding of the ways in which party affiliation and race competitiveness impact how female candidates campaign “as women.” Not very much is known about the campaign behavior of Republican women. This is a problem which future scholarship should seek to address. The literature on women in politics suggests that, given the conflict between party and gender stereotypes, Republican female candidates face more challenges in constructing their campaign messages. At the same time, this conflict can also give Republican women greater choice in how they construct their messages to appeal to different groups of voters. By studying the communication choices that Republican female candidates make in their campaigns, we can better understand how they view and navigate the challenges

presented by gender and party stereotypes. As the number of Republican women elected to Congress continues to lag behind that of Democrat women, scholars also have the opportunity to examine and perhaps identify what types of campaign strategies work for Republican female candidates.

## WORKS CITED

- Alexander, Deborah, and Kristi Andersen. 1993. "Gender as a Factor in the Attribution of Leadership Traits." *Political Research Quarterly* 46: 527-45.
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, James M. Snyder Jr., and Charles Stewart III. 2001. "Candidate Positioning in U.S. House Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 45(1):136-59.
- Banwart, Mary Christine. "Gender and Candidate Communication: Effects of Stereotypes in the 2008 Election." *American Behavioral Scientist* 54, no. 3 (2010): 265-283.
- Baumgarten, Britta and Jonas Grauel. 2009. "The Theoretical Potential of Website and Newspaper Data for Analysing Political Communication Processes." *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 34: 94-121.
- Benoit, Pamela J., and William L. Benoit. 2005. "Criteria for Evaluating Political Campaign Webpages." *Southern Communication Journal* 70 (3): 230-247.
- Burrell, Barbara. 1994. *A Woman's Place Is in the House: Campaigning for Congress in the Feminist Era*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Bystrom, Dianne G., Terry Robertson, Mary Christine Banwart, and Lynda Lee Kaid, eds. 2004. *Gender and Candidate Communication: VideoStyle, WebStyle, NewStyle*. New York: Routledge.
- Chang, Ailsa. "Women on Capitol Hill Reach Across Party Lines to Get Things Done." *National Public Radio*. <http://www.npr.org/2014/05/08/310630792/women-on-capitol-hill-may-be-better-at-crossing-party-lines>. Accessed 7/26/15
- Chong, Dennis, and James N. Druckman. 2011. "Identifying frames in political news." In *Sourcebook for Political Communication Research*, eds Erik P. Bucy and R. Lance Holbert. New York: Routledge: 238-67.
- Cooks Political Report. "2014 Senate Race Ratings for October 17<sup>th</sup> 2014." <http://cookpolitical.com/senate/charts/race-ratings/7937>. Accessed July 17, 2015.
- . "2014 House Race Rating for October 17<sup>th</sup> 2014." <http://cookpolitical.com/house/charts/race-ratings/7957>. Accessed July 17, 2015.
- Darcy, R., Susan Welch, and Janet Clark. 1994. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. *Women, Elections and Representation*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Dittmar, Kelly. 2015. *Navigating Gendered Terrain: Stereotypes and Strategy in Political Campaigns*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

- Dodson, Debra L. 2006. *The Impact of Women in Congress*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dolan, Kathleen. 2004. "The Impact of Candidate Sex on Evaluations of Candidates for the US House of Representatives." *Social Science Quarterly* 85.1: 206-217.
- . 2005. "Do Women Candidates Play to Gender Stereotypes? Do Men Candidates Play to Women? Candidate Sex and Issues Priorities on Campaign Websites." *Political Research Quarterly* 58.1: 31-44.
- . 2014. *When Does Gender Matter?: Women Candidates and Gender Stereotypes in American Elections*. Oxford University Press.
- Druckman, Jamie, Martin Kifer and Michael Parkin. 2009. "Campaign Communications in U.S. Congressional Elections." *American Political Science Review* 103: 343-366.
- Druckman, Jamie, Cari Lynn Hennessy, Martin J. Kifer, and Michael Parkin. 2010. "Issue Engagement on Congressional Candidate Websites (2002-2006)." *Social Science Computer Review* 28: 3-23.
- Fenno, Richard. 1977. "U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies: An Exploration." *The American Political Science Review* 71 (3): 883-917.
- . 1978. *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Co.
- Fox, Richard L., and Jennifer L. Lawless. "Family structure, sex-role socialization, and the Decision to Run for Office." *Women & Politics* 24.4 (2003): 19-48.
- Fox, Richard L. and Eric. R.A.N. Smith. 1998. "The Role of Candidate Sex in Voter Decision-Making." *Political Psychology* 19 (June) 405-419.
- Fridkin, Kim L. and Gina Serignese Woodall. 2005. "Different Portraits, Different Leaders? Gender Differences in U.S. Senators' Presentation of Self." In *Women and Elective Office: Past Present and Future*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Sue Thomas and Clyde Wilcox, eds.
- Fulton, Sarah A., et al. 2006. "The Sense of a Woman: Gender, Ambition, and the Decision to run for Congress." *Political Research Quarterly* 59.2: 235-248.
- Fulton, Sarah A. 2012. "Running Backwards and in High Heels: The Gendered Quality Gap and Incumbent Electoral Success." *Political Research Quarterly* 65.2: 303-314.
- Gershon, Sarah. 2008. "Communicating Female and Minority Interests Online: A Study of Web Site Issue Discussion among Female, Latino, and African American Members of Congress." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 13(2):120-40.
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor.

- Greenhouse, Emily. "The Numbers Don't Lie: Women Make More Effective Legislators Than Men." *Bloomberg Politics*. <http://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2015-02-20/the-numbers-don-t-lie-women-make-more-effective-legislators-than-men>. Accessed July 26, 2015.
- Greenlee, Jill. 2014. *The Political Consequences of Motherhood*. University of Michigan Press.
- Gulati, Girish. 2004. "Members of Congress and Presentation of Self on the World Wide Web." *Press/Politics* 9 (1): 22-40.
- Hayes, Danny. 2011. "When Gender and Party Collide: Stereotyping in Candidate Trait Attribution." *Politics & Gender* 7: 133-165
- . 2005. Candidate Qualities through a Partisan Lens: A Theory of Trait Ownership. *American Journal of Political Science* 49 (4): 908-923.
- Herrnson, Paul, J. Celeste Lay, and Atiya Kai Stokes. 2003. "Women Running 'As Women': Candidate Gender, Campaign-Issues, and Voter-Targeting Strategies." *Journal of Politics* 65 (February): 244-255.
- Huddy, Leonie, and Nayda Terkildsen. 1993a. "Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates." *American Journal of Political Science* 37 (February): 119-147.
- . 1993b. "The Consequences of Gender Stereotypes for Women Candidates at Different Levels and Types of Office." *Political Research Quarterly* 46 (September): 503-525.
- Iyengar, Shanto, and Adam F. Simon. 2000. "New Perspectives and Evidence on Political Communication and Campaign Effects." *Annual Review of Psychology* 51.1: 149-169.
- Jamieson, Kathleen Hall. 1995. *Beyond the Double Bind*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kunovich, Sheri, and Amanda Wall. "Internet Autobiographies: Female Politicians' Representations of Gender." *Research in Political Sociology* 20 (2012): 49-72.
- Kahn, Kim Fridkin. 1996. *The Political Consequences of Being a Woman*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- King, David C., and Richard E. Matland. 2003. "Sex and the Grand Old Party: An Experimental Investigation of the Effect of Candidate Sex on Support for a Republican Candidate." *American Politics Research* 31: 595-612.
- Koch, Jeffrey. 2000. "Do Voters Apply Ideological Gender Stereotypes to Senate Candidates?" *Journal of Politics*.
- . 2002. "Gender stereotypes and Citizens' Impressions of House candidates' Ideological Orientations." *American Journal of Political Science* (2002): 453-462.
- Lawless, Jennifer, and Pearson, Kathryn. 2008. "The Primary Reason for Women's

- Underrepresentation? Reevaluating Conventional Wisdom." *The Journal of Politics* 70 (January): 67-82.
- Lawless, Jennifer and Richard Fox. 2005. *It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lawrence, Regina G., and Melody Rose. 2010. *Hillary Clinton's Race for the White House: Gender Politics and the Media on the Campaign Trail*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- McDermott, Monika L. 1997. "Voting Cues in Low-Information Elections: Candidate Gender as a Social Information Variable in Contemporary United States Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* (1997): 270-283.
- Niven, David and Jeremy Zilber. 2001a. "How Does She Have Time for Kids and Congress? Views on Gender and Media Coverage from House Offices." In *Women and Congress: Running, Winning and Ruling*. Karen O'Connor, ed. New York: The Haworth Press, Inc.
- . 2001b. "Do Women and Men in Congress Cultivate Different Images? Evidence from Congressional Web Sites." *Political Communication* 18: 395-405.
- Panagopoulos, Costas. Ed. 2009. *Politiking Online: The Transformation of Election Campaign Communication*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Petrocik, John. 1996. "Issue-Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study." *American Journal of Political Science* 40: 825-850.
- Pew Research Center, The. 2008. "Revisiting the Mommy Wars After Palin: Politics, Gender and Parenthood." Washington, DC: The Pew Research Center.
- Sanbonmatsu, Kira. 2002. "Gender Stereotypes and Vote Choice." *American Journal of Political Science* (2002): 20-34.
- . 2004. *Democrats, republicans, and the politics of women's place*. Scholastic.
- Sanbonmatsu, Kira, and Kathleen Dolan. "Do Gender Stereotypes Transcend Party?" *Political Research Quarterly* 62.3 (2009): 485-494.
- Sapiro, Virginia, et al. 2009. "Gender, context, and television advertising: A comprehensive analysis of 2000 and 2002 House races." *Political Research Quarterly*.
- Schneider, Monica C. Forthcoming. "Gender-Based Strategies in Candidate Websites." *Journal of Political Marketing*.
- Schwindt-Bayer, Leslie A., and William Mishler. "An Integrated Model of Women's Representation." *Journal of Politics* 67.2 (2005): 407-428.
- Schaffner, Brian F. 2005. "Priming Gender: Campaigning on Women's Issues in US Senate

- Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 49.4: 803-817.
- Shames, Shauna. 2003. "The 'Un-Candidates: 'Gender and Outsider Signals in Women's Political Advertisements." *Women & Politics* 25(1/2); 115-147.
- Schreiber, Ronnee. "Mama Grizzlies Compete for Office." *New Political Science* 34.4 (2012): 549-563.
- Swers, Michele L. 2005. "Connecting descriptive and substantive representation: An analysis of Sex Differences in Cosponsorship Activity." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 30.3 (2005): 407-433.
- .2002. *The Difference Women Make: The Policy Impact of Women in Congress*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Stalsburg, Brittany L. 2010. "Voting for Mom: the Political Consequences of Being a Parent for Male and Female Candidates." *Politics & Gender* 6: 373-404.
- Stanyer, James. 2008. "Elected representatives, Online Self-presentation and the Personal Vote: Party, Personality and Webstyles in the United States and United Kingdom." *Information, Community & Society* 11 (3): 414-432.
- Thomas, Sue and Clyde Wilcox, eds. 2005. *Women and Elective Office: Past, Present, and Future*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Thomsen, DM. 2014a. "Ideological Moderates Won't Run: How Party Fit Matters for Partisan Polarization in Congress." *The Journal of Politics*.
- .2014b. "The Complete Makeover of Republican Congresswomen, 1980-2010." Paper prepared for presentation at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, April 2014, Chicago, IL.
- Weisman, Jonathan and Jennifer Steinhauer. 2013. "Senate Women Lead in Effort to Find Accord." *New York Times* (October 14). Accessed 7/26/15.
- Winter, Nicholas JG. 2010. "Masculine Republicans and feminine Democrats: Gender and Americans' Explicit and Implicit images of the Political Parties." *Political Behavior* 32.4: 587-618.
- Witt, Linda, Glenna Matthews, and Karen M. Paget. 1995. *Running as a woman: Gender and power in American politics*. Simon and Schuster.
- Xenos, Michael A., and Kirsten A. Foot. 2005. "Politics as usual, or politics unusual? Position taking and dialogue on campaign websites in the 2002 US elections." *Journal of Communication* 55 (1): 169-185.

### APPENDIX: CONTENT ANALYSIS CODE SHEET

<u>Candidate Description</u>
Name:
State and District
House or Senate? (House = 1, Senate = 0)
Sex (1= female, 0 = male)
Party (Republican = 1, Democrat = 0)
Incumbent? (Incumbent = 1, Challenger = 0)
Open Seat? (1 = Open Seat)
Race Competitiveness (Measure based upon the Cook Political Report) 1= Competitive, 0 = Not Competitive
Amount of \$ spent by the campaign
Includes Bio Section
Includes Issue Section
African American? (1= yes, 0 = No)
Latino? (1= yes, 0 = No)
Asian? (1 = yes, 0 = No)
Pacific Islander? ( 1= yes, 0 = No)
Feminine Identity in Bio: 1 = Mention; 0 = No Mention (Ex: “As a mother...; “As a woman”; “As the first woman...)
Feminine Interests in Bio Section (Ex: “I care about women’s issues...; “I help women in this way” 1 = Mention; 0 = No Mention
*Empathy Trait Strategy 1 = Mention; 0 = No Mention Does candidate mention her spouse, children, or provide other personal details (hobbies, names or occupations of parents or siblings?) <small>*Measurement used by Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009.</small>
Bipartisan Trait Strategy 1 = Mention; 0 = No Mention Does the candidate talk about “working across the aisle,” cooperation between parties, or being bipartisan? 1 = mention; 0 = no mention



**“As a mother or woman I am qualified to talk about...”**

Feminine Interests in Issue Section

Does candidate include a “women’s issues”? Does the candidate mention women’s interests in other issue sections?

Ex: “I support the ACA because it does not allow gender discriminaton”

1 = mention; 0 = no mention