The Effects of Gender-Bending on Candidate Evaluations *

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Running Head [Gender Bending on Candidate Evaluations]

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BIOGRAPHY:

Monica C. Schneider is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Miami University (OH). Additional work on gender and racial stereotypes has appeared in Political Psychology (with Angela Bos) and Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin (with Elizabeth Brown and Amanda Diekman). Monica has co-sponsored (with Angela Bos) an NSF-funded conference entitled New Research on Gender in Political Psychology (http://genderandpolipsych.com/). Her other interests include the gender gap in political attitudes and teaching and assessing quantitative literacy.
ABSTRACT

A candidate’s gender affects vote choice, but the manner in which candidates can influence the effects of their gender is not well understood. I address candidates’ strategies based on gender stereotypes; that is, how voters are influenced by rhetoric that is either consistent (gender-reinforcing) or inconsistent (gender-bending) with gender stereotypes. This is particularly important because of women’s underrepresentation in American politics. Employing an experimental design, I found that male and female candidates who used gender-bending rhetoric were able to overturn stereotypes by persuading and priming voters. Male candidates were particularly successful. This was contrary to prior findings that consistency – at least in terms of party - is a superior strategy. These results have important implications for understanding how gender stereotypes evolve throughout a campaign to influence voters.

KEYWORDS: women candidates, gender stereotypes, candidate sex, campaign strategy, candidate websites
A candidate’s gender affects vote choice, but the manner in which candidates can influence the effects of their gender on vote choice is not well understood. I focus here on the “strategic attempts” (McGraw 2003, 395) that candidates might use throughout a campaign to emphasize favorable gender stereotypes or overcome disadvantageous gender stereotypes (Schaffner 2005). In the analogous area of party stereotypes, reinforcing party stereotypes – also referred to as claiming “issue ownership” - is found to be the superior strategy for focusing voters’ attention towards favorable issues and winning elections (Petrocik 1996). Indeed, a candidate might strategically reinforce stereotypes favorable to his or her gender or, alternatively, engage in “gender-bending” (i.e., commandeering favorable stereotypes of the opposite gender). However, the effects of gender-based strategies on vote choice are unknown. Therefore, the present study seeks to understand a candidate’s ability to alter voter perceptions and, ultimately, vote choice, by reinforcing gender stereotypes or by bending gender stereotypes.

Little is known about the most successful campaign strategy as related to gender stereotypes. It is important because women are significantly underrepresented in all levels of government (CAWP 2009). Voters use a candidate’s gender as a cue to make inferences about the candidate’s character traits, beliefs, and positions on gender-related policies and to choose their representatives (Cook 1998; Paolino 1995; Zipp and Plutzer 1985). Therefore, closing the gap between successful male and female candidates may depend on a female candidate’s choice to either reinforce or bend gender stereotypes, and her ability to adequately convey the chosen message. A potential risk to the female candidate electing to bend gender stereotypes is that implementing such a strategy can cause voters to have a difficult time reconciling their stereotypical expectations with conflicting information provided by the campaign. In sum, a
better understanding of strategic choices and their success attracting votes can help candidates and scholars address the underrepresentation problem.

Gender Effects in a Strategic Environment

Campaign strategy research suggests that the most successful strategy for candidates is priming issues that fit with voters’ candidate stereotypes (Druckman, Jacobs, and Ostermeier 2004; Petrocik 1996). Indeed, a particularly successful strategy is an “issue ownership strategy,” when candidates highlight issues on which their party is seen as more competent (Petrocik 1996). The idea of “reinforcing” stereotypes with respect to gender is comparable to the idea of emphasizing party-owned issues. Stereotypes of female candidates are that they are more competent than males at handling issues such as education, health care, and helping the poor (e.g., Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Sapiro 1981). Male candidates are stereotyped as more competent than females to handle the military, terrorism, crime, and the economy. A limited amount of research shows that a female candidate pursuing a strategy congruent with her gender is successful (Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003).

With respect to gender, candidates will often invoke an issue ownership strategy with respect to gender by focusing on issues that are congruent with gender stereotypes, a “resonance model,” to reinforce gender stereotypes and capitalize on existing voter perceptions of their gender-stereotypical strengths (e.g., Dolan 2005; Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003; Iyengar et al. 1997; Kahn 1996). Many female candidates adopt this strategy – either because of past experiences (such as a job) with issues stereotypically associated with women candidates or because a particular issue environment might favor the stereotypical expertise of female candidates (Iyengar et al. 1997). Analyses of strategies on candidate websites and campaign
materials give credence to the idea that this kind of tactic occurs (Fox 1997; Kahn 1996; Panagopoulos 2004).

However, under some circumstances, candidates are *gender-bending* - or employing a strategy that is inconsistent with their gender stereotypes. Indeed, the use of issue ownership strategies have been shown to be limited by several factors (Druckman, Jacobs, and Ostermeier 2004). In particular, candidates must respond to exogenous events and particular issue environments where male stereotypical issues are more important to voters, such as during wartime (Lawless 2004). These incongruent strategies are of particular interest. In using such a strategy, campaigns are deviating from the status quo of the typical issue ownership or gender-reinforcing strategy. The main purpose of an incongruent strategy from the campaign’s point of view (in addition to winning more votes than an opponent) is to receive high ratings for the candidate on all of the incongruent dimensions while retaining the advantages of the typical female candidate.

**Hypotheses**

I expect gender-bending will affect voters via the mechanisms of persuasion and priming. First, a gender-bending strategy of emphasizing issues can affect voters’ initial evaluations via persuasion. Persuasion occurs when rhetoric modifies the evaluation of a politician on a particular issue (Druckman and Holmes 2003). For example, a female candidate could convince voters that she is competent at handling a military crisis.

We know from prior research that voters form initial expectations or stereotypes of a candidate’s issue competency based on the candidate’s gender; these initial expectations are difficult to alter because stereotypes are powerful and pervasive. Once people categorize a target into a group (like “male candidate” or “female candidate”), they resist changing that
categorization (Fiske, Lin, and Neuberg 1999; Fiske and Neuberg 1990). Similarly, voters have been shown to use party stereotypes to determine a candidate’s issue positions, despite receiving information that conflicts with party stereotypes (Rahn 1993).

Nevertheless, new or *individuating* information influences voters’ evaluations. If voters cannot reconcile their ideas with the new information coming from the campaign that is incongruent with their stereotype, they are likely to abandon their stereotype altogether and rely on the accessible information coming from the campaign (Fiske and Neuberg 1990; Zaller 1992). Using this theory, a female candidate, by discussing male-stereotypical issues, is likely to be able to persuade voters to abandon their stereotype that women candidates are not good at handling these issues. In this way, voters will use the information coming from the candidate instead of gender stereotypes to determine their evaluation of her ability to handle male-stereotypical issues. I hypothesize that incongruent rhetoric, in comparison to congruent rhetoric, from either a male or female candidate will persuade voters to change their evaluations of how well the candidate can handle particular counter-stereotypical issues.

I explore the possibility of priming as a second way that incongruent rhetoric will influence voters. Priming “occurs when an individual changes the *criteria* on which he or she bases an overall evaluation.” (Druckman and Holmes 2003, p 757). For example, a candidate’s focus on education could result in voters’ use of their evaluation of the candidate on the education issue more than other issues in their final determination. Priming has been shown to occur when voters pursue an issue ownership strategy. In particular, Petrocik’s (1996) analysis of the 1980 Presidential race shows that Reagan’s focus on Republican issues like the economy and foreign relations was successful; these issues were used more by voters in their choice.
Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of priming issues in a campaign setting (e.g., Bartels 2006; Druckman 2004; Johnston et al. 1992).

I therefore hypothesize that gender-based strategies will influence voter evaluations in the same way. That is, incongruent rhetoric will likely result in voters using incongruent issues as the criteria used in a summary evaluation (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Kinder 2003). For example, when a woman candidate emphasizes the military (an incongruent issue for her), the prominence of military issues in voters’ evaluations should increase, compared to a congruent candidate.

Design, Participants, Procedure, and Key Measures

*Design*

To test my hypotheses regarding persuasion and priming, I designed an experiment in which participants evaluated one fictitious candidate – either a female or a male candidate who utilized either a gender-congruent or gender-incongruent strategy on his or her web site. The design is summarized in Table 1. In particular, participants viewed the web site of Patricia or Tom Bevell who was running in a primary for United States Senator in the state of Michigan. The office of US Senator was used because male stereotypical issues (i.e., national security) are more common at this level of office, compared to local office (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b). The state of Michigan was ideal because it was a Midwestern state similar to the one where the research occurred, yet participants were unlikely to suspect that the candidate was fictitious.

[Insert Table 1 About Here]

Each web site had 13 pages: an introduction which linked to the text of two speeches by the candidate; a biography; an issues summary page which linked to five detailed issue pages; an endorsements list; volunteer opportunities; and a contribution solicitation. The main manipulation was the issues *mentioned* on the site; I did not ascribe to the candidate a clear
position on these issues. The male-stereotypical issues used on the female-incongruent and the male-congruent sites were issues where men have an advantage over women: corporate crime; economy; and terrorism (e.g., Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Lawless 2004; Sapiro 1981). On the female-congruent (male-incongruent) site, I included three issues on which prior research concluded that women have an advantage over men: improving education and health care, and caring for the elderly (e.g., Alexander and Andersen 1993; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Sapiro 1981). The environment and natural resources were included on both sites because neither men nor women have an advantage on these issues (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Sapiro 1981).

The text of the issues pages is available in Appendix 1.

This experimental design incorporated several calculated decisions. First, an experiment with a fictitious candidate allows the researcher to keep other potential effects constant. Other studies have relied on the technique of using fictitious candidates to understand how particular independent variables influence evaluations of candidates (e.g., Anderson, Lewis, and Baird 2011; Lau and Redlawsk 2006; Lodge, McGraw, and Stroh 1989; Rahn 1993), despite arguments that fictitious candidates might not be sufficiently realistic or externally valid precisely because of the importance of internal validity. A related decision is whether to ascribe party identification to the candidate, since a criticism of the literature on gender stereotypes is the failure to include party (King and Matland 2003; Matland and King 2002) and findings have suggested that party and gender stereotypes might interact (e.g., Dolan 2004; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009). The approach to experimental design that I use here is to establish the importance of independent variables one at a time. Thus, I use a fictitious candidate to identify the effects of gender combined with gender-based strategy that subsequently can lead to further research with additional variables or can be explored in the context of actual campaigns.
Second, participants rated only one candidate. Prior research has established that an opponent and his or her strategy matters (Dolan 2005; Panagopoulos 2004), yet many studies use only one target candidate to obtain voter evaluations without complex comparisons (e.g., Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; but see Lau and Redlawsk 2006). I take advantage of the strength of experimental design by trying to establish a clear pattern on main variables expecting that future research will build upon this design.

Third, I compare incongruent and congruent strategies because these two strategies represent the clearest choices that candidates have. A ‘neutral’ candidate would likely be unrealistic because many important issues in campaigns fall into gender-stereotypical categories. A ‘mixed’ candidate would not offer a clear comparison, though future research should certainly explore degrees of congruence and incongruence. My design follows the design of prior studies in gender research (e.g., Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a) and framing research (e.g., Chong and Druckman 2007) that do not use a true ‘control’ or ‘neutral’ group.

Finally, displaying the information on a mock website is advantageous for several reasons. First, voters and candidates increasingly use websites to receive and distribute information (Bimber and Davis 2003). While candidate websites are not universal, nearly 90% of House and Senate candidates had websites in 2004 (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009). Second, websites offer a largely unfiltered view of candidate strategy (Bimber and Davis 2003; Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009). Third, websites are more prevalent than ever in political campaigns, yet few scholarly studies have systematically examined the effects of the Internet (but see Bimber and Davis 2003).

Displaying information on a website is also useful to correct the deficiencies of prior experimental research that have not incorporated the ways in which campaigns present
information (e.g., Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Matland 1994). In real campaigns, voters read websites, listen to speeches, and see commercials. Indeed, information disseminated by the candidates themselves have a different and potentially positive effect on voters compared to information from others (Bos 2009). To ensure that my research mimicked the campaign environment, I used actual candidate websites as a model based on other work analyzing the content of candidate websites (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009), employed professionals in graphic design and photography to produce the website, and enlisted experienced and realistic actors to portray the candidates. A pre-test of the pictures of the male and female candidate ensured that they were equivalent in being ‘typical’ candidates and in attractiveness. Using a t-test, I found that there was no difference between the male and female candidate on whether the candidate in the photo represented a typical political candidate, t(38)=.29, p=.78. There was also no difference between the male and female candidate on attractiveness, t(38)=1.11, p=.27.

Participants

A total of 187 students at Midwestern university, recruited from political science and psychology courses in November, 2009, were asked if they would participate in a study where they would examine the website of a political candidate. The sample was 49% male, 93% Caucasian (2.7% African-American, 2.1% Asian, and 1% bi- or multi-racial), and an average of 19.4 years old (SD=1.53).

Using student participants raises questions of generalizability. The student sample may differ from the general population as to the students’ potentially higher levels of web use and computer knowledge. However, these differences appear advantageous for studying the effects of rhetoric on the web; in the 2008 cycle, nearly 60% of those under the age of 30 got most of their news from the Internet (Kohut and Keeter 2008). While student samples tend to be more
liberal than the total United States population, the sample is appropriate for generalizing to the audience most likely to use websites. Recent work by Druckman and Kam (2011) argues in favor of using student samples in a situation like this one, because it is a purposive sample that provides an appropriate test.

Procedure

Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to evaluate a candidate’s website. A typed instruction memo randomly assigned them to an experimental condition by directing them to one version of a candidate’s website. Participants were instructed to “browse the website as you normally would browse any website,” which they did for approximately ten minutes, after which they closed the website and completed a questionnaire. Participants were then paid (either five dollars plus a chance to win a gift card or course credit), thanked, and debriefed. 72% of student participants were recruited in their classes and used their own laptop computers. Nearly all students have laptops and bring them to class; however, for the few students who did not have a laptop, the researcher and assistants had laptops available. 28% of participants participated for partial course credit. To check that respondents cooperated in examining the pages of the website, students reported which pages they visited; the average number of pages visited was 7.74 (SD=2.75) out of a possible 13. 97% of participants visited the issues page.

Key Measures

Participants rated how likely they were to vote for the candidate, measured on a 5-point scale ranging from ‘1=extremely unlikely’ to ‘5=extremely likely.’ Participants also rated how well the candidate would handle the issues mentioned on the website (1=’not well at all’ to 4=’very well’). A male-stereotypical issues scale consisted of an average of ratings on handling corporate crime, terrorism, and the economy (α=.75). A female-stereotypical issues scale
consisted of an average of ratings on how well the candidate would handle the educational system, the elderly, and health care (α=.77). On the same scale, participants evaluated the candidate’s ability to handle issues in the interest of women, which were not mentioned on the website but are still associated with female candidates (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a). The women’s issues scale included abortion and the wage gap between men and women (α=.61).

Finally, I asked respondents their ideology, knowledge, interest in politics and frequency of consuming media, and had them rate the importance of each issue. Respondents gave the following demographic characteristics: race, gender, age, and year in school. In order to be confident that the manipulation did not have unintended effects, I confirmed that there were no differences between the male- and female-stereotypical websites in terms of believability or amount of information by comparing mean ratings of these variables across condition. Respondents thought that the site was close to ‘somewhat believable,’ on a 4-point scale ranging from ‘1 - not believable at all’ to ‘4 - very believable’ (M=2.84, SD=.66). T-tests confirmed that this rating did not vary by the candidate gender (t(185)=.12, p=.91) or strategy type (t(185)=1.33, p=.19. Participants reported that they received ‘not very much information,” on a scale that ranged from ‘1 - practically no information at all’ to ‘4 – a lot of information.’ This too did not differ by candidate gender (t(184)=.48, p=.63) or strategy (t(184)=.28, p=.78).

Results and Discussion

**Persuasion on Candidates’ Issue Ratings**

I first tested the hypothesis that gender-incongruent rhetoric would be able to change ratings of each candidate’s competencies. That is, when a candidate emphasizes issues that are not consistent with stereotypes of their own gender, they should be able to persuade respondents. In Table 2, I display the mean ratings for all four candidate combinations on female- and male-
stereotypical issues. Higher means indicate that the candidate was better able to handle the particular issue. I expected to find the incongruent female candidate receiving higher capability ratings on male-stereotypical issues compared to both the congruent female candidate and the incongruent male, neither of whom stressed these issues. If the same rhetoric affects male and female candidates equally, there should be no difference on ratings of male-stereotypical issues for those who mentioned them: the incongruent female and the congruent male.

[Insert Table 2 About Here]

In the first row of Table 2, I report the effects of gender and rhetoric on male-stereotypical issues. As expected, the female candidate persuaded voters that she is competent on non-stereotypical issues. I use t-tests to test the differences between means. Respondents gave the incongruent female candidate a mean rating of 2.54 out of 4 in her ability to handle male-stereotypical issues, far ahead of her congruent female counterpart who received a mean of 1.99 (t(92)=4.16, p<.01). Notably, both the female and male candidate who discussed male-stereotypical issues was rated very similarly on ability to handle these issues (t(88)=.62, p=.54).

I found similar effects on ratings of competency on female-stereotypical issues, reported in the second row of Table 2. The incongruent male candidate, who discussed female stereotypical issues, was able to persuade voters of his competence on those issues, receiving a mean rating of 3.13, which was just .01 shy of the female candidate emphasizing those same issues and therefore not significantly different (t(92)=.08, p=.94). The male incongruent candidate was also able to do better on female-stereotypical issues than his congruent male counterpart, who received a mean of 2.5 (t(88)=5.14, p<.01) and the female-incongruent candidate, who received a mean of 2.7 (t(87)=3.23, p<.01), leading me to conclude that the strategy of the candidate mattered more than his or her gender.
Women’s issues, or issues in the particular interest of women, are important since prior research has found that female candidates are seen as being particularly competent on these issues (e.g., Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a). The stereotype-individuation model predicts that counter-stereotypical information, like that of a female candidate using incongruent rhetoric, can lead voters to abandon their female stereotype, causing the female candidate to lose her advantage on women’s issues. Similar to prior research, I did find a main effect of candidate sex: the female candidate was rated significantly higher than the male candidate on women’s issues regardless of strategy, \( t(181)=3.39, p<.01 \). The means in the third row of Table 2 show that the means for the female candidates, 2.48 and 2.53, are clearly higher than for either male candidate, who scored means of 2.11 and 2.19. In addition, the female candidate loses no ground on women’s issues by using an incongruent strategy; the difference between ratings on women’s issues is the same across strategy \( t(91)=.35, p=.73 \). Moreover, the male candidate does not receive higher ratings on women’s issues simply by employing an incongruent strategy. The comparison between the two male candidates was not significant, \( t(88)=.56, p=.58 \) and the male incongruent candidate was significantly lower than both the congruent \( t(92)=2.25, p<.05 \) and incongruent female candidates \( t(87)=2.82, p<.01 \). These findings suggest that stereotypes are still having an influence on the candidate’s evaluation, despite the fact that the incongruent rhetoric changed evaluations on male-stereotypical issues.

The rhetoric was therefore persuasive and overturned gender stereotypes – when the male or female candidate emphasized issues in either condition, they were evaluated highly on those issues. Strategy seemed to matter more than the gender of the candidate; both candidates were successful by infringing on the other’s stereotypical ground. Still, the highest rating for the female candidate was on female stereotypical issues when she pursued a congruent strategy;
respondents’ average rating on how well she could handle these issues was 3.13 out of 4. In addition, she lost none of her advantage on women’s issues, regardless of condition. The male candidate, in contrast, received the highest ratings on female-stereotypical issues in the incongruent condition, even higher than ratings on male-stereotypical issues in the congruent conditions. This indicates that the male candidate was slightly more persuasive at overturning stereotypes than the female. These findings are initially suggestive that individuating information overturns gender stereotypes, evaluations of female candidates on women’s issues are not affected.

*Priming Issues*

I hypothesized that, when the candidate emphasized certain issues on their website, respondents would use those issues more in their overall evaluations of the candidate. A series of ordered logit regressions with likelihood of voting as the dependent variable tested for the hypothesized patterns. Women’s issues are also included in the model. Table 3 displays the models for each of the four conditions as well as the full regression model. If the hypothesis is correct, the interactions between male or female stereotypical issues and rhetorical strategy should be significant for the male and female candidates.vii

Although randomization in the experimental design means that controls are not necessary, I ran a model using gender, participant knowledge, interest in politics, frequency of using news outlets, race, age, and year in school as controls. I also included an ideological distance rating, calculated by taking the absolute value of the difference between participants’ rating of themselves with ratings of the candidate on a 7-point ideology scale. When adding these controls to the model, the results presented do not change.
As shown in Table 3, the coefficients for male stereotypical issues were positive and significant in every condition except for the female congruent. That is, the only respondents who did not use male stereotypical issues in their vote choice were those who saw the female candidate who emphasized female stereotypical issues. Importantly, male stereotypical issues seem to affect vote choice not only for the female incongruent and male congruent candidates – which was expected because they emphasized these issues - but also for the male incongruent candidate, who emphasized female-stereotypical issues. Respondents use competence ratings of male stereotypical issues in their overall evaluation of the male candidate regardless of whether or not he mentions them. This is an advantage for the male candidate and is suggestive of continued use of a male stereotype. In contrast, female candidates must mention male stereotypical issues in order for them to affect overall vote decision. These conclusions are supported by the lack of significance of the interaction between candidate strategy, candidate sex, and male stereotypical issues in the full model ($\beta=1.08$, $SE=1.20$, $p=.37$) (Column 1, Table 3).

As hypothesized, female stereotypical issues contributed to vote choice only when the female congruent candidate or the male incongruent candidate mentioned them. Female-stereotypical issues were not significant in the other two scenarios. This is confirmed by the significance of the three-way interaction between strategy, candidate sex, and female stereotypical issues (column 1, Table 3). Thus, there are differences between the male and female candidate as to how the female-stereotypical issues affect vote choice when the candidate adopts either a congruent or incongruent strategy.

While the findings for priming on female-stereotypical issues are consistent with the hypothesis, these results are not optimal for female candidates. The female candidate who tries to
gain an advantage on male stereotypical issues loses her advantage on priming her highly rated female-stereotypical issues. In other words, despite the fact that respondents rated the female candidate who pursued an incongruent strategy high on female issues, these issues did not play a large role in their vote choice. The male candidate fares better; regardless of the issues he presents, respondents always use male-stereotypical issues in evaluating him.

Whereas one might expect that women’s issues would play a larger role for the more female-stereotypical candidates, they instead have a larger effect on vote choice in the instances where the candidate – regardless of sex – does not mention female-stereotypical issues. In other words, the three-way interaction between issues in the interest of women, candidate strategy and candidate sex is significant ($\beta=2.95$, $SE=1.19$, $p=.013$).

In sum, the priming hypothesis was confirmed for female stereotypical issues. Voters use female-stereotypical issues in their vote decision when the candidate mentions them, but not when the candidate omits them. The female incongruent candidate succeeds in priming male stereotypical issues. The male candidate primes male-stereotypical issues when he mentions them. When he does not mention them, respondents use them anyway, suggesting that male candidates do not even need to emphasize male-stereotypical issues for voters to use them in candidate evaluations. In this way, male stereotypes may be quite powerful. Female candidates lose an emphasis on female-stereotypical issues when they gender-bend, while male candidates who gender-bend seem to benefit from the most positive stereotypes of both genders.

Combining the Effects of Priming and Persuasion

Thus far, I have demonstrated that incongruent rhetoric can both prime and persuade. To complete the understanding of the effects of gender-based strategies, I answer the question of which candidate is rated the highest when the effects of priming and persuasion are combined by
generating predicted probabilities using Clarify (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000; Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2001). To account for the persuasion effects, I take the means for the candidate on each of the independent variables and input them into the logistic regression in order to account for the priming effects. The results are found in Table 4.ix

[Insert Table 4 About Here]

Contrary to predictions that congruent candidates will be more successful, the female incongruent candidate did better than her female congruent counterpart, mainly because there was a much lower probability that a voter would be extremely or somewhat unlikely to vote for the incongruent female candidate. The incongruent female candidate was less polarizing than the congruent candidate. The incongruent male candidate did far better than his congruent counterpart; indeed the probability of favoring him was higher than any other candidate.

Conclusion

In sum, this research indicates that gender combined with strategic communication from candidates is complex. Specifically, I found that gender-bending strategies are more successful than prior research might predict. In addition, while prior studies look at the impact of candidate gender alone, this study took into consideration the particular strategy that a candidate might pursue and how, specifically, through persuasion and priming, this strategy might affect voters. Using an experimental design with realistic prompts means that strong claims can be made about the causal relationships uncovered.

These data showed that using a strategy inconsistent with gender-stereotypes was successful for both male and female candidates at earning high competency ratings from voters. Importantly, female candidates in a male-stereotypical issue environment were still able to retain some of the advantages of being a female candidate, namely their competency on women’s
issues. Similarly, respondents who viewed a male candidate used male-stereotypical issues in their overall evaluations, even when the male candidate discussed female-stereotypical issues. Individuating information, therefore, overturns many stereotypes but there are still some ways in which the original gender stereotype remains. This outcome is consistent with a theory of stereotyping that posits that individuating information inconsistent with a stereotype might not overturn stereotypes completely, but change only some evaluations (Kunda and Thagard 1996).

This study also demonstrates that both male and female candidates in an issue environment incongruent with their gender stereotypes were able to successfully prime voters on those issues. In fact, perhaps alarmingly for female candidates, the male candidate who mentioned female issues does the best at persuasion and priming and has the highest likelihood that voters will be extremely or somewhat likely to vote for him. The female candidate who mentioned masculine issues was less polarizing than the female candidate mentioning female-stereotypical issues, but did not match the success of the incongruent male candidate.

This finding is contrary to studies that show that candidates will be most successful by pursuing a strategy consistent with existing gender stereotypes (Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003; Petrocik 1996). One potential explanation is that gender stereotypes are dynamic in nature and therefore, respondents will have an easier time accepting gender-bending strategies than strategies that bend party stereotypes. Prior research uses party stereotypes to argue that candidates will be most successful by emphasizing those stereotypes. Yet, party stereotypes have been shown to be fairly consistent over time (Sides 2006), while evidence demonstrates that gender stereotypes appear to be changing over time (Diekman and Eagly 2000). That is, when asked about the future, respondents predict that men will have more feminine qualities and women will have more masculine ones, particularly as women move into roles traditionally
dominated by men (Diekman and Eagly 2000). Thus, while perceivers will default to traditional
gender stereotypes without much information, they might abandon parts of those stereotypes
when faced with new information because it is consistent with their theories that males and
females are changing. In this way, voters seem to have some stereotypes of male and female
candidates that are difficult to abandon (i.e., the stereotype that women candidates are superior at
women’s issues), while other stereotypical evaluations are easily modified.

A second explanation is that male candidates might be seen as more versatile and
competent all around. As a result, not only can male candidates easily persuade on female-typical
issues, but they also are able to prime on those issues while retaining their stereotypical
strengths. Indeed, Ridgeway’s work (Correll and Ridgeway 2003) demonstrates that no matter a
woman’s profession, she will always be lower in status than a male. While studies have rarely
shown blanket discrimination against women candidates (Darcy and Schramm 1977; Ekstrand
and Eckert 1981), the lower status of women may result in more subtle effects on her ability to
handle particular issues such that she will always be rated lower than male candidates.

Future research can add additional factors to understand further the effects of gender-
based strategies. First, in the campaign context, voters are repeatedly exposed to campaign
information and this repeated exposure might make the candidate trying to “bend” her gender
even more believable and successful. Second, there may be limits to how extreme on the
“incongruent” or “congruent” spectrum a candidate can be without alienating voters. Third,
context effects, such as the gender or gender-based strategy of the opposing candidate, are
important for persuasion and priming. Fourth, because male-stereotypical issues may be more
important at higher levels of office (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b) or in a post-9/11 world
(Lawless 2004), gender-based strategies might also vary in effectiveness based on the level of
office. Fifth, repeated calls for examining the interaction between gender and party (Matland and King 2002) become more complicated when considering gender-based strategies. My research suggests that we must consider, for example, female Democrats who try to emphasize competency on military and defense issues (as Hillary Clinton did in her primary bid). Sixth, future research might examine individual-level differences in acceptance or rejection of gender-based strategies. Certainly in a campaign context, awareness of campaign rhetoric is important (Zaller 1992) as is the amount of information that the voter has about the candidate (McDermott 1997, 1998). Those who are moderately aware, but who have less information should be most influenced by strategic communication. The sex of the voter might also play a role in acceptance of campaign messages; indeed, Anderson, Lewis, and Baird (2011) found that men seemed to punish a male candidate for taking a position on an issue that is of importance to women and, therefore, men might be less receptive to male candidates’ incongruent strategies. Similarly, those who have lower liberal or feminist scores on the Attitudes towards Women Scale might also be less receptive to information that is incongruent with gender stereotypes; those with low scores on this scale have already been shown to rate female candidates lower in their competence at handling certain issues (Rosenwasser et al. 1987). Finally, this research design could be extended to include candidates of other races and ethnicities.

The recent candidacies of Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Michele Bachmann underscore the importance of understanding women running for office. To appreciate the political impact of being a female candidate, political science research must consider that novel campaign strategies and rhetoric can manipulate gender expectations. Gender is not static throughout the campaign; indeed, gender stereotypes persist in all aspects of the campaign process. When such gender-based strategies are employed, voters might have a difficult time
using the heuristic of gender stereotypes. This research demonstrates that there are interesting persuasion and priming effects for female and male candidates who choose either a strategy consistent or inconsistent with their gender stereotypes.
References


Table 1: Manipulation Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campaign emphasis on →</th>
<th>Female issues</th>
<th>Male issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender of candidate ↓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female-congruent</td>
<td>Female-incongruent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male-incongruent</td>
<td>Male-congruent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Mean Issue Competency Ratings by Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female Candidate</th>
<th>Male Candidate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female-incongruent</td>
<td>Male-incongruent (Female congruent)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male Stereotypical Issues</td>
<td>2.54 (.10)</td>
<td>2.17 (.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.99 (.09)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Stereotypical Issues</td>
<td>2.70 (.09)</td>
<td>3.13 (.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.13 (.09)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Issues</td>
<td>2.53 (.10)</td>
<td>2.11 (.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.48 (.12)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46</td>
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</table>

Issue Ratings: Cell entries for the issue ratings are an average of scale items (with standard errors in parentheses) that range from 1 (Candidate would handle the issue ‘Not well at all’) to 4 (Candidate would handle the issue ‘Very Well’).
Table 3: Likelihood of Voting and Predicted Probabilities by Candidate Sex and Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full Model</th>
<th>Female Candidate</th>
<th>Male Candidate</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Incongruent</td>
<td>Congruent</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>Candidate</td>
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<td>Male stereotypical Issues</td>
<td>1.60**</td>
<td>(.59)</td>
<td>2.25**</td>
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<td>(.67)</td>
<td>(.54)</td>
<td>3.49**</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(.67)</td>
<td>(.67)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(.76)</td>
<td>-.72</td>
<td>1.02*</td>
<td>(.51)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.56**</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(.76)</td>
<td>(.76)</td>
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<td>(.72)</td>
<td>1.61*</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>(.74)</td>
<td>(.44)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(.74)</td>
<td>(.74)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.98</td>
<td>(3.60)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incongruent Condition</td>
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<td>Incongruent Condition *</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incongruent Condition *</td>
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<td>(.93)</td>
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<td>(.87)</td>
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<td>Women’s Issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female Candidate *</td>
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<td>(.81)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female Candidate *</td>
<td>1.62†</td>
<td>(.92)</td>
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<td>Female stereotypical Issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female Candidate *</td>
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<td>(.84)</td>
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<td>Female Candidate *</td>
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<td>Male stereotypical Issues</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Candidate *</td>
<td>-4.22**</td>
<td>(1.32)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female stereotypical Issues</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Candidate *</td>
<td>2.95*</td>
<td>(1.19)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Incongruent Condition *</td>
<td>_cut1</td>
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<td>.41</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
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<td>5.71</td>
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<td>(1.84)</td>
<td>(1.46)</td>
<td>12.13</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>_cut3</td>
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<td>8.53</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>(1.04)</td>
<td>(1.70)</td>
<td>14.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: Cell entries are ordered logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable, likelihood of voting is measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Extremely Unlikely) to 5 (Extremely Likely). The incongruent male candidate only has three cut points because no respondent chose that they were ‘extremely likely’ to vote for the incongruent male candidate.

†p < .10
* p < .05
** p < .01
Table 4: Predicted Probabilities for Likelihood of Voting for Candidate by Candidate Sex and Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female Candidate</th>
<th>Male Candidate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incongruent</td>
<td>Congruent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>Candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely /Somewhat Unlikely</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither likely nor unlikely</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely/ Somewhat Likely</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incongruent</td>
<td>Congruent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>Candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.50</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A

Issue Page

Female Stereotypical Issues

Supporting Education: Opening the Door to Opportunity

I have made it a priority to work in education and to work closely with the schools in the communities that I serve. I introduced new initiatives to keep schools safe and to help keep kids in school and out of trouble. I’ve volunteered to help keep kids in the classroom and on the playground. I’ve also emphasized the essential role of parental understanding, responsibility, and education. If there’s any magic to kids thriving in school and doing well in life, it’s the magic of parental involvement. We must not turn our backs on the foundation of our future prosperity: education.

Reforming Health Care: Cutting Costs, Expanding Access & Improving Quality

As a private citizen, I went to the State Capitol and helped to get one of the first laws in the country to guarantee minimum 48-hour hospital stays for new moms and their babies in Michigan. I believe every Michigander – and every American – should have access to quality, affordable health care. Michigan already has one of the highest coverage rates in the nation, and there is much that the rest of the nation can learn from us. But Michiganders also face higher health care costs than ever before, and we need our nation’s health care system to be focused on the well-being of patients.

Preserving the Lives of our Elderly

Our nation’s social and economic fabric depends on protecting our elderly. We need to make sure that Medicare and Medicaid are functioning effectively so that our seniors can get the health care and prescription drugs that they need. For generations, our retirees have depended on social security to be a stable help in their retirement. It is our nation’s most successful domestic program, providing an essential safety net and ensuring a decent retirement for elderly Americans who’ve worked hard their whole lives. Social security, Medicare, and Medicaid have provided a crucial safety net and ensure that all Americans can retire with dignity and security. We must preserve our elderly and reform these programs so that they can work for the elderly.

Male Stereotypical Issues

Securing our Nation: Protecting Our National Security at Home & Abroad

Protecting the safety and rights of its people is the first and foremost function of any responsible democratic government. The protection of America’s national security – both at home and abroad – is among the most important responsibilities of our government in Washington. We need to make sure that we succeed at this task. We need to make sure that we
are working to prevent terrorism both here at home and throughout the world. We need to make sure that our military has the equipment they need to prevail at whatever task we give them. We need people in Washington who are willing to do what it takes to protect our nation.

**Growing Our Economy: Delivering Prosperity**

Michigan has always stood for opportunity through hard work. We believe that no matter where you come from, if you work hard, you can have security in your later years. To make the most of this opportunity, we must have an economy that produces good-paying jobs and delivers prosperity. Too many hard-working leaders of good companies now must deal with soaring costs. We need people in Washington who will fight to provide incentives for creating new, good-paying jobs.

**Prosecuting Crime: Protecting Michiganders**

Being fair is as important as being tough. Someone who commits a crime with a computer should be held equally accountable under the law as someone who commits a crime with a crowbar. We need to prioritize the investigation and prosecution of major financial crimes. For example, we must prosecute commercial airline pilots for tax evasion, members of an identity theft ring who stole personal information from hospital patients, and a Michigan Court of Appeals judge who stole more than $400,000 from a trust fund. In addition, spearheading the discussion of identity theft, methamphetamine, and sex offender issues are also important. We must take a more aggressive approach to gun crimes, especially the prosecution of convicted felons who possess guns.

**Neutral Issues**

**Securing Our Energy Future: Promoting Homegrown Resources**

As I travel the state, many of you have shared your concerns about the rising costs of energy. I'm listening to those concerns. Experts say we should get used to these price levels, and not be surprised if they go even higher. We can’t continue down the same energy path that’s got us here. We need a comprehensive energy strategy to get us on a better course to ensure that we continue to promote homegrown resources for the future.

**Conserving Our Air, Water & Land**

Michiganders know that preserving our traditions of fishing and camping requires responsible stewardship over our natural resources. Enjoying our environment is part of who we are as Michiganders. We need a clean environment for recreation. Strong, healthy and prosperous communities in Michigan depend on maintaining our proud heritage of conservation, clean water and clean air. In a state that depends on clean water for our health, our industry and our tourism, we should be able to eat the fish that we catch.
Indeed, evidence shows that female politicians are more likely to represent women’s interests by taking up issues such as equal pay and discrimination far more often than males, regardless of party affiliation (e.g., Carroll 2001).

While some claim persuasion is less common than priming in political campaigns (e.g., Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Chong and Druckman 2007), persuasion still occurs and can affect voters (e.g., Bartels 2006).

The first names are equal in age-perception, intellect, and attractiveness (Kasof 1993).

Because of the obvious overlap between party and gender stereotypes, I chose issues that were more likely to be owned by gender rather than party, based on Petrocik’s (1996) findings of Democrat- and Republican-owned issues.

To improve the believability of the site, I also added endorsements and text about the candidate. On the site with male-stereotypical issues, I highlighted the candidate’s leadership qualities. Male legislators, local men, and a men’s group endorsed the candidate. On the site with female-stereotypical issues, I highlighted the candidate’s trait of empathy and manipulated the endorsements.

Indeed, in 2007 8% of adults had visited a candidate’s website, in the 2008 campaign 13% visited the presidential candidates’ websites for news; these numbers have been increasing (Kohut, Doherty, et al. 2008; Kohut, Keeter, et al. 2008).

There was no overall effect of candidate sex or strategy on vote choice. Participants were no more likely to vote for the female or the male candidate, t(185)=.98, p=.33. Participants were no more likely to choose the candidate with the congruent strategy over the incongruent strategy, t(185)=.98, p=.33. Finally, I used a simple ANOVA test and found that the interaction between the two factors was not significant, F(1,183)=1.12, p=.29.

It could be that male stereotypical issues are more important than female stereotypical. However, the results of a within-subjects t-test comparing the average importance of female-stereotypical and male-stereotypical issues indicated that the female-stereotypical issues (Mean=3.79) were rated as significantly more important than the male stereotypical (Mean=3.64), t(185)=3.03, p=.003). This finding did not differ by the candidate’s strategy or gender.

These results are without standard deviations because I combine two categories and the program provides probabilities for each dependent variable category.